

John Clarke of Hull's Argument for Psychological Egoism¹

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British Journal for the History of Philosophy 23(1) (2015): 69–89.
Please cite the published version.

Abstract: John Clarke of Hull, one of the eighteenth century's staunchest proponents of psychological egoism, defended that theory in his *Foundation of Morality in Theory and Practice*. He did so mainly by opposing the objections to egoism in the first two editions of Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue*. But Clarke also produced a challenging, direct argument for egoism which, regrettably, has received virtually no scholarly attention. In this paper I give it some of the attention it merits. In addition to reconstructing it and addressing interpretive issues about it, I show that it withstands a tempting objection. I also show that although Clarke's argument ultimately fails, to study it is instructive. It illuminates, for example, Hutcheson's likely intentions in a passage relevant to egoism.

Keywords: John Clarke of Hull; Hutcheson; Robert M. Stewart; psychological egoism; psychological hedonism

1.

John Clarke of Hull – so called because he was master of the Hull grammar school from 1720 to 1732 – was one of the eighteenth century's staunchest defenders of psychological egoism (hereafter egoism), the view that our most basic desires are self-interested.² Clarke defended this view in his *Foundation of Morality in Theory and Practice* (1726), mainly by opposing the objections to egoism in the first two editions of Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue*

¹For helpful conversations, communications, or written suggestions, I thank Chad Carmichael, Robert M. Stewart, and, especially, Monica Ainhorn Morrison and the anonymous reviewers for BJHP.

²John Clarke (1687–1734), philosopher, classical scholar, and educational reformer, was born in York and died in Gloucester. He received his BA (1707) and MA (1710) from St. John's College, Cambridge. His most important philosophical works are Clarke, *Examination*, which critiques the moral theory of William Wollaston (1659–1724); and Clarke, *Foundation*, which critiques the moral theories of Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746). Clarke's own moral theory, evident mainly in his *Foundation*, attempts to harmonize ethical egoism, theological volunteerism, and a concern for the general good by arguing that at bottom they favour the same conduct. In this attempt, psychological egoism is a key premise.

(1725, 1726).³ But Clarke also produced a challenging, direct argument for egoism, prominent in that it appears twice in his *Foundation* (26–27, 54–55). This argument has received virtually no scholarly attention.⁴ This fact is curious, partly because the argument has been in circulation for some time (it appears in Selby-Bigge's *British Moralists*),⁵ and partly because Clarke's *Foundation* was no inconsequential work. It received considerable respect from Hutcheson and influenced Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions* (1728) and the third edition of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* (1729).⁶

Given these facts, the neglect of Clarke's argument creates a serious lacuna in the literature on early modern ethics. Also, Clarke's argument deserves attention in its own right, for although it ultimately fails, it does not lack outward plausibility. Indeed, it seems to have persuaded some philosophers, thereby influencing later defences of egoism. A variation of it, for instance, very likely reflecting Clarke's influence, appears in John Barr's *Summary of Natural Religion* (1749, 67–68).⁷ Also of interest is that the argument withstands the only extant explicit objection to it: Robert M. Stewart's attempt to show that it fails through equivocation (Stewart 1982, 266–67). Finally, to study the argument is instructive – it illuminates, for example, Hutcheson's likely intentions in a well-known passage relevant to egoism.

In section 2 I clarify egoism, including Clarke's version of it. In section 3 I present Clarke's argument for egoism and raise interpretive issues about it. I then present two viable readings of his argument, which yield the same reconstruction of its core elements. In section 4 I critique Stewart's objection to Clarke's argument; in section 5 I present my own objection. In section 6 I discuss some points my analysis raises, including one about Hutcheson's likely intentions in a passage related to egoism.

³On this topic (and related ones) see the excellent article by Stewart (1982). The title *Inquiry into Virtue* is an abbreviated reference to *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good*, one of the two treatises in Hutcheson, *Inquiry*. Hutcheson needs little introduction, for he is widely familiar. Among his tenets is that virtue reduces to benevolence, which does not reduce to self-interest. It is thus unsurprising that he opposes egoism.

⁴Virtually no *explicit* scholarly attention, that is. On some likely *implicit* scholarly attention, see section 6. Let me add that Clarke's *Foundation* received criticism in the anonymously authored *A Letter to Mr. John Clarke*. However, although a brief part of that work (pp. 27–29) makes critical points relevant to Clarke's direct argument for egoism (especially to its conclusion), it neither paraphrases that argument nor directly addresses it.

⁵Selby-Bigge 1897, vol. 2: 224. This well-known anthology remains available through the Liberty Fund.

⁶The first of these titles is an abbreviated reference to *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, the first of the two treatises in Hutcheson, *Essay*. Regarding Hutcheson's respect for Clarke's *Foundation*: see Hutcheson, *Essay*, 6. Regarding the third edition of Hutcheson's *Inquiry*: this was a revised edition in which many of the changes were prompted by Clarke's *Foundation*. For valuable discussion see Turco 1999, 82–89.

⁷It may also have influenced Campbell's *Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue* (1733). Evidence exists that Campbell had studied Clarke's *Foundation* and had been influenced by it in some respects. See Turco 1999, 91, 92 n. 21.

2.

Egoism asserts that every fundamental desire aims solely at a self-benefit.⁸ By a self-benefit I mean a personal benefit to the agent (the person who has the desire), such as the agent's *own* health or happiness. By a fundamental desire I mean a desire we possess insofar as we want something for its own sake, not simply as a means to something else. Suppose Claire wants to take aspirin because she wants to relieve her pain, and thinks that by taking aspirin she can relieve it. But suppose she wants to relieve her pain for no further reason – she simply wants relief from pain. Then the latter desire, Claire's desire for relief from pain, is a *fundamental* desire. Her desire to take aspirin, by contrast, is a *nonfundamental*, or *subordinate*, desire. Its object is something Claire wants not for its own sake, but because it will serve one of her other ends. In other words, its *direct* aim or object (the consumption of aspirin) is not its *ultimate* aim or object (pain relief).

A common version of egoism is *psychological hedonism* (hereafter hedonism), according to which every fundamental desire aims solely at the agent's own *pleasure*. (Here 'pleasure' is used broadly, to include the absence of pain and discomfort.) This is the form of egoism John Clarke defends,⁹ emphasizing that the pleasure in question need not be an immediate pleasure or even a pleasure available in this world. It may come in the afterlife, in reward for deeds in this life (Clarke, *Foundation*, 18, 22, 31–32).

In the view of some scholars, Clarke holds not only psychological hedonism as just defined, but a hedonistic theory of the *causes* of desire.¹⁰ This theory, as I understand it,¹¹ asserts, first, that our fundamental desire for pleasure arises, in part, from experiences of pleasure and pain in our infancy. Second, our desires for things other than our own pleasure (e.g., for another's happiness) arise from observing or experiencing those things (or closely similar ones), receiving pleasure thereby, and, consequently, considering them sources of pleasure. The general idea here, regarding things besides pleasure itself, is not just that we desire those things only if we think they offer us pleasure, but also that if we think that about them, we do so only because we have pleasurable experiences of them in the past.

⁸An excellent recent discussion of egoism is May 2011. A classic treatment is Feinberg 1965/2013.

⁹Clarke, *Foundation*, 25–27, 53–57, 63–64; Clarke, *Examination*, 46–47. Often, Clarke does not use the word 'pleasure', but rather 'happiness', 'satisfaction', or 'enjoyment', when stating his thesis. But he seems to regard them as synonyms of 'pleasure' or, in some cases, references to species of pleasure. For instance, his claim (in *Foundation*, 55) that 'the Supreme and Terminating Regard of the Mind is to its own Satisfaction or Enjoyment' seems to be an alternative wording of his assertion, one page earlier, that 'Pleasure and Pain, and the supposed Means of producing them, are alone capable of raising in the Mind ... Inclination and Aversion'.

¹⁰Stewart 1982, 265–66; see also Selby-Bigge 1897, lxvi–lxvii. Stewart quotes passages in Clarke, *Foundation*, 25–26, 55–57.

¹¹My understanding stems mainly from Stewart 1982, 265–66, and a helpful email exchange with Stewart. If my understanding is defective the fault is mine.

A fascinating theory; also fascinating is the hypothesis that Clarke holds it. Space precludes doing full justice to this hypothesis, but allow me two tentative remarks. First, I am not certain that Clarke holds the above theory. He may hold that desires *typically*, though perhaps not *always*, arise as the theory maintains. The relevant passages in Clarke's work seem to permit this reading (Clarke, *Foundation*, 25–26, 52–64).¹²

Second, charity makes me hesitant to attribute the above theory to Clarke. The theory asserts, in part, that if I believe that *x* would bring me pleasure, this is only because I have pleurably experienced *x*-like things. This assertion is questionable even if 'believe' means 'reasonably believe', and hence excludes believing things on the basis of, say, tarot readings. Suppose I have never gone skydiving or done anything closely similar to it. Also, in doing things that bear rough similarities to skydiving I have never received pleasure. Suppose also, to anticipate a likely refinement of the above theory, that I have never received pleasure from *imagining* myself skydiving or doing things like it.¹³ But now suppose a person I trust, well acquainted both with me and with skydiving, maintains that I certainly would enjoy skydiving. It seems that on the basis of this person's opinion – meaning the opinion itself, not any pleasurable *imaginings* it spawns – I could believe, reasonably, that I would find skydiving pleasurable.¹⁴ In sum, it is doubtful that in *every* case in which I believe that *x* would bring me pleasure, I do so only because I have previously experienced (or imagined) *x*-like things and received pleasure thereby.

3.

Clarke's argument for egoism (specifically, for hedonism) is part of his critique of the moral theories of Samuel Clarke and Francis Hutcheson. Those theories contend, each in its own way, that self-interest is not our sole ultimate motive (see, e.g., Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 103–104, 106, 108, 112). John Clarke disputes this contention partly through his direct argument for egoism. He states that argument in his critique of Samuel Clarke and repeats it, virtually verbatim, in his critique of Hutcheson (Clarke, *Foundation*, 26–27, 54–55).

¹²Here is an example, quoted in Stewart 1982, 266: 'The Mind having once from Experience felt the Pleasure that eminent Virtue in Prosperity gives ..., receives from that Experience a Benevolent Disposition towards a Person that excels in Virtue, or a Readiness to contribute to his Happiness and Prosperity, in order to the Enjoyment of the Satisfaction arising from it' (Clarke, *Foundation*, 57). We can grant this assertion without thinking that it means to describe the *only* way the 'Benevolent Disposition' can arise. Perhaps it can arise if a trusted person *tells me* that contributing to the virtuous person's happiness will bring me enjoyment. See the next paragraph in the text.

¹³From Stewart's emails, I believe that he takes Clarke to hold the refined version of the theory.

¹⁴'Yes', some might say, 'but then that person, or others from whom she has learned things, at least indirectly, about skydiving, must have once found pleasure in that sport; otherwise, she would not have the opinion you mention. More generally, unless *someone*, at *some* previous time, found skydiving pleasurable, you would not now reasonably believe that you could find pleasure in skydiving'. Implicit here is a revision of the theory we are examining. Whatever it does for the plausibility of the theory, it also makes the theory much less contentious, and hence much less interesting, than it was before.

Here is that argument as it appears in his critique of Hutcheson. I have labelled its elements with letters.

[a] Pleasure and Pain, and the supposed Means of producing them, are alone capable of raising in the Mind, the Passions or Dispositions of Inclination and Aversion, the Cause and Object of the former being always Pleasure, or the supposed Means of procuring it; and the Cause and Object of the latter, Pain, or the Means of producing it, either Real or Apprehended, and nothing else. [b] All other Things but Pleasure and Pain, with the supposed Means of attaining the one, and avoiding the other, are perfectly indifferent to the Mind, what it can be under no Trouble or Concern about; and [c] to assert the contrary, is a visible Contradiction; it is the same as to affirm, the Mind may be troubled at what can give it no Trouble at all, or concerned for what can give it no Concern in the least. For [d] what the Mind apprehends no ways necessary to its Pleasure or Happiness, so long as that Apprehension continues, it can be perfectly easy without; for [e] if it cannot, it is then necessary to its Satisfaction or Happiness, and so apprehended by it, which is contrary to the Supposition. And [f] where the Mind is perfectly at Ease without a Thing, there it is absolutely free from all Desire of it, or Inclination for it, because [g] Desire of, or Inclination for a Thing, is nothing but an Uneasiness for the want of it. And, again, [h] what the Mind apprehends incapable in its Nature of giving it any Pain or Trouble, it can have no Aversion for, because [i] Aversion is only an Uneasiness of Mind, arising from the Sense or Apprehension of a Thing's being in its Nature capable of causing Pain, mediately, or immediately. (Clarke, *Foundation*, 54–55)

Before proceeding, let us understand ‘happiness’, ‘pleasure’, and the like the way hedonists usually do, to include the absence of pain and discomfort. Also, let us note that Clarke generally uses ‘inclination’ equivalently with ‘desire’, and let us understand ‘desire’ broadly enough that an aversion to x counts as a desire for the absence (removal, termination) of x .¹⁵ Finally, let us understand ‘a thing’ broadly enough to include the absence of something.

We now can simplify parts of the argument by reading ‘inclination’ to mean ‘desire’ and reading phrases like ‘Desire of it, or Inclination for it’ to mean ‘Desire of it’. Also, given our broad understandings of ‘pleasure’ and ‘desire’ we can ignore the references to pain, aversion, and their avoidance in (a) and (b). Further, we can ignore statements (h) and (i), for they are now implicit in (f) and (g). For instance, the nub of (f) is that if we are untroubled by the absence of a thing, we have no desire for that thing. Given our readings of ‘thing’ and ‘desire’, according to which the absence of x is a thing, and an aversion to x is a desire for the absence of x , (f) implies that if we are untroubled by the absence of the absence of x – or better put, untroubled by x – then we have no aversion to x . Since this is the gist of (h), we can consider (h) implicit in (f).

Even with these simplifications we face interpretive difficulties. For example, although (b), taken literally, is perhaps not equivalent to (a), it is

¹⁵Regarding Clarke's use of ‘inclination’: Hutcheson defines self-love and benevolence in terms of desires (e.g., in *Inquiry*, 102, 104); hence, Clarke would often be talking past Hutcheson, rather than engaging him, if by ‘inclination’ Clarke did not mean ‘desire’.

similar enough to (a) that Clarke may intend it as a rewording of (a) – that is, as an alternative statement of his conclusion. Then again, (b), combined with (f), seems to entail (a) or something close to it; so perhaps (b) is a premise in the argument for (a) rather than a restatement of (a).

To give another example, (d) resembles (b); so perhaps it aims to repeat (b). From another angle, however, it seems that (d), combined with (f), aims to support (b) and (a), sentence (b) serving to restate (a). This would make (d) part of an argument for (b) rather than a restatement of it.

But now another issue arises. Statement (d) follows (c) and is prefaced by ‘for’, indicating, possibly, that it aims to support (c) rather than (b) and (a). More fully, perhaps (d), backed by (e), defends (c), with (c) supporting (b) or (a).

Rather than dwelling on these issues, allow me to present two viable readings of Clarke’s argument, each of which tacitly takes a stand on each issue. On the first reading, (a) is Clarke’s conclusion; (b) and (f) his main premises. The other statements have supporting roles – for instance, (g) supports (f).

In reconstructing Clarke’s argument to reflect this reading, I will take some liberties to ensure fairness and precision. Also, I will employ the simplifications I mentioned shortly ago. Finally, I will label the steps with upper-case letters, each corresponding to one of the lower-case labels I put in Clarke’s argument. Statement (A) is my formulation of Clarke’s statement (a), statement (B) is my formulation of Clarke’s statement (b), and so on.

- (E) If the mind is troubled, uneasy, about the lack (want, absence) of x , the mind regards x as a source of pleasure. That is, it regards x either as pleasure or as a means to pleasure.
- (D) Therefore (largely by contraposition), if the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure, the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x .
- (C) Therefore (from (D)), to assert that even if the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure the mind may yet be troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x is to imply a contradiction: that although the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x , the mind may yet be troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x .¹⁶
- (B) Therefore (from (C), by indirect proof), it is false that even if the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure, the mind may yet be troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x . In other words, if the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure, then the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x .

¹⁶If the step from (D) to (C) is not clear, let (j), (k), and (l) denote, respectively, the sentences ‘the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure’, ‘the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x ’, and ‘the mind may yet be troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x ’. (C) basically says that if (j) and (l) are jointly true, (k) and (l) are jointly true. This assertion is true if, as (D) says, (j) implies (k). So (D) entails (C).

- (G) To desire x is simply to be troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x .
- (F) Therefore (from (G)), if the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x , the mind has no desire for x .
- (A) Therefore (from (B) and (F)), if the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure, the mind has no desire for x .

The core of this argument is (B), (F), and (A); the remainder supports (B) and (F). The reader will notice some problems in the argument, or at least some curiosities. Some will receive notice if I explain how I produced my reconstruction; others will receive notice later.¹⁷

To begin, I first noticed that whereas (a) and (b) speak of pleasure and the means to it, (e) speaks of necessities for satisfaction or happiness. So I was initially tempted to formulate (A) and (B) exactly as I have done, but to formulate (E), and then (D) and (C), to include ‘regards (does not regard) x as necessary to its satisfaction or happiness’ in place of ‘regards (does not regard) x as a source of pleasure’. But this would have made the argument invalid.¹⁸ This is because something can be *necessary* for a thing without being a *source* of it (and vice versa); also, the terms ‘satisfaction’ and ‘happiness’ are not synonymous with ‘pleasure’. This is especially true if ‘pleasure’ has the broad meaning it has in this paper, and thus includes relief from even minuscule discomfort. So had I yielded to my initial temptation, I would have produced an argument that starts out discussing one topic (necessities for satisfaction or happiness), but then, by shifting to another topic (sources of pleasure), becomes invalid.

Thus, to be charitable, I formulated (C), (D), and (E) to include the same expression we find in (A) and (B): ‘the mind regards (does not regard) x as a source of pleasure’. This formulation, particularly the use of ‘pleasure’ in place of ‘satisfaction or happiness’, was justified not just by charity but by Clarke’s use of ‘satisfaction’ and ‘happiness’. He normally uses them interchangeably with ‘pleasure’.

Another of my decisions was to formulate (B) and (F) first, those being the main premises. I tried to capture precisely and succinctly their respective thoughts in Clarke’s argument. My formulation then influenced my wording of (A) and (C). I formulated (A) keeping in mind not just the content of (a) (and my earlier simplifications) but also, and equally important, Clarke’s view that (a) follows from his main premises. I worded (A) so that it indeed follows from (B) and (F). Turning to (C), I formulated it aiming to capture the gist of (c) and

¹⁷Readers who prefer not to wait may see note 22.

¹⁸Also, it would have been no remedy to align the wording of (A) and (B) with that of (C), (D), and (E), rather than vice versa. That would have produced the following wording of (A): ‘If the mind does not regard x as necessary to its satisfaction or happiness, the mind has no desire for x ’. This statement is inferior to the present version of (A) as an expression or approximation of hedonism. For example, hedonists agree that we often desire things that are merely *sufficient*, not *necessary*, for our pleasure.

to ensure that (C) implies (B). My formulation of it then influenced, in part, my wording of (E) and (D). My wording ensures that (C) and (D) follow, respectively, from (D) and (E).

But now, having formulated the argument this way, we see a problem: (B) simply repeats an earlier step, namely (D). So (B) and its support, premise (C), are inessential steps.

So perhaps Clarke's argument has a defensible reading in which (B) and (C) – or, as we might say, (b) and (c) – are indeed inessential. I believe it does. On this reading, Clarke states his conclusion in (a), rewords it in (b), and supports it with (d) and (f). He intends (g) as support for (f), (e) as support for (d), and (c) as an implication of (d) that highlights the absurdity (in Clarke's view) of denying hedonism. So on this reading, the core of Clarke's argument is (D), (F), and (A), with (G) and (E) supporting, respectively, (F) and (D). Statements (B) and (C) have inessential, even if useful, functions.¹⁹

Let us pause and take stock. On our first reading of Clarke's argument its core is (B), (F), and (A); on our second reading it is (D), (F), and (A). But (B) and (D) are equivalent. Hence, the two readings yield the same reconstruction of the argument's main steps. Here is a streamlined statement of them. It results from reversing the order of the premises (stating (F) first rather than second) and, partly through contraposition, rewording each step.

1. If we desire x , we are troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x .
2. If we are troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x , we regard x as a source of pleasure.
3. Therefore, if we desire x , we regard x as a source of pleasure. Only if we regard x that way do we have a genuine desire for x .

Even in this simplified form, which makes its flaws easier to detect, Clarke's argument is far from silly. Even so, it fails. I will explain why, after discussing a tempting but unsuccessful objection to it.

4.

Clarke's argument withstands the only extant explicit objection to it: that of Robert M. Stewart. In an important paper concerning, among other things, Clarke and Hutcheson's debate over egoism, Stewart plausibly maintains that 'no nontrivial motivational theory can be proved by the kind of a priori argument Clarke offers [for egoism]' (Stewart 1982, 266). Stewart then quotes statements (c) through (i) of Clarke's argument and follows with this:

¹⁹The same goes for (E), which is equivalent to (D). Sometimes, the plausibility of a premise stands out if we contrapose it; apparently, (E) contraposes (D) for that purpose.

Thus Clarke contends that there is a strict logical relation between truly believing that something is not necessary to one's own happiness (pleasure), being at ease without that thing, and lacking desire for it, such that if one has this belief he must be in the other state(s) also. The claim [in (g)] that desire is (or at least is always accompanied by) uneasiness Clarke takes from Locke. But if it is true, it is so only in the weakest possible sense of 'uneasiness', whereas a much stronger notion of uneasiness is involved in the first part of the argument, where it is asserted [in (e)] that if someone cannot be 'perfectly easy' without something, then it is necessary to his happiness. We often want or would prefer things that have no real bearing on our own happiness ... or that we desire far out of proportion to any contribution they are thought to make to it. ... Only when the two words ['desire' and 'uneasiness'] mean almost the same thing is it true [as (g) says] that desire 'is nothing but an uneasiness' for the lack of something; if 'uneasiness' is used to imply discomfort, pain, or displeasure the identification is untenable or at least very questionable. Yet it is this latter, stronger sense that is used when Clarke asserts [in (e)] that if one cannot be 'perfectly easy' without something, then it is necessary to his happiness. (Stewart 1982, 266–67)

Stewart apparently understands Clarke's premises as follows:

- (E') If the mind is troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x , the mind regards x as necessary to the mind's happiness.
- (D') Therefore, if the mind does not regard x as necessary to the mind's happiness, the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x .
- (G) To desire x is simply to be troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x .
- (F) Therefore (from (G)), if the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x , the mind has no desire for x .

Where I use, in (E) and (D), the phrase 'regards (does not regard) x as a source of pleasure', we find, in (E') and (D'), 'regards (does not regard) x as necessary to the mind's happiness'. Since the latter phrase is closer than mine to what Clarke uses in (e) and (d), Stewart's reading of Clarke's premises is more literal than mine. This difference in reading is significant. For as maintained earlier, pleasure differs from happiness, and a source of something (e.g., a means to it) differs from a necessity for it.

Given Stewart's reading of the premises, his objection is easy to follow. He thinks that in (E'), 'troubled' and 'uneasy' have a narrow (or strong) sense, one that denotes a significant degree of discomfort. That is, 'troubled, uneasy' means 'significantly troubled or uneasy'. If this were not so, if 'troubled' and 'uneasy' included even minimal uneasiness, (E') would be false. This is because we can be happy while experiencing slight uneasiness; uneasiness affects happiness only if fairly intense. Since (E') entails (D'), Stewart also believes, implicitly, that in (D') 'easy' and 'untroubled' have a narrow sense.

They denote, not freedom from just any discomfort, but freedom from pain or discomfort of a significant kind.

Stewart further believes that in (G), ‘troubled’ and ‘uneasy’ have a broad (or weak) sense, one that includes even minimal discomfort. That is, ‘troubled, uneasy’ means ‘at least slightly troubled or uneasy’. Given a narrower meaning, one that includes only significant discomforts, we could find desires unattended by such discomforts, making (G) false. Since (G) entails (F), Stewart also believes, implicitly, that in (F) ‘easy’ and ‘untroubled’ have a broad sense, one that includes freedom from even minimal uneasiness.

In sum, Stewart thinks that Clarke’s argument equivocates on ‘troubled’, ‘uneasy’, and related terms – that in (E′) and (D′) those terms have a narrow sense, whereas in (G) and (F) they have a broad one. He thus believes that Clarke’s argument is invalid. It is invalid even if we align the wording of its conclusion, statement (A), with (D′) by replacing ‘regard x as a source of pleasure’ with ‘regard x as necessary to the mind’s happiness’.

Stewart’s objection is unsuccessful. He assumes that we should read (e) and (d) as (E′) and (D′); however, as argued earlier, charity requires that we read them as (E) and (D). If we do that, and if we understand ‘pleasure’ broadly, so that it includes relief from any uneasiness, Stewart’s objection does not stand. To see this, first recall (E) and (D):

- (E) If the mind is troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x , the mind regards x as a source of pleasure. That is, it regards x either as pleasure or as a means to pleasure.
- (D) Therefore, if the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure, the mind is easy, untroubled, about the lack of x .

One of Stewart’s crucial points concerns the words ‘troubled’ and ‘uneasy’ in (E′) and (D′). Adapted to (E) and (D), that point is that (E) and (D) are false unless ‘troubled’ and ‘uneasy’ have a narrow sense, one that denotes only a significant degree of discomfort. This point is false given our broad understanding of ‘pleasure’. Consider (D), for instance. Suppose its antecedent is true: the mind does not regard x as a source of pleasure (meaning that it regards x neither as pleasure nor as a means to pleasure). Then given our broad understanding of ‘pleasure’, the mind does not see x as relief from uneasiness of any kind, strong or weak. Nor does it see x as a means to such relief. Hence the mind is not troubled, not even slightly, over the lack of x . To put this another way, the mind is not troubled over the lack of x , making the consequent of (D) true, even if ‘troubled’ has a broad meaning, one that makes the slightest uneasiness a form of trouble. In sum, given our understanding of ‘pleasure’, the antecedent of (D) ensures the consequent, making (D) true, even if ‘troubled’ does not have a narrow sense.

Thus, Clarke's argument withstands Stewart's objection. It withstands it, that is, if we read 'pleasure' broadly and take Clarke's argument to be (D), (F), and (A), with (E) and (G) supporting, respectively, (D) and (F). For then the first two premises, (E) and (D), are plausible even if they use 'troubled', 'uneasy', and related terms just as broadly as do the remaining premises.

5.

Recall the following streamlined statement of Clarke's argument:

1. If we desire x , we are troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x .
2. If we are troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x , we regard x as a source of pleasure.
3. Therefore, if we desire x , we regard x as a source of pleasure. Only if we regard x that way do we have a genuine desire for x .

This argument fails. Firstly, step 1 is questionable. Clarke defends it by claiming (in (g)) that a desire for x is simply an uneasiness over the want of x . This claim comes from John Locke, who gives no argument for it, regarding it as evident from introspection (Locke 1690/1975, II.xx.6, II.xxi.31–32). But I suspect that when many introspect they find that they sometimes desire x , if only weakly, even when x is so trivial that its absence brings no uneasiness.²⁰ If I read of a distant person trying to set a world record for the largest popcorn ball, I detect no uneasiness in myself about the matter. Even so, it seems that I genuinely desire her success; I prefer her success to her failure.

Even if premise 1 stands up, Clarke's argument fails in its purpose. Statement 3 neither is, nor entails, a form of egoism. Statement 3 is consistent with the claim that we fundamentally desire the happiness of others. This is because, possibly, although we fundamentally desire such happiness, 3 is true: anything we desire, including the happiness of others, we consider a source of pleasure. We do so because we think its achievement promises us pleasure, even if that pleasure is merely relief from the uneasiness which, according to premise 1, attends any desire.²¹

However, if 3 entailed egoism, it would rule out the claim that we fundamentally desire the happiness of others. Since it does not rule out that claim, 3 does not entail egoism.

A possible reply is that I have been unfair to Clarke's argument, particularly in my wording of his conclusion. This reply capitalizes on a fact some

²⁰Compare Stewart's objection – its penultimate sentence.

²¹Not only is this possibly true, but given Clarke's Lockean theory of desire he would say that it's actually true.

may have noticed in section 3: that in interpreting statement (a) as assertion (A) – or, what comes to the same thing, in interpreting (a) as assertion 3 – I ignored some words in (a).²² Statement (a), read in the simplified way suggested in section 3, says this:

Pleasure, and the supposed Means of producing it, is alone *capable of raising* in the Mind the Passion or Disposition of Desire, the *Cause* and Object of which is always Pleasure, or the supposed Means of procuring it (italics added).

Arguably, the italicized words show that Clarke's conclusion is not assertion 3, but this: If we desire x , we do so *because* we regard x as a source of pleasure. Also, it is no stretch to read the word 'because' in this statement as doing double duty, that is, to read the statement to mean this:

4. If we desire x , either we desire x simply because we regard x as pleasure or we desire x because we want pleasure and regard x as a means to pleasure.

Statement 4, the reply continues, is Clarke's actual conclusion. Unlike 3, it captures the thesis of hedonism. This stems from the two uses of 'because' in 4. The first time 'because' appears there, though not the second, it is part of a rough way of speaking. To say that we desire x 'simply because we regard x as pleasure' is a rough way of saying that we desire x for no *further* reason than that x (we think) is pleasure. It is to say, that is, that our desire for x is a *fundamental* desire for pleasure. So 4 basically says that any desire we have is either a fundamental desire for pleasure or a subordinate desire for a perceived means to pleasure. This is the hedonist's thesis.

The final part of the reply is that since 4 is Clarke's conclusion, my objection to his argument fails. My objection, that Clarke's conclusion does not entail egoism, is clearly false if 4 is his conclusion.

This reply contains some truth, namely, that statement 4 is probably the thesis Clarke thinks he has defended. However, the reply fails to rescue Clarke's argument. Observe that the phrase 'we regard x as a source of pleasure' appears not just in 3 but also in 2. Hence, if in statement 3 we replace that phrase with 'either we desire x simply because we regard x as pleasure or we desire x because we want pleasure and regard x as a means to pleasure' (thereby turning 3 into 4), we must do the same in 2 to preserve validity. So 2 becomes this:

²²This is one of the curiosities I mentioned in section 3. I have already addressed two others: my wording of (E) and (D) (my use of 'regards ... x as a source of pleasure'); and the redundancy of (B) in my first reconstruction of Clarke's argument.

- 2'. If we are troubled, uneasy, about the lack of x , either we desire x simply because we regard x as pleasure or we desire x because we want pleasure and regard x as a means to pleasure.

This premise is implausible. To see how it contrasts with premise 2, suppose the antecedent of 2 is true: we are uneasy about the lack of x . Then surely we know that if x comes about, our uneasiness for the want of x will cease. This is to say that we see x as a source of relief from uneasiness. This, in turn, is to say that we regard x as a source of pleasure, given our broad use of 'pleasure'. But to say that we regard x as a source of pleasure is to assert the consequent of 2. In premise 2, therefore, the antecedent ensures the consequent, making 2 true.

Things are different with 2'. Suppose its antecedent is true: we are uneasy about the lack of x . Even if this ensures that we desire x , and even if, as just shown, it ensures that we regard x as a source of pleasure, it does not ensure the consequent of 2'. For that consequent claims not just that we desire x and regard x as a source of pleasure, but (stated simply) that we desire x *because* we regard x as a source of pleasure. Nothing in the antecedent of 2' supports this causal claim.

So the antecedent of 2' does not ensure the consequent, which is to say that 2' is not plausible. Since we must substitute 2' for 2 if we claim that 4, rather than 3, is Clarke's conclusion, we see that the latter claim, the core of the reply to my objection, does not help Clarke's argument.

Let us consider a second reply to my objection. It admits that 3 does not entail egoism, but says that perhaps Clarke's argument contains more than the passage I quoted. Perhaps the remarks surrounding that passage contain premises which, when combined with 3, support either statement 4 or egoism more generally.

However, I find no such premises, not even in the paragraph most likely to contain them, the one directly following Clarke's argument.²³ It begins thus:

Now, if, as our Author [Hutcheson] tells us, ... *The Affections which are of most Importance in Morals are Love and Hatred* [meaning, partly, that all forms of moral behaviour reduce to benevolent behaviour]²⁴ ... ; We have [in the argument culminating in 3] ... something like a Demonstration, that all Morality in Practice is founded upon Self-Love [i.e., that all moral behaviour is fundamentally self-interested]. (Clarke, *Foundation*, 55)

This passage is not a premise that supplements 3 to establish egoism. Rather, it is a conclusion Clarke draws from his argument for 3, one that would follow from 3 if 3 entailed what Clarke thinks it entails, namely hedonism. For if

²³Since Clarke's argument occurs in two places – *Foundation*, 26–27; and *Foundation*, 54–55 – I could mean either the paragraph in *Foundation*, 27–28, or the paragraph in *Foundation*, 55–56. I mean the second of these. But my point about it applies even more obviously to the first one.

²⁴That this is part of the meaning of Hutcheson's statement is evident from Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 101–108. For the statement itself see *ibid.*, 102.

hedonism is true, all desires, including benevolent ones, aim ultimately at the agent's own pleasure. So hedonism implies that if, as Hutcheson tells us, moral behaviour is benevolent behaviour, meaning that it springs from benevolent desires, then moral behaviour is fundamentally self-interested – or as Clarke would say, 'Morality in Practice is founded upon Self-Love'.²⁵

Next in that paragraph is another conclusion that would follow from Clarke's argument if 3 entailed hedonism. It was touched on a moment ago, for it figures in the case for the previous conclusion, that is, in the (putative) derivation of that conclusion from Clarke's argument. It asserts that benevolent desires, like other desires, aim ultimately at the agent's own pleasure:

For by all this [referring to the argument that culminates in 3],²⁶ ... it appears pretty manifestly, that no Man can desire ... the Happiness of others, but where it makes a part of his own, either by the Pleasure and Satisfaction it naturally and immediately gives him, or the Hopes of future Benefit and Advantage to arise from it. So that the Supreme and Terminating Regard of the Mind [when it desires another's happiness] is to its own Satisfaction or Enjoyment, arising ... from the Happiness of others; and their Happiness becomes the Object of Desire, only as it is a Means to procure the said Satisfaction or Enjoyment. (Clarke, *Foundation*, 55)

The first sentence here seems merely to repeat the essence of 3, though with regard to benevolent desires rather than desires in general. The second sentence concludes (invalidly) that benevolent desires aim ultimately at the agent's own pleasure, that they are subordinate to the agent's 'terminating' desire for that pleasure. Neither sentence is a premise that works with 3 to establish egoism.

But Clarke continues. He completes the paragraph with this:

For, suppose the Mind to take no Pleasure ... from the Happiness of another, ... and then his Happiness cannot move Desire at all, because Desire is only an Uneasiness, arising from the want of some Satisfaction And by consequence, ... Benevolence²⁷ ... is really but a Concern for the Happiness of others, in order to secure our own. (Clarke, *Foundation*, 55–56)

This passage contains nothing that works with 3 to defend egoism. It is not a continuation of the argument for 3, but rather a new argument, defending the

²⁵This implication of hedonism is important to Clarke partly because reveals, in his view, that even on Hutcheson's account of moral behaviour, such behaviour is what Christian scripture implies it is: a species of fundamentally self-interested behaviour. Among Clarke's reasons for opposing Hutcheson's moral theory, especially Hutcheson's view that moral conduct is disinterested, is that he considers it radically at odds with scripture (Clarke, *Foundation*, 48–50, 104–112).

²⁶What else could Clarke be referring to? He is not referring to the immediately preceding sentence, for as already indicated, that sentence contains, not any support for Clarke's conclusion about benevolent desires, but rather another of Clarke's conclusions, one to which his conclusion about benevolent desires is subservient. So his reference is to what comes *before* that sentence, namely, the argument that culminates in 3, the one comprised of (a) through (i).

²⁷The full term Clarke uses here is 'Love of Benevolence'. But he uses it in an eighteenth-century sense: to mean love of *the kind we call* benevolence, i.e., love comprised of a desire for another's happiness.

hedonistic view of benevolence we saw in the previous quotation. Charitably reconstructed, it runs thus:

Our desire for another's happiness is only an uneasiness arising from the perceived absence of a pleasure, namely, the pleasure we would receive from that other person's happiness.

Thus, if we desire another's happiness, we take pleasure in that person's happiness.

Thus, our desire for another's happiness is subordinate to our desire for pleasure – the pleasure we would receive from that other person's happiness.

The second step in this argument resembles statement 3; the third resembles statement 4. And just as 3 does not entail 4, the second step does not entail the third. ('If we desire x , we take pleasure in x ' does not entail that our desire for x is subordinate to a further, more basic desire.) Nor can we repair the argument by revising the second step, for that step is only an intermediate conclusion. The real problem is that the first step, the sole premise in the argument, does not entail the third. Also, the first step, a variation of Locke's view of desire, is highly questionable.

But here I digress from my main point, namely, that the passages surrounding Clarke's argument, the argument quoted in section 3, contain no premises that supplement statement 3 to prove egoism. Clarke's argument is meant as a self-standing defence of egoism, specifically of its hedonistic variety.

6.

Although Clarke's argument fails, to study it is instructive. My analysis of it raises two further points of interest.

The first point concerns a textbook error related to egoism – 'textbook' in that many philosophy texts warn students about it. My point is that Clarke commits the error. This is historically interesting in that although the error receives much attention, it is hard to find philosophers who commit it. The fact that Clarke commits it shows that the error is neither fictitious nor confined to beginning students. Competent philosophers can fall into it.

Allow me to explain, first by noting that many treatments of egoism suggest that its appeal stems largely from the neglect of certain distinctions, including the distinction between, firstly, invariably receiving – or at least

expecting – pleasure from a satisfied desire, and secondly, ultimately desiring pleasure.²⁸ More exactly, the distinction is between the following:

- (m) If we desire x , then it is true – at least, we are bound to believe – that the satisfaction of our desire, i.e., the achievement or occurrence of x , will bring us pleasure.²⁹
- (n) If we desire x , we do so ultimately because we believe that x will bring us pleasure. In short, our ultimate aim is pleasure.

As I said, treatments of egoism often suggest that the neglect of this distinction explains much of egoism’s appeal. Interestingly, we find a tradition, reflected in these same treatments of egoism, of citing no actual egoists guilty of the neglect.³⁰ It is thus an interesting question whether we can find any published argument for egoism, from a philosopher of some competence, that neglects the above distinction.

Yes we can. Firstly, recall statement 3, the conclusion that follows from Clarke’s premises. Also recall the conclusion Clarke likely intends, which does not follow from his premises.

- 3. If we desire x , we regard x as a source of pleasure.
- 4. If we desire x , either we desire x simply because we regard x as pleasure or we desire x because we want pleasure and regard x as a means to pleasure.

Now compare 3 and 4 with (m) and (n). We see that 3 and (m) are equivalent;³¹ likewise with 4 and (n). For example, (n) says that if we desire x , our ultimate aim is pleasure. This is to say, in abbreviated form, that any desire we have is either a fundamental desire for pleasure or a subordinate desire for a perceived means to pleasure. This is the same thought 4 expresses.

Hence, the leap from 3 to 4 – the error we tacitly make if we take Clarke’s argument to prove egoism – is the same error as the leap from (m) to (n). So insofar as Clarke’s argument culminates in a form of egoism, it commits a textbook error. That error is no fiction foisted onto egoists by their opponents; nor is it confined to philosophical novices.

²⁸For discussions of the distinction, some of them accompanied by the suggestion just mentioned, see Bond 1996, 15–16; Feinberg 1965/2013, 168–69; Harrison 1993, 3; Scriven 1966, 235–36; and Taylor 1975, 43–44.

²⁹The phrase ‘we are bound to believe’ is often missing from (m), perhaps for simplicity, when (m) appears in print. But it should be there. No one thinks that (m) entails (n) even if the agent – the referent of ‘we’ in (m) – does not *believe* the consequent of (m).

³⁰See, e.g., the treatments cited in note 28.

³¹Recall from section 3 (specifically from (E)) that to regard x as a ‘source of pleasure’ is to regard x as pleasure or as a means to pleasure.

My second point is that my treatment of Clarke's argument may help us detect Hutcheson's aims in a passage in his *Essay on the Passions*. That passage, I suspect, aims to expose an error at the root of Clarke's case for egoism. The passage is this:

Let it be premised, that *Desire is generally uneasy, or attended with an uneasy Sensation*, which is something distinct from that uneasy Sensation arising from some *Event* or *Object*, the Prevention or Removal of which Sensation we are intending when the Object is apprehended as Evil Then it is plain,

1. 'That no Desire of any Event is excited by any view of removing the *uneasy Sensation attending this Desire itself*. ... The *uneasy Sensation, accompanying and connected with the Desire itself*, cannot be a Motive to that *Desire* which it presupposes. The *Sensation* accompanying Desire is generally *uneasy*, and consequently our Desire is never raised with a view to obtain or continue it; nor is the Desire raised with a view to *remove* this uneasy *Sensation*, for the Desire is raised previously to it. ...

There is also a *pleasant Sensation of Joy*, attending the *Gratification* of any Desire, beside the *Sensation* received from the *Object itself*, which we directly intended. 'But Desire does never arise from a View of obtaining that *Sensation of Joy*, connected with the Success or Gratification of Desire; otherwise the strongest Desires might arise toward any Trifle, or an Event in all respects indifferent: Since, if Desire arose from *this View*, the stronger the Desire were, the higher would be the *Pleasure of Gratification*; and therefore we might desire the turning of a Straw as violently as we do *Wealth* or *Power*'. (Hutcheson, *Essay*, 24)

Here Hutcheson grants two things and comments on each. What he grants are the following. First, every desire brings with it some uneasiness. As long as the desire lasts, a sensation of uneasiness accompanies it. Second, the satisfaction of any desire, the attainment of its object, brings the agent some independent pleasure – 'independent' in that it occurs separately from any pleasures the object might bring on its own, apart from being desired.

Hutcheson's comments on these things, shorn of his arguments for them, reduce to this: No desire aims, either ultimately or directly, either at relief from the uneasiness accompanying the desire or at the independent pleasure produced by satisfying any desire. So given what Hutcheson grants and his attending comments, his key point is this:

Although, as we know, to satisfy any desire we possess is to reap at least two pleasures – first, relief from the uneasiness accompanying the desire, and second, the independent pleasure produced by satisfying any desire – our desire does not aim, either ultimately or directly, at one of those pleasures.³²

³²Regarding the phrase 'as we know': I take it to be implicit in Hutcheson's remarks that the relevant agent (the referent of 'we' in Hutcheson's main point) *knows* that to satisfy her desire is to receive the two pleasures Hutcheson mentions. For if we, Hutcheson's readers, assumed that the agent is *ignorant* of the pleasures she will receive, we would not be tempted to make the inference Hutcheson is exposing as fallacious (that the agent's desire aims at one of those pleasures). Hence his remarks would have little point.

Let us refer to this as Hutcheson's main point. It is similar to the point that (n) is distinct from (m) – similar enough that Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions* counts as a classic source, even if not the most pristine one, for that distinction.

It is easy to regard Hutcheson's main point as merely some advice to heed when considering arguments for egoism. But I suspect that it is something more, that it is a deliberate challenge to Clarke's argument for egoism – or more precisely, to the reasoning at the root of accepting egoism on the basis of Clarke's argument. I say this for three reasons.

First, in the portion of Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions* in which we find his main point – namely, article 3 of section 1 – he clearly has Clarke's egoism in mind.³³ He even cites Clarke early in that article (Hutcheson, *Essay*, 23 n.). He devotes part of that article (and some of the next one) to producing new objections to egoism, 'new' in that they add to those in the first two editions of his *Inquiry into Virtue* (ibid., 26–27). Clarke had forcefully criticized those early objections in his *Foundation*; so one of Hutcheson's aims in his *Essay on the Passions* was to construct improved objections to egoism. Hence, it is not far-fetched to think that another of Hutcheson's aims was to counter Clarke's direct argument for egoism.

Second, it is no objection here that in the passage earlier quoted, Hutcheson neither mentions Clarke nor reconstructs Clarke's argument. Firstly, Hutcheson often proceeds this way; he often neither mentions his opponents nor paraphrases them closely when challenging their contentions.³⁴ Secondly, Hutcheson probably has in mind, not only Clarke's argument, but other possible arguments which, like Clarke's, infer (n) from (m) insofar as they culminate in egoism. He wants to expose the error underlying that inference.

Third, Hutcheson not only exposes the error just mentioned, but does so through his main point – the one stated shortly ago. To show this, let me first show that most likely, those who hold (m) tacitly understand (m) as an abbreviation of (m'), below. Hence, if they mistakenly infer (n) from (m), a better description of their mistake is that they infer (n) from (m').

(m) If we desire x , then it is true – at least, we are bound to believe – that the satisfaction of our desire, i.e., the achievement or occurrence of x , will bring us pleasure.

(m') If we desire x , then it is true – at least, we are bound to believe – that the satisfaction of our desire, i.e., the achievement or occurrence of x , will bring us pleasure – specifically, it will bring us either relief from

³³This point applies to section 1 generally. See Turco 1999, 82–89.

³⁴To give just one example, in a footnote in the third and fourth editions of his *Inquiry* (230–31), Hutcheson discusses three scriptural passages (1 Corinthians 15:32, Hebrews 11:6, and Hebrews 12:2), arguing that they do not contradict his view that disinterested benevolence is the mark of virtue. From what he says, he clearly is responding to a contrary claim in Clarke's *Foundation*, 49–50, 107. Yet he neither mentions Clarke nor closely paraphrases him.

the uneasiness accompanying the desire or the independent pleasure that comes from any desire's satisfaction.

- (n) If we desire x , we do so ultimately because we believe that x will bring us pleasure. In short, our ultimate aim is pleasure.

I said that those who hold (m) most likely understand (m) as short for (m'). To see my point, suppose we challenge a proponent of (m) to defend her belief. Suppose we say, 'Prove that, as (m) claims, if we desire x we are bound to believe that the achievement of x will bring us pleasure. Why accept such a claim? What pleasure could we possibly expect from the fulfilment of *any* of our desires, including, say, the desire that trees grow on Mars (a strange desire, certainly, but not impossible)?' The only plausible reply to this challenge is that the pleasure in question is one or both of the (putative) pleasures to which (m') refers: relief from the uneasiness that attends any desire; and the independent pleasure that comes from any desire's satisfaction. Those are the only pleasures bound to result, arguably, from the satisfaction of *any* desire, even the desire that trees grow on Mars.

But if our proponent of (m) replies this way, she reveals that what she really believes is not so much thesis (m) as the view that if we desire x , we are bound to believe that the achievement of x will bring us one of the pleasures to which (m') refers. Simply put, what she really believes is (m'). Thesis (m) serves, in her mind, as an abbreviation of (m').

Thus, the error of inferring (n) from (m) is better described as that of inferring (n) from (m'). This is the error at the root of Clarke's case for egoism. Now, why would someone commit that error? Why would he think that (m') establishes (n)? No doubt because he assumes the following, the tacit premise in the step from (m') to (n):

If we think the satisfaction of our desire for x will bring us either relief from the uneasiness accompanying the desire or the independent pleasure that comes from any desire's satisfaction, then we desire x ultimately because we believe that x will bring us pleasure – specifically, one of the two pleasures just mentioned. In short, our ultimate aim is one of those pleasures.

This premise, combined with (m'), entails (n). It does so, at least, if we read 'pleasure' in (n) to mean not pleasure *simpliciter*, but rather either of the two pleasures mentioned in the above premise. If one accepts (n) on the basis of (m') he tacitly reads (n) that way, and more important, he tacitly grants the above premise. Hence to expose his mistake – at least, to do so without challenging (m') – one must refute the above premise.

So we come to this result: The way to refute the reasoning at the bottom of Clarke's argument – more precisely, at the bottom of accepting egoism on the basis of that argument – is to refute the tacit premise just stated.

And that is exactly what Hutcheson does, insofar as he establishes his main point. That point, again, is that although, as we know, to satisfy any desire we possess is to reap at least two pleasures – first, relief from the uneasiness attending the desire, and second, the independent pleasure that comes from satisfying a desire – our desire does not aim, ultimately or directly, at one of those pleasures. This point rules out the tacit premise stated above.

I believe this is no coincidence, that Hutcheson means to challenge the reasoning underlying Clarke's argument. I admit that my belief is speculative; seldom can we be certain of a philosopher's aims in a given passage. Even so, my speculation has plausibility.

It also has significance. Firstly, Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions* is a work of great influence; any effort to uncover one of its aims is worthwhile, historically at a minimum. Secondly, if Hutcheson's aim in the quoted passage is the one I think it is, then we cannot fault him – or cannot fault him much – for accepting the following views: first, every desire brings a feeling of uneasiness; and second, to satisfy any desire is to produce some independent pleasure. If we look back at the passage I quoted we see that, arguably, Hutcheson indeed *accepts* these two views; he does not merely grant them *arguendo*. Many philosophers would contend that the two views are false, and perhaps conclude that the quoted passage is thus seriously flawed. However, if Hutcheson's aim is the one I believe it is, if it is to expose the error at the root of Clarke's reasoning, then it does not matter for Hutcheson's purpose whether the two views are true. What matters, and what Hutcheson means to emphasize, is that *even if* those views are true, they do not support egoism. And this point is true.

7.

I have uncovered the core of Clarke's direct argument for egoism; I have shown that it withstands a tempting objection to it; and I have shown that it fails in the final analysis. Also, I have shown that to study it is instructive, that it raises points of historical and philosophical interest. I seriously doubt, however, that I have exhausted everything of interest in Clarke's argument – and I certainly have not exhausted everything of interest in Clarke's philosophy. Although not a major figure in eighteenth-century British ethics, John Clarke of Hull is surely a significant one – significant enough to merit, and to repay, increased attention from historians of philosophy.

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