Unconscious Pleasure as Dispositional Pleasure

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Abstract: A good deal of recent debate over the nature of pleasure and pain has surrounded the alleged phenomenon of unconscious sensory pleasure and pain, or pleasures and pains whose subjects are entirely unaware of them while experiencing them. According to Ben Bramble, these putative pleasures and pains present a problem for attitudinal theories of pleasure and pain, since these theories claim that what makes something a sensory pleasure or pain is that one has a special sort of pro- or con-attitude toward it at the time one experiences it. In this paper, I look at the two existing defenses of attitudinal theories against this worry and explain (following Bramble) that each is inadequate. I show that this inadequacy is in part a result of existing attitudinal theories failing to recognize an important distinction in pro- and con-attitudes, and I propose and defend an amended attitudinal view that does recognize this distinction. I then offer a more promising response to the objection from unconscious sensory pleasures and pains: that experiences of apparently unconscious pleasure or pain only seem pleasant or unpleasant because their subjects are *disposed* to experience pleasantness or unpleasantness. In this sense, unconscious pleasures and pains are not really pleasures or pains at all.

Keywords: pleasure; pain; desire; aversion; unconscious pleasure; attitudinal theories of pleasure.

A distinction is commonly made between two types of pleasure (see, for example, Feldman 2004: 55–57; Heathwood 2007: 28; Lin 2020: 511). *Sensory* pleasure is pleasure experienced in connection with a pleasant sensation, such as the feeling of a warm shower after a freezing day, or the smell of freshly baked bread. *Attitudinal* pleasure is pleasure experienced when one is pleased about some state of affairs, such as the fact that one's favorite team has won. To experience attitudinal pleasure is to be happy, glad, or pleased *that* something is the case; to experience sensory pleasure is to

experience a pleasant sensation.

According to *attitudinal* theories of pleasure (and pain), what makes an experience a pleasure is a matter of its relationship to a special sort of pro-attitude on the part of its subject. The two leading proposals of this sort, which are offered by Fred Feldman and Chris Heathwood, differ only slightly. According to Feldman (2004: ch. 4), attitudinal pleasure is the most basic type of pleasure. Experiences of attitudinal pleasure (and displeasure) are explained entirely by the fact that the one who experiences them is attitudinally pleased (displeased) about some state of affairs during them. Thus, if I take pleasure in the fact that my favorite team has won, I experience attitudinal pleasure; and that I take pleasure in this fact is all there is to my experiencing pleasure of this type. In contrast, to experience sensory pleasure, on this view, is to both experience some sensation, and take pleasure in the fact that one is experiencing it. If I take pleasure in the fact that I now feel the warmth of the shower after the freezing day, then, I experience sensory pleasure; and that I simultaneously take pleasure in this fact and experience this sensation is all there is to my experiencing pleasure of this type.

Heathwood (2006, 2007) offers a largely similar account. The key difference is that he takes attitudinal pleasure and pain to reduce to intrinsic desire. More precisely, he takes attitudinal pleasure (displeasure) in some state of affairs to consist in an intrinsic desire for that state of affairs (not) to obtain, and a simultaneous belief that it does. So when I take pleasure in the fact that my favorite team has won, this is explained by the fact that I now intrinsically desire for my favorite team to win, and believe that they have. And when I take pleasure in the fact that I now feel the warmth of the shower, and thus experience sensory pleasure, this is explained by the fact that I now intrinsically desire to be feeling this particular sensation, and believe that I am feeling it.[1]

[1] Heathwood phrases his view of sensory pleasure in terms of the desire's being *de re*, and omits talk of belief, though I think the formulation I offer here makes his proposal particularly straightforward. It does not take into account his (2018) most recent arguments, however, which I'll discuss below.

Though plausible, attitudinal theories like these seem to face an important objection. This is the objection, offered most explicitly by Ben Bramble (2013, 2020), that these theories cannot account for pleasures whose subjects are entirely unaware of them at the time of experiencing them. If a subject is entirely unaware of the fact that they are experiencing some sensation, then they cannot intrinsically desire, be intrinsically attitudinally pleased, or have any pro-attitude at all toward the fact, that they are experiencing that particular sensation at that time. Hence, if it is possible to experience such unconscious pleasures, that seems to prove that theories like Feldman and Heathwood's, and indeed all attitudinal theories of pleasure and pain, are false.

Are these pleasures possible? Bramble seems to think so. To show that they are, he appeals to a number of cases, one of which comes from Dan Haybron:

> Perhaps you have lived with a refrigerator that often whined due to a bad bearing. If so, you might have found that, with time, you entirely ceased to notice the racket. But occasionally, when the compressor stopped, you did notice the sudden, glorious silence. You might also have noted … that you'd had no idea how obnoxious the noise was—or that it was occurring at all—until it ceased. But obnoxious it was, and all the while it had been, unbeknownst to you, fouling your experience as you went about your business. *In short, you'd been having an unpleasant experience without knowing it.* (Haybron 2008: 205)

A second case of note here is Oliver Sacks's patient, who reports the following after losing his sense of smell:

> You don't normally give it a thought. But when I lost it—it was like being struck blind. Life lost a good deal of its savour—one doesn't realize how much 'savour' *is* smell. You *smell* people, you *smell* books, you *smell* the city, you *smell* the spring—maybe not consciously, but as a rich unconscious

> background to everything else. My whole world was suddenly radically poorer. (Sacks 1987: 159)

Here we seem to have cases where subjects were entirely unaware of sensory pains and pleasures, respectively, at the time of experiencing them. We then seem to have cases that suggest that attitudinal theories of pleasure are false.

As Heathwood (2018) and Feldman (2018) see it, though, their own accounts are perfectly capable of plausibly accounting for these cases. Though they appear to reject each other's explanations, each provides arguments for thinking their account remains unthreatened by putatively unconscious pleasures. Naturally, Bramble (2020) disagrees. And so do I. As I see it, though, attitudinal theories in fact face no threat from cases of putatively unconscious pleasure, because the experiences in these cases are not pleasurable at all. Nonetheless, the sort of psychological state possessed by the subjects in these cases makes it easy for us to mistake their experience as pleasurable. That, at least, is what I will argue. Before offering an account of this psychological state, though, I will explain Heathwood and Feldman's accounts of putatively unconscious pleasure, and the inadequacies I see in each.

1. Heathwood and Feldman on putatively unconscious pleasures and pains

1.1 Heathwood's account

Heathwood does not take issue with the claim that the subjects in Haybron and Sacks's cases experience pains and pleasures of which they are unaware. As he sees it, though, it is not right to say that these subjects are *entirely* unaware of the sensations they experience while experiencing them. A more accurate description, he thinks, appeals to a distinction between two senses of 'aware' (Heathwood 2018: 223). To be *strongly* aware of some sensation is to occurrently believe, or consciously notice, that one is having it. To be *weakly* aware of some sensation is to be such that, if

the sensation were to cease, one would notice its cessation. Thus, weak awareness is a matter of whether a certain subjunctive conditional is true of one, whereas strong awareness is a matter of whether one now has a certain conscious belief.

With this distinction in place, Heathwood has the resources to respond to Bramble's argument. Since the subjects in Bramble's cases notice the cessation of the relevant sensations when they cease, they were of course weakly aware of the sensations. According to Heathwood, being weakly aware of a sensation makes it possible to have intrinsic desires regarding that particular sensation. So, since the subjects in Bramble's examples are weakly aware of the relevant sensations, and weak awareness allows for a relevant desire toward that sensation, it follows that the sensations can be counted as sensory pleasures and pains, on Heathwood's account. And so, the possibility of unconscious pleasures does not undermine attitudinal theories of pleasure.

There are a few reasons to be wary of Heathwood's approach, however. The first comes from Bramble. As he sees it, this approach seems to work only given a mischaracterization of the relevant cases. In the refrigerator case in particular, he suggests, what is noticed by the subject is not the cessation of a past pain, but is instead a pleasurable sense of relief, which itself results from the cessation of the pain. This is relevant because, if what the subject first notices is the pleasurable sense of relief, then since this relief is not the same thing as the cessation of the unpleasant sound, it is not the case that the subjects were weakly aware of the sound, because what they noticed was not the cessation of the sound. Whatever explanation the attitudinalist offers of putatively unconscious sensory pains, then, this explanation must plausibly link the putatively unconscious pain to the later pleasurable sense of relief in cases like this one.

Another problem with Heathwood's account concerns the implications of the claim that putatively unconscious pleasures and pains should indeed be counted as pleasures and pains. If that claim is right, then presumably experiences of such pleasure will bear a similar relation to one's

welfare as experiences of conscious sensory pleasure. In that case, it seems those who wish to claim that experiences of sensory pleasure contribute to one's well-being will be forced to claim that this is true of experiences of conscious as well as unconscious such pleasure. Yet it seems considerably less plausible that a life of nothing but experiences of putatively unconscious sensory pleasure might be very high in welfare than it seems plausible that a life of nothing but experiences of conscious sensory pleasure might be very high in welfare. I will expand on this point when I turn to Feldman's account below.

Finally, Heathwood's arguments (2018: 227) to the conclusion that having weak awareness of a sensation allows for intrinsic desires regarding that particular sensation are not entirely convincing. Here he begins with the intuition in the refrigerator case that the whining is 'fouling' your experience, and takes this as evidence that the sound must be 'bothering' you. He then concludes that because the sound is bothering you, you must have an attitude toward it. But, as Bramble also notes (2020: 1338), it is not at all clear that the sound here must have been bothering you. Indeed, you did not consciously notice the sound, so in what sense does it seem right to say that it was bothering you? Here Heathwood would presumably respond: in the sense in which you were weakly aware of it, and intrinsically desired not to be experiencing (specifically) it. But while this might show that the case can be explained by Heathwood's view, it certainly does not provide independent support for the view, or for the claim that weak awareness allows for relevant intrinsic desires. It is at most a restatement of that claim.

1.2 Feldman's account

Feldman's response, on the other hand, is effectively to deny that these apparently unconscious pleasures and pains really are pleasures or pains at all. Focusing first on the refrigerator case, Feldman says that reflection reveals the following three phases:

(1) 'First there is a period of time during which the refrigerator is whining but I am not aware of it. [Although] we can stipulate that there are various sound-related vibrations going on in my ears and perhaps some electrical goings-on in my auditory nerves … we must assume that I am entirely unaware of the sound. … [It] is not part of my conscious experience'.

(2) 'Then there is a transitional phase during which the compressor is shutting down. … The change in sound catches my attention. Thus, the sound of the refrigerator comes into consciousness. … During this phase I am aware of the fading sounds. Now we can describe the sounds as painful (or at least unpleasant) since I take intrinsic attitudinal displeasure in those sounds'.

(3) 'Then in Phase Three the sound of the refrigerator has ceased. The vibrations in the auditory system have ceased as well. I may take pleasure in the fact that the annoying noise that I heard during Phase Two is no longer to be heard'. (Feldman 2018: 478–79)

Feldman then notes that at no point in this story is there an experience of pain of which he is unconscious. In the first phase he is entirely unaware of the sound. So in the same way that an anaesthetized patient may have things going on in their nervous system without their experiencing pain, so Feldman has things going on in his auditory nerves without his experiencing pain. This is explained in each case by the fact that the subject is unaware of the goings-on. In the second phase he notices the sound, and takes displeasure in it. His experience is then unpleasant in virtue of the sound. Since he is conscious of the sound, though, there is no unconscious displeasure. Finally, in

the third phase, there is no more sound, and so there can be no unconscious displeasure with respect to it. He thus concludes that there is no experience of unconscious displeasure in the case.

Looking next at the Sacks case, Feldman focuses on the implications of the thought that the subject has experienced unconscious pleasantness, rather than on how that thought itself might be explained. He notes, as I have mentioned, that according to the sensory hedonist, if the unconscious aromatic pleasures that Sacks's patient is supposed to have experienced are indeed to count as pleasures, then the lives of those who have never and will never report having experienced anything like the sensory pleasure involved in, say, taking a warm shower after a freezing day, but who have nevertheless experienced a very great deal of this supposedly unconscious aromatic pleasure, must be counted as great. After all, they are supposed to have included experience of a great deal of sensory pleasure. Conscious or not, this pleasure has contributed to the subject's welfare just the same. Yet, Feldman objects, this is clearly implausible. How could a life made up entirely of sounds or smells of which one was always entirely unaware be one that was, in virtue of those sounds or smells, truly great? If we were to tell a person with this sort of life that their life has been a great one, and that it has been great in virtue of these things that the person has been utterly unaware of, they would likely insist that we were mistaken. Their life has not been nearly as good as we have suggested. This suggests that the unconscious aromatic or auditory experiences here are not really pleasures at all.

In neither case, then, does Feldman take the subjects to experience unconscious pleasures or pains. Still, the proponent of unconscious pleasures and pains might remain unconvinced. For one, Feldman's discussion of the refrigerator case seems to add a detail to the case that was not originally there. This is, during the second phase, that he notices the refrigerator's whining beginning to end, and thus takes displeasure in the sound. In the original case, it was not the whining's having weakened that was noticed, but was instead the pleasurable sense of relief that resulted from the

whining's having ceased completely. So there was no conscious displeasure in the case. This is relevant because adding such a conscious displeasure might muddy our intuition about what is going on when the noise is not consciously noticed. Moreover, without this conscious displeasure, it becomes difficult for the attitudinalist to plausibly explain the conscious pleasure that results from the noise's ceasing. That's because, if the conscious pleasure is not experienced as a result of some past pain's ending, it is unclear what else it might be experienced as a result of. The pleasurable sort of relief typified by one's noticing that a noise has ceased tends to be experienced when the noise has been unpleasant. So if the attitudinalist is correct that the noise has not in any sense been unpleasant, the burden appears to be on her to explain why the noise's ending resulted in such a pleasurable sense of relief.

Concerning next Feldman's discussion of the Sacks case, here too he seems to have left room for a plausible response. That is because, while he may have argued convincingly that experiences of putatively unconscious sensory pleasure cannot contribute a great deal to one's welfare, or make one's life well worth living, he has not thereby shown that these experiences can contribute *nothing* to one's well-being.[2] The proponent of unconscious pleasures and pains might claim that while they share Feldman's intuition about a life full of experiences of these pleasures, they also think that such a life would be at least somewhat good, or have at least some well-being. And, given the original intuition that Sacks's patient did indeed experience unconscious pleasures, this position does not seem all that implausible. So it seems the attitudinalist must do more to convince her opponent that whatever is going on in apparent experiences of unconscious pleasure, it cannot be something that contributes to well-being.

Finally, as Bramble notes, there is further evidence for the existence of unconscious

[2] A similar point is made by Bramble (2020: 1343).

pleasures and pains, and Feldman's response does not address it.[3] The evidence again comes from Haybron:

> stressed or anxious individuals may discover their emotional state *only by attending to the physical symptoms of their distress*. Presumably being tense, anxious, or stressed detracts substantially from the quality of one's experience, even when one is unaware of these states. (Haybron 2008: 222)

That one's face is getting redder, or one's heart is beating faster, for instance, may provide evidence that one is experiencing pleasurable or unpleasant feelings, whether one is conscious of them or not. Whereas Heathwood may be able to offer a plausible explanation here (though he also makes no attempt to), as his account at least does not deny the existence of unconscious pleasures and pains, Feldman might seem to have some difficulty in plausibly explaining how these physiological changes come about. Regardless of how difficult offering such an explanation would be, though, Feldman does not attempt to offer one, and this alone constitutes an issue with his response.[4]

1.3 Wrapping up

In sum, Heathwood and Feldman's accounts face some serious problems. Neither seems to account

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[3] Actually, Bramble (2020) only offers this as an objection to Heathwood's reply, but it applies similarly to Feldman's.

[4] An Associate Editor points out that the back and forth in this debate seems to have largely neglected a closely related debate in consciousness research. This is the debate regarding the relation between, as Ned Block (1995) originally dubbed them, 'phenomenal' consciousness and 'access' consciousness. Appealing to similar sorts of cases, Block suggests it is possible for us to be phenomenally conscious—or, very roughly, for there to be something it is like to be in our mental state—without being access-conscious—or, again very roughly, without our having access to this state for use in reasoning and guiding action. (How to define these concepts is itself up for debate.) If that's right, it may similarly seem possible for us to experience sensory pleasures and pains without having the access needed to adopt (occurrent) attitudes toward the relevant sensations, contrary to what the attitudinalist suggests. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address how the great deal of back and forth regarding Block's distinction would bear on the current debate, it is at least worth noting that Block's claims regarding the possibility of phenomenal consciousness without access consciousness remain controversial, and that the rival view that phenomenal consciousness requires access consciousness—a view that would seem to mesh well with the attitudinalist's claims—is not without its supporters. For discussion, see, e.g., Carruthers and Gennaro 2020 and Wu 2018.

fully for cases of putatively unconscious pleasures and pains. Below, I want to offer an account that does fully explain these cases, and that does so while avoiding the problems faced by Heathwood and Feldman's accounts. First, though, I think it is important to get entirely clear on the difference between sensory pleasure and pain, on the attitudinalist's view.

2. Desire and aversion, pleasure and pain

I agree with Heathwood that attitudinal pleasure reduces (roughly) to intrinsic desire and belief.[5] As a result, I think his account is the most complete attitudinal view available. On this view, the difference between sensory pleasure and pain concerns whether the subject intrinsically desires *to* experience the particular sensation, or intrinsically desires *not* to experience it. Notice, though, that there are two senses in which we can (intrinsically) desire something to be or not be the case.[6] That is, when I say that I desire something, I might mean one of two things. I might mean either that I have a positive desire for the thing, or I might mean that I have an aversion toward not getting the thing (Schroeder 2004: 132–33; Sinhababu 2017: 32). This is explained by the fact that desires, as we generally think of them, come in two different types, or 'flavors': positive desires, which are fundamentally 'for' things; and aversions, which are fundamentally 'against' things.[7] On this rough characterization, desire in the wider sense covers both of these types because, generally speaking, we have a similar stance to getting what we are for, or are in favor of, as we do to not getting what we are against. Importantly, and more concretely, notice that these two types of desire are each associated with distinct types of (attitudinal) pleasure and pain. My desire for a delicious meal, for

[5] Actually, I think attitudinal pleasure (at least of one kind—see below) consists in the apparent satisfaction of 'genuine' desire, or the sort of desire experienced when something is seen with enthusiasm, excitement, or gusto. See Heathwood 2019. For present purposes, though, Heathwood's account as I present it here is close enough.

[6] While I focus on Heathwood's account here, a similar point seems to apply to Feldman's: attitudinal pleasure and displeasure can each come in two distinct forms, and this is plausibly explained by (the distinct hedonic profiles of) the two types of desire that I am about to discuss.

[7] Schroeder (2004: ch. 5) defends an empirically-backed picture of this sort.

instance, is a positive desire. I am prone to experience joy or delight if I satisfy it, and disappointment if I do not. My desire not to miss my flight, in contrast, is an aversion. I will typically experience relief if I satisfy it, and anxiety or dread if I do not. Ultimately, in each case, whether I experience a relevant pleasure or pain, and if so which I experience, depends not on whether the desires are actually satisfied, or whether the world is such that the desire's content obtains, but instead on whether the desire appears to me to be satisfied. If I arrive at the airport on time and find a restaurant where I order my favorite meal, I may experience both relief and joy as I reflect on my current circumstances, even if, unknown to me, my flight has left without me and my meal is sure to be horrible. These facts about the world may lead to my experiencing unpleasantness later, of course, but that will be the case only if my desires appear to me not to be satisfied at that later time.

This is relevant because, as it stands, Heathwood's approach does not specify which type of intrinsic desire is involved in each of sensory pleasure and pain. What may otherwise be the most promising attitudinal account of pleasure and pain is then incomplete. So this aspect of the account will need to be filled in by the attitudinalist. Fortunately, though, I do not think this will be all that difficult to do. The attitudinalist need only claim that the type of desire relevant to sensory pleasure is positive desire, and that the type of desire relevant to sensory pain is aversion. While both types of desire are associated with distinct types of pleasure and pain, it seems clear that both have a role to play in accounting for sensory pleasure and pain. After all, the type of pain one endures when one is burned, or hears an annoying noise, or smells something putrid does not seem like disappointment, or like the type of pain one endures when one does not get the pizza one wanted for dinner. Rather, it seems more like anxiety or dread, or like the type of pain one endures when one realizes one will miss one's flight, or be attacked by a dog. Our attitude in cases of sensory pain seems to be one that is 'against' the relevant sensation, rather than 'for' some other particular sensation we see ourselves as missing out on. Similarly, our attitude in cases of sensory pleasure seems to be one that is 'for' the

relevant sensation (resulting in joy or delight), rather than 'against' some other particular sensation we see ourselves as avoiding (which would result in relief). Indeed, as these claims illustrate, for sensory pleasure to essentially involve aversion, or for sensory pain to essentially involve positive desire, there would have to be an at most indirect connection between these attitudes and any sensations that were also essential to sensory pleasures and pains: in either of these cases, the attitude would concern a sensation we seemed to *lack*, rather than one we seemed to *have*, and so experiencing the sensation our attitude concerned would not be necessary for experiencing the sensory pleasure or pain. That is, if the attitudes that are partially constitutive of sensory pleasures and pains do not concern any particular sensations we are experiencing, but instead concern other particular sensations we take ourselves not to be experiencing, then sensory pleasures and pains are not partially constituted by the particular sensations our attitudes here concern. In that case, the connection between these attitudes and any sensations that might also partially constitute sensory pleasures and pains will be at most indirect. So, since the primary motivation for adopting attitudinal theories of sensory pleasure and pain is that they advance a plausible, direct link between the relevant attitudes and sensations, it appears the attitudinalist should claim that positive desire is the type of desire involved in sensory pleasure, and that aversion is the type of desire involved in sensory pain.

Beyond just filling a gap in Heathwood's approach, this addition also helps the attitudinalist to avoid one of the problems faced by Feldman and Heathwood's accounts of unconscious sensory pleasures and pains. This was the problem each account had with accounting for the connection between the pleasurable sense of relief you experience when the refrigerator's whining stops, and the putative past sensory pain experienced in connection with the whining. As we have seen, the current account says that the sense of relief you experience upon noticing that the refrigerator's whining has ceased is just the sort of pleasant psychological state involved in noticing that something to which

you are averse is not the case. While this relief may in one sense seem pleasurable, this is not because it constitutes a sensory pleasure. There is, after all, no sensation here that could even *be* pleasurable: what you notice is precisely that the sensation is gone. Instead, your experiencing this relief—or this *attitudinal* pleasure—just is your noticing that the thing to which you are averse, namely the noise, is gone.[8] And your experiencing sensory pain just is your noticing that this sensation to which you are averse is present. Since the sound is something to which you are averse, in other words, you experience sensory pain when you notice it, and experience relief when you notice its cessation. This follows directly from the nature of sensory pain, on the current account. It seems, then, that the attitudinalist has no issue plausibly accounting for the connection between the sense of relief and sensory pain you experience in this case.

3. Unconscious pleasure as dispositional pleasure

Having gotten entirely clear on the distinct natures of sensory pleasure and pain on the attitudinalist's view, we are now in position to see the account of putatively unconscious sensory pleasure and pain that I prefer. So consider first states like stress. How do these states manifest themselves in our experiences? They do not dominate our consciousness—at least, not for the entire time we intuitively count as experiencing the states. They only dominate our consciousness when we are focused on them, such as when stress finally 'gets to' us, and we explicitly recognize its presence. Most of the time that we are in these states, though, they share a less direct relation to our experiences. They dispose us to act and react to stimuli in different ways, such as by directing our attention to different aspects of our experiences rather than others. Stress in particular is unpleasant, at least in part, because it disposes us to experience frustration in a wider range of circumstances,

[8] The pleasure here is thus akin to the relief experienced upon noticing that you will not miss your flight, or be attacked by a dog. In each case, the relief results from your taking the object of your aversion *not* to be the case.

and entails our becoming more likely to focus our attention on those of our desires that are not satisfied. It is not that stress is inherently unpleasant, in virtue of attendant sensations that are constantly present but only noticed (in whatever sense) at particular times. Rather, it is unpleasant in virtue of its disposing and causing us to experience unpleasantness.

To see this, suppose that you have a large and important project due tomorrow. There are many aspects to this project, and you've completed few of them. What you want is to complete all these aspects by tomorrow—at least in the sense that you are averse to what will happen if you do not—but you fear that your desire to complete each aspect will go unfulfilled. Overwhelmed, you begin to feel stressed. Your attention is focused on the many aspects of the project you may not complete. Fortunately, after calming down, you're able to get some work done. As you become lost in your work, the feeling of stress goes away. But, the moment you return from your work, you are once again overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work that remains. You will never get it done in time.

It seems plausible to say here that you are stressed throughout this situation. Even when you are lost in your work, it seems right that you remain stressed. But, during that time, it does not seem right to say that the stress, in itself, is unpleasant.[9] Nor, as it happens, does it seem right that you experience any aversion. After all, you are entirely lost in your work: it is as if you had never experienced any stress at all. It is instead stress's effects on the surrounding experiences that make it unpleasant. It is unpleasant in the sense that it is always lurking, disposing you to experience unpleasantness in a wide range of circumstances. It is, we might say, *dispositionally* unpleasant: it is a state in which you are disposed to experience unpleasantness. It is unpleasant in this sense in virtue of its being a state in which there is something that you are averse to and believe yourself to be

[9] Feldman (2018), we've seen, argues for essentially the same point, though he does so in attempt to show that there is no sense in which these states are unpleasant.

getting, but that you do not currently see yourself as getting. In fact, it is particularly dispositionally unpleasant, since it is a state in which you are disposed to experience unpleasantness in a particularly wide range of cases (or, a state in which there is something that you are averse to, believe yourself to be getting, and do not currently see yourself as getting, but are particularly likely in the near future to see yourself as getting).[10]

That is the case, at least, for the entirety of the described situation. But when the stress also overwhelms you—when your attention becomes focused on your many aversions and frustrated desires—it is not merely dispositionally unpleasant. It is also *occurrently* unpleasant: it is a state in which you experience unpleasantness. It is unpleasant in this sense in virtue of its being a state in which you are averse to something you now see yourself as getting. If you did not see yourself in this way—as when you were consumed in your work—you would not be experiencing anxiety or frustration, and there would therefore be no attendant unpleasantness as part of your current state. Your state, in other words, would not be occurrently unpleasant.

Now, to be perfectly clear: dispositional pleasure and pain do not entail occurrent pleasure or pain. This is because both having a positive desire or aversion toward something and believing yourself to be getting the thing does not entail currently seeing yourself as getting the thing. It is only if one also now sees oneself as getting the thing that one's state here will count as occurrently

[10] It is worth noting here that I do not take my talk of dispositions to experience pleasantness and unpleasantness to depend on any particular view of the metaphysics of dispositions. As we've seen, positive desires and aversions are theoretically distinguished from each other by the distinct feelings their subjects experience when they are seen as satisfied and frustrated. Whatever we think of the metaphysics of dispositions—whether dispositions ultimately are basic properties, reducible to categorical properties, etc.—I think, we should be able to attribute to these attitudes that they dispose us to experience these feelings when they are seen as satisfied or frustrated (again, whether these dispositions are basic, reducible to e.g. the categorical properties of the mind or brain, etc.). See, e.g., Armstrong, Martin, and Place 1996 and Choi and Fara 2021. All I am adding to this, in saying that a state is 'dispositionally pleasant' (or 'unpleasant'), is that when we have these attitudes, and we also believe these attitudes are satisfied or frustrated, the set of circumstances in which the disposition to experience these feelings will be manifested will be particularly wide—indeed, it will effectively include any circumstance in which we are brought to think about the object of our attitude. As long as a theory of the metaphysics of disposition can accord with these putative facts about human psychology (however the explanation ultimately goes), then, it should be consistent with the claims here. I thank the journal's Editor for pressing me to clarify this.

unpleasant. When one does not see oneself in this way, one's state will be merely dispositionally unpleasant. This is explained by the fact that it is only when one's positive desires or aversions are apparently satisfied that one will experience anything typically thought of as pleasurable or painful. Thus, when one is positioned to see one's positive desires or aversions as satisfied, one's state will be dispositionally pleasant or unpleasant; and when one is actually in that position of seeing one's positive desires or aversions as satisfied, one's state will be occurrently pleasant or unpleasant.

It is also worth noting that, because dispositional pleasantness and unpleasantness do not entail occurrent pleasantness or unpleasantness, those who are inclined to view welfare as consisting in experiences of (occurrent) pleasantness—or, hedonists—can adopt this conception while avoiding the claim that states that are merely dispositionally pleasant are in themselves welfare-affecting. This is a virtue of the current account, as I see it, because it seems to me implausible that a merely dispositionally pleasant or unpleasant state could affect a subject's welfare. It is surely pleasant to think that pleasantness is just around the corner, and this may make this future pleasantness seem good for us even before it is present. But, if it is never present, it is unclear to me how it could ever be good for us. A life where you were entirely lost in your work would seem no better or worse, in itself, for you, merely in virtue of your being disposed to feel relief or stress upon returning from your work, if you never ultimately so returned. Whatever does matter to welfare, then, it seems clear to me that dispositional pleasantness and unpleasantness do not.

This distinction between occurrent and dispositional unpleasantness can also be seen in the cases Bramble appeals to. In the case of the whining refrigerator, before the whining stops, your state is dispositionally unpleasant. If you were to think about the noise in your current environment, you would be annoyed, or would experience unpleasantness. Still, when you are lost in your work, you experience no occurrent unpleasantness. The whining is 'fouling' your experience only in the sense that it adds an ever-present threat of unpleasantness, which will be realized whenever you are

unable to place your attention elsewhere. Then, when the noise ceases, this threat is removed, and you feel relief as a result of your noticing that the thing to which you are averse, namely the noise, has been avoided. It is not that the noise is constantly occurrently unpleasant, whether you know it or not; it's that the noise is constantly dispositionally unpleasant, and is occurrently unpleasant only when you know it.[11]

In Sacks's case, on the other hand, the subject experiences displeasure as a result of noticing that his positive desire to smell is now frustrated. His state is occurrently unpleasant. When he thinks back longingly to past smells he's experienced, he notices that he will never experience them again, and becomes disappointed. It is not that he was constantly experiencing occurrent pleasure without noticing it; it is that he now experiences occurrent displeasure and notices it. Moreover, and importantly, his current state is also *dispositionally* unpleasant: given his inability to smell, and his desire to have this ability, he is disposed to experience unpleasantness whenever he notices that smell is not a part of his experience. His inability to smell represents an ever-present threat of unpleasantness, which will now be realized whenever he thinks about the smell of the things he lists. That, plus the fact that he will now miss out on very many sensory pleasures in the future, is why his world seems radically poorer, or worse in a way that is not explained just by the occurrent unpleasantness he experiences.

This is, I think, a more plausible explanation of the cases than the one Bramble provides.

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[11] Here it may be wondered how a state that was merely dispositionally unpleasant could give rise to any feelings of relief, on the current account. After all, the objection goes, this account says that we experience relief once we notice that a state that disposes us to experience occurrent unpleasantness ceases. Yet how could the cessation of a disposition to experience occurrent unpleasantness lead us to feel anything at all? How could the cessation of a mere disposition give rise to feelings of relief? Notice, however, that the account offered here does not say this. Instead, it claims that we experience relief when we notice that something we are averse to is not (or does not appear to us to be) the case, and that aversion disposes us to experience this feeling (as well as a feeling of anxiety when the thing appears to us to be the case). Thus, it is not the cessation of a disposition to experience occurrent unpleasantness that gives rise to any feelings of relief; rather, it is the manifestation of a disposition to experience the feelings of relief. Still, what makes cases like the one involving the whining refrigerator cases of dispositional unpleasantness—despite the subjects' aversions disposing them both to feel relief and to feel anxiety—is that the subjects also *believe* they are getting the thing to which they are averse, making them prone to experience unpleasantness rather than relief whenever they think about it (or whenever they occurrently see themselves as getting it). I thank an Associate Editor for pressing me on this.

Bramble suggests that the pleasures and displeasures are all the while experienced but nevertheless unnoticed or unknown. It is unclear to me, however, why we should posit such unconscious, unverifiable pleasures and displeasures when a more natural explanation is available. This is that the states or sensations are occurrently pleasant or unpleasant when they are under explicit consideration, and are merely dispositionally pleasant or unpleasant when they are not.

Furthermore, notice that this explanation avoids each of the objections to Heathwood and Feldman's accounts considered above. Consider first the objections to Heathwood's view. We have already seen how the current account handles the objection regarding the connection between the putatively unconscious pain and sense of relief you experience in the refrigerator case. We have also seen that the account does not treat any hedonically relevant phenomena that are not themselves conscious pleasures or pains, like dispositions to experience conscious pleasures or pains, as contributing to one's welfare, and so does not face any objection concerning the plausibility of treating lives made up of just these dispositions as high in welfare. Finally, concerning the objection to Heathwood's claim that if something is 'fouling' your experience, then it must be 'bothering' you, I think the current account reveals that there are two senses in which a thing can properly be said to 'foul' your experience. Something can foul your experience either by disposing you to experience unpleasantness (or, by being such that you both are averse to it and believe you are getting it) or by itself causing you to experience occurrent unpleasantness (or, by being such that you both are averse to it and now see yourself as getting it). In the second sense, the thing must be bothering you; in the first sense, it need not. It seems apt to say that it is 'fouling' your experience in each case because, when the thing is bothering you, it is causing you to experience unpleasantness, and so is clearly fouling your experience; and when the thing disposes you to experience unpleasantness, it represents a constant threat of unpleasantness, which will be realized whenever you focus on the thing, and this too seems to foul your experience. Regardless of whether you agree that this understanding of the

phrase seems plausible, though, it seems clear that none of my arguments for the distinction between occurrent and dispositional displeasure depend on any claims about the connection between something 'fouling' your experience and the thing's bothering you, and so that the current objection to Heathwood's view does not apply to the account I provide.

Consider next the objections to Feldman's account. Again, we have already seen that the proposed view plausibly accounts for the connection between the putatively unconscious pain and sense of relief you experience in the refrigerator case. The second and third issues are not as obviously handled by the view, however. Feldman, recall, argues that because a life made up entirely of putatively unconscious sensory pleasures would not seem very high in welfare, it seems implausible that these putative pleasures would contribute anything to one's welfare. Here it is open to the proponent of unconscious pleasures to suggest that while they share Feldman's intuition that the life would not be very high in welfare, these pleasures still would make at least a small contribution to the person's welfare. As I see it, though, the more plausible explanation as to why these putative pleasures seem at least somewhat good for us is simply that they are, in virtue of actually being dispositions to experience pleasantness, so closely linked, and so often precursors to, pleasantness. This makes it easy to mistake them for experiences of actual, occurrent pleasantness, and so makes it easy to mistake them as being, in themselves, good for us. But because they are mere dispositions to experience pleasantness, they themselves contribute nothing to our welfare. At the very least, I think this explanation is more plausible than the one that makes these unconscious, unverifiable pleasures constituents of our well-being. Finally, Feldman makes no attempt to account for the physiological changes that seem to accompany putatively unconscious pleasures and pains. These include changes like one's heart beating faster and one's face growing redder. If there are no unconscious pains here, as Feldman suggests, then it is unclear how we are to make sense of these changes, which seem to be typical of conscious pains as well. Yet the current account again offers a

plausible explanation: one experiences the physiological changes as a result of both experiencing, and being disposed to experience, occurrent pleasantness or unpleasantness. The changes to one's dispositions, positive desires, and aversions that experiences of such pleasantness or unpleasantness entail are sometimes accompanied by physiological changes. The stressed individual may occasionally notice that some of their desires are frustrated, or that some states to which they are averse seem likely, and this may slowly build until it dominates their attention. All the while their state will be dispositionally unpleasant, and they may become increasingly tense or warm, and their heart rate may rise. I see this explanation as entirely plausible.

It seems, then, that the distinction between occurrent and dispositional pleasure and displeasure allows the attitudinalist to plausibly account for putatively unconscious pleasures and pains, and to do so while avoiding each of the objections faced by alternative attitudinal accounts. Thus, I conclude that this distinction should be adopted by the attitudinalist, and that the phenomenon of putatively unconscious pleasures and pains presents no problem for her approach.

Before closing, I'd like to offer two more brief points in favor of this distinction, each of which is inspired by claims made by Feldman and Heathwood. First, in dismissing the idea of unconscious sensory pleasures and pains, Feldman claims that the existence of these pleasures and pains seems as implausible as the thought that an anaesthetized patient might suffer intense but unconscious pains during surgery (2018: 480). This claim has some force, I think, but closer reflection seems to reveal that our intuitions about this case and a case of putatively unconscious sensory pain are not in fact identical. There is something to the thought that your experience in the refrigerator case is worse than the experience of the anaesthetized patient during surgery. And the current account makes sense of this something. It tells us that, while neither case involves any experience of sensory pain, only your case involves a disposition to experience such pain. That is why your experience seems worse than the anaesthetized patient's experience, and why neither of

your experiences seem nearly as bad as the experience of someone who feels occurrent sensory pain.

Second, it is worth mentioning that the picture I've proposed plausibly accounts for a puzzling sort of case mentioned by Heathwood. He notes that there are 'finkish' cases where a subject, despite being disposed to notice the cessation of a sensation, would not in fact notice that it ended if it did, due to some quirk (Heathwood 2018: 224–25). It might be, for example, that a subject would die instantly if the special machine that they are hooked up to, and that also makes an obnoxious whining noise while it operates, turned off. This subject may not occurrently believe that she is hearing the noise, and may be disposed to hear the noise end if it does, and yet may fail to be such that if the noise ended, she would notice that it ended, given the machine may turn off. While this may present a problem for Heathwood, since he thinks that the subject is experiencing unpleasantness despite his account implying that she cannot be, I think the case can be plausibly explained by the current proposal. On this picture, the subject here is disposed to experience unpleasantness in virtue of the whining noise, but does not experience any occurrent unpleasantness in virtue of the noise. If the machine were to stop, she would of course not experience any relief from this unpleasantness; yet, if the whining were to stop for any reason that did not entail the machine's malfunctioning, she would experience such relief. This seems to me exactly right.

4. Conclusion

As we have seen, the idea of unconscious pleasures and pains presents no problem for proponents of attitudinal theories of pleasure and pain. When sensations that one both has an intrinsic positive desire to experience or an intrinsic aversion to experiencing and believes one is experiencing are not thought about, they are dispositionally, but not occurrently, pleasant or unpleasant. They improve or foul one's experience in the sense that they represent a constant prospect of pleasantness or unpleasantness, which will be realized whenever one focuses on them. Still, they are not, in

themselves, actually (occurrently) pleasant or unpleasant. In this sense, unconscious pleasures and pains are not really pleasures or pains at all.[12]

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