

The final and definitive version of this paper is published in *Philosophical Studies*.

An Honest Look at Hybrid Theories of Pleasure

§1 Two Theories of Pleasure

Some experiences feel good. Examples include the experiences I have when I eat chocolate, listen to 80s pop-rock, watch a Los Angeles sunset, or get a back massage. These and other experiences are pleasurable. But in virtue of what are they pleasurable? What do all and only pleasurable experiences have *in common*?

Philosophers have tended to gravitate towards two broad theories. The first of these is the *felt-quality theory*. According to the felt-quality theory, each pleasurable experience is pleasurable because of the way that it feels—its “qualitative character” or “felt-quality”. The second theory is the *attitudinal theory*. According to the attitudinal theory, each pleasurable experience is pleasurable because the experiencer takes certain attitudes towards it. These two theories of pleasure are typically framed as rivals. But we can aspire to get the best of both worlds. It could be that pleasure is partly a matter of felt-quality, and partly a matter of attitudes. It could be that a *hybrid* theory is true.

In this paper, I aim to advance the cause of hybrid theories of pleasure. I will do this in two ways. I will begin by examining the challenges which motivate the search for a hybrid theory. I call these the HONEST challenges: Heterogeneity, Oppositeness, Normativity, Euthyphro, Separateness, and Togetherness. The first three challenges—HON—are challenges for the felt-quality theory. The second three challenges—EST—are challenges for the attitudinal theory. Our aim in pursuing a hybrid theory is to draw upon the resources of the two theories, and thereby avoid challenges for both of them. Having established the HONEST challenges, I will then describe and motivate a particular cluster of hybrid theories which I will call *dispositional* hybrid theories. According to these theories, pleasurable experiences are all and only those experiences which dispose us to desire them in virtue of feeling the way that they do. (What exactly this means will become clearer in the course of the discussion.) These

dispositional theories deliver on the promise of hybrid theories: because they appeal to both felt-qualities and attitudes, they have the resources to avoid most, if not all, of the HONEST challenges.

§2 The Felt-Quality Theory

To define the felt-quality theory in a precise way, we have to start by getting clear about what is meant by “felt-quality”. As I use the term, a felt-quality is a property of experiences—it is a property of being an experience which feels a certain way. For example, consider the experiences you normally have upon taking a bite of chocolate. Your chocolate-experiences feel a certain way: they are *sweet, rich, creamy*, and so on. Call this felt-quality Q_c . Q_c is shared by any experiences which feel just like your ordinary chocolate-experiences.

According to the felt-quality theory, pleasurable experiences are pleasurable because of the way that they feel. So, if your ordinary chocolate-experiences are pleasurable, then any other experiences with felt-quality Q_c are also pleasurable. More generally, there is a set of felt-qualities which are distinctive of pleasure, and an experience is pleasurable just in case it has one of those felt-qualities. This is enough for a definition of the felt-quality theory:

(Felt-Quality Theory) There is a non-empty set of felt-qualities $[Q]$ such that necessarily, for any experience e , e is a pleasure iff e has a felt-quality which is a member of $[Q]$.

This is intended as a *minimal* definition. It tells us that some felt-qualities are distinctive of pleasure, but it does not tell us which felt-qualities have this special status. It does not tell us which felt-qualities are in $[Q]$.

Different versions of the felt-quality theory correspond to different views about which felt-qualities are in $[Q]$. There are many such versions. The simplest theory is the pure monist theory, according to which $[Q]$ contains a single felt-quality: the felt-quality of pure pleasure. So, if pure monism is true, then all pleasurable experiences feel exactly alike—they are all experiences of pure pleasure. It's possible that G.E. Moore held this view (see (1993, p. 64-65)). But no contemporary philosophers accept it.

Contemporary felt-quality theorists hold that there are multiple felt-qualities in [Q]; they deny that all pleasures feel exactly alike.

Because they deny that all pleasures feel alike, the onus is on felt-quality theorists to say what the felt-qualities in [Q] have in common. According to Ben Bramble's *distinctive feeling theory*, the felt-qualities in [Q] are alike in that they all "include" or "involve" a distinctive feeling of pleasurableness (2013, p. 202).¹ Other felt-quality theorists hold the felt-qualities in [Q] do not share a distinctive feeling, but rather a higher-order felt-quality. The idea is often illustrated with an analogy. An experience of vivid green resembles an experience of vivid red, but not in virtue of their sharing a distinctive feeling of *vividness*. Rather, vividness is a higher-order feeling common to both experiences of vivid red and experiences of vivid green. Similarly, pleasurableness might be a higher-order feeling of pleasurable experiences. Several philosophers have developed theories along these lines, including Shelly Kagan (1992, p. 192), Roger Crisp (2006, p. 109-110), and Aaron Smuts (2011). Theories of this kind are often called *hedonic tone theories* (Bramble 2013, p. 202; Heathwood 2007, p. 26).

Some philosophers simply define the felt-quality theory as the disjunction of the distinctive feeling theory and hedonic tone theory. (See for example Smuts 2011, p. 255; and Heathwood 2007, p. 26.) But we should resist this disjunctive definition. The distinctive feeling theory and the hedonic tone theory are not the only theories which make good on the idea that pleasures are pleasurable in virtue of their felt-qualities. Other ways of making good on this idea correspond to different views about what the felt-qualities in [Q] have in common. For example, the felt-quality theorist might hold that the felt-qualities in [Q] are alike with respect to their associated representational contents. Many

¹ The distinctive feeling theory is sometimes conflated with the pure monist theory. But these are different theories. Ben Bramble clearly denies that all pleasurable experiences feel exactly alike (2013, p. 202). He affirms that there is a distinctive feeling of pleasure, but he does not insist that pleasures are all and only instances of that very feeling. Rather, he argues that all and only pleasures "include" or "involve" that feeling.

philosophers have argued for broadly representationalist theories; examples include David Bain (2013, p. 2018), Manolo Martínez (2011), and Brian Cutter and Michael Tye (2011, p. 2014).² Alternatively, a felt-quality theorist might hold that the felt-qualities in [Q] are alike with respect to their axiological properties. For example, one might hold that all and only felt-qualities in [Q] are such that experiences with those felt-qualities are non-instrumentally good due to how they feel. Stuart Rachels (2000, p. 198) and Roger Crisp (2006, p. 108-109) consider a few theories of this kind. One might even adopt a particularist theory, according to which the felt-qualities in [Q] are not alike with respect to any interesting properties—except, of course, that they are all distinctive of pleasure.³

With the minimal definition at hand, I will examine what I take to be the three most significant challenges for the felt-quality theory: the Heterogeneity challenge, the Oppositeness challenge, and the Normativity challenge. I will not assess whether those challenges succeed or fail, and I will not explain in any detail how felt-quality theorists have responded to the challenges. I don't mean to imply that felt-quality theorists have not responded, or that the responses they have given are not worthy of consideration. Rather, I do not address the responses because doing so would take me beyond the goals of this discussion. I am examining the HONEST challenges in order to motivate the search for a hybrid theory. We need to have the HONEST challenges at hand before we see how a hybrid theory might avoid them.

§2.1 Heterogeneity

² These representationalist theories are not generally classified as versions of the felt-quality theory, but it's not obvious why they are not so classified. David Bain is an exception—he recognizes that his preferred representationalist theory is as much a "phenomenological theory" or "feeling theory" as are traditional felt-quality theories (2017, p. 2). It is a theory on which pleasures are pleasurable because in virtue of their felt-qualities.

³ The particularist theory seems unsatisfying; it seems to be a radically disunified theory of pleasure. Still, it's worth noting that the particularist theory is another theory in the logical space of felt-quality theories.

Many philosophers have argued that our pleasurable experiences do not resemble one another in felt-quality; they do not feel alike. This poses a problem for any version of the felt-quality theory which entails that they do feel alike.

Henry Sidgwick is widely cited as the first philosopher to raise the Heterogeneity challenge. Sidgwick considers the theory that pleasure is an indefinable quality of experience, like *sweetness*, which is common to all pleasurable experiences. And Sidgwick claims that there is no such common quality. He tells us:

...when I reflect on the notion of pleasure,—using the term in the comprehensive sense which I have adopted, to include the most refined and subtle intellectual and emotional gratifications, no less than the coarser and more definite sensual enjoyments,—the only common quality that I can find in the feelings so designated seems to be that relation to desire and volition expressed by the general term 'desirable', (1981, p. 127).

Many contemporary philosophers—including many attitudinal theorists—have made more or less the same point. See for example Richard Brandt (1979, p. 37-38), Fred Feldman (1988, p. 60), David Sobel (2002, p. 241), and Chris Heathwood (2007, p. 25-26). The challenge is clear enough: introspection suggests that pleasures do not resemble one another in felt-quality. Taken at face value, this challenge poses a serious problem for any version of the felt-quality theory which implies otherwise. That includes the two most prominent versions of the felt-quality theory: the distinctive feeling theory, and the hedonic tone theory.

§2.2 Oppositeness

The second challenge to the felt-quality theory concerns the relationship between pleasure and unpleasure. "Unpleasure" is a term covering all and only unpleasant or unpleasurable experiences: aches,

burns, stings, itches, and the like.⁴ If we accept the felt-quality theory of pleasure, then we should accept a corresponding theory of unpleasure. We should say that some felt-qualities are distinctive of pleasure, and other felt-qualities are distinctive of unpleasure. And we should admit that there is some obvious sense in which pleasure is the opposite of unpleasure.

Chris Heathwood, an attitudinal theorist, argues that felt-quality theorists cannot make sense of the idea that pleasure and unpleasure are opposites. Heathwood tells us:

The Felt-Quality Theory of pleasure and pain⁵ described above would leave it mysterious why, and in what sense, pleasure and pain are opposites. Many pairs of felt qualities (e.g., a sensation of middle C on a piano and a sensation of F\# on a banjo) are in no way opposites. But if the felt-quality theory is true, then some such pairs are opposites. How could that be? What could make one sensation the opposite of another sensation? (2007, p. 27).

Heathwood seems to be suggesting the following argument. On reflection, felt-qualities do not seem like the sorts of things that have opposites. So if pleasure and unpleasure are to be understood in terms of felt-qualities, then there is no way to make sense of the idea that pleasure and unpleasure are opposites.

Taken at face value, this challenge poses a serious problem for the felt-quality theory. It is difficult to deny that pleasure and unpleasure are in an important sense opposites. But if Heathwood is correct, then the felt-quality theorist must deny this.

§2.3 Normativity

⁴ We often talk as if pain is the opposite of pleasure, but that's not quite right. "Pleasure" can be used as a synonym for "pleasurable experience". But "pain" is not a synonym for "unpleasurable experience". There are unpleasurable experiences which are not painful; for example: nausea, itchiness, and vertigo. So "pleasure" picks out a broader category of experience than does "pain". For more on the relationship between unpleasure, pleasure, and pain, see Rachels 2004.

⁵ Ultimately, Heathwood is concerned with felt-quality theories of unpleasure, not pain (2007, p. 41-43). He takes unpleasure, not pain, to be the opposite of pleasure. His reasons mirror my own—see n.4.

The third challenge to the felt-quality theory concerns the special normative status of pleasure. It is plausible that pleasure bears a necessary connection to well-being: necessarily, whenever you have a pleasurable experience, you also enjoy an increase in well-being.⁶ But, according to some attitudinal theorists, the felt-quality theorist cannot explain this necessary connection. For suppose that the felt-quality theory is true, and my chocolate-experience is a pleasure. Then every experience that feels like my chocolate-experience is also a pleasure. In other words, every experience with felt-quality *Q_c* is a pleasure. But it seems easy to imagine a person who is utterly indifferent to experiences with that felt-quality. It would be strange to insist that this person is made better-off by those experiences. So it seems that, if the felt-quality theory is true, then not everyone is made better-off when they experience pleasure.

William Austin seems to have been the first to make this point:

What we are suggesting to be necessarily true is (P) the fact that one gets pleasure out of *x* is a reason for doing or seeking *x*... The conscious-quality theory can throw no light on this necessity. If pleasure is an unanalyzable quality of experience, there is nothing about the meanings of the terms involved in (P) that would make it necessarily true. Why should it be necessarily true that a certain unanalyzable quality of experience is something to be sought? (1967, p. 346)

Austin formulates the challenge in terms of *reasons*, rather than *well-being*, but it's clear that his challenge has implications for well-being. If pleasure is not "something to be sought", then presumably it is not something that necessarily makes us better-off.

⁶ The claim that all pleasures make you better-off is consistent with the claim that some pleasures also make you worse-off.

Perhaps you do not deserve to feel pleasure, and you are made worse-off to the extent that you get something you do not deserve. In that case, if your pleasure might make you both better- and worse-off. It makes you better-off because it is pleasurable, and it makes you worse-off because it is underserved. So even if we claim that some pleasures make you worse-off, we could also claim that all pleasure make you better-off. See Irwin Goldstein, 2005, 23-27.

More recently, Chris Heathwood and David Sobel also made more or less the same argument (2011, p. 94; 2005, p. 445-446). The basic idea is the same in each case. If the felt-quality theory is true, then some creatures might be indifferent to their pleasures. Intuitively, then, those creatures are not benefited by their pleasures—for them, pleasure is not “something to be sought.” So, on the felt-quality theory, pleasure does not bear a necessary connection to well-being. Taken at face value, this challenge poses a serious problem for felt-quality theorists. It is plausible—though not uncontroversial—that pleasures necessarily make us better-off. But if the above arguments are sound, then felt-quality theorists must deny this.

§2.4 HON

To sum up: felt-quality theories face three *prima facie* serious challenges. This is not to say that the theory is hopeless. Felt-quality theorists have responded to the Heterogeneity, Oppositeness, and Normativity challenges. They have responded to the Heterogeneity challenge by arguing that pleasures really do feel alike, despite our intuitions to the contrary (Crisp 2006, p. 109-110; Smuts 2011, p. 256-257; Bramble 2013, p. 209-211). They have addressed the Oppositeness challenge by developing views according to which pleasure and unpleasure are clear opposites (Klocksiem 2010; Moen 2013). And they have responded to the Normativity challenge, by arguing we have reasons to pursue pleasure even if we are indifferent to it (Goldstein 1980; Rachels 2000, p. 201; and Bramble 2013, p. 213-214). So felt-quality theorists have things to say about the HON challenges. Still, it’s clear that the HON challenges do *require* responses from felt-quality theorists.

In contrast, the HON challenges do not even arise for attitudinal theorists. The attitudinal theory does not face a Heterogeneity challenge, because it does not imply that all pleasures feel alike. It does not face an Oppositeness challenge, because attitudes—unlike felt-qualities—have clear opposites. (The opposite of desiring that *p* is desiring that not-*p*, for example.) Finally, the attitudinal theory does not face a Normativity challenge, because it does not imply that creatures can be indifferent to their

pleasures. So the HON challenges are not challenges for the attitudinal theory. But as we will see, the attitudinal theory faces challenges of its own.

§3 The Attitudinal Theory

According to the attitudinal theory, each pleasure is pleasurable—for a subject—because that subject bears certain pro-attitudes towards that experience. There are some pro-attitudes such that, necessarily, an experience is a pleasure for a subject iff that subject bears one of those attitudes towards that experience. This is enough for a minimal definition:

(Attitudinal Theory) There is a non-empty set of attitudes [A] such that necessarily, for any experience *e* and subject *s*, *e* is a pleasure for *s* iff *s* bears an attitude in [A] to *e*.

Different versions of the attitudinal theory correspond to different theories about [A]. For example, Fred Feldman appeals to a *sui generis* pro-attitude which he calls "attitudinal pleasure" (1988, p. 2004). On Feldman's theory, [A] is the singleton set of attitudinal pleasure. Derek Parfit appeals to a *sui generis* pro-attitude which he calls "hedonic liking" (2011, p. 52-53). On Parfit's theory, [A] is the singleton set of hedonic liking.

The most popular version of the attitudinal theory is the desire theory, according to which [A] contains a certain species of desire. The desire theory has been defended by William Alston (1967), and Thomas Carson (2000), and Chris Heathwood (2007), among others. Heathwood provides an especially sophisticated version of the theory. He tells us that "...a sensation *S*, occurring at time *t*, is a sensory pleasure at *t* iff the subject of *S* desires, intrinsically and *de re*, at *t*, of *S*, that it be occurring at *t*" (2007, p. 32). It will be helpful to linger over Heathwood's theory for a moment, since I will return to it later.

Here's what Heathwood's theory has to say about my pleasurable chocolate-experience. First, I am directly acquainted with that experience. Second, I contemporaneously desire that experience: I desire that I have a chocolate-experience while I am in fact having a chocolate-experience. Third, my desire is *de re*: it is directly about the chocolate-experience with which I am acquainted. Finally, my desire

is “intrinsic” in the sense of being *non-instrumental*: I desire that I be having a chocolate-experience for its own sake. My chocolate-experience counts as pleasurable for me because I bear this special sort of desire towards it (2007, p. 32).⁷ Heathwood's desire theory, like Feldman's and Parfit's theories, is a theory on which [A] is a singleton set—[A] contains one special species of desire, and nothing else. It's worth noting, however, that one might accept a pluralist attitudinal theory: one might hold that [A] contains multiple kinds of attitudes.

Disagreements about the contents of [A] are the most obvious disagreements among attitudinal theorists. But attitudinal theorists might also disagree about the attitudes themselves. For example, proponents of desire theories agree that [A] contains desire, but they might disagree about the nature of desire. There are, after all, many possible theories. Some philosophers opt for an Aristotelian “guise of the good” theory⁸ (Stampe 1987, p. 359-362; Oddie 2005, chap.3). Others opt for an attention-based theory (Scanlon 1998, p.38-42; Schroeder 2007, chap.8). Still others opt for various teleological and functionalist theories (Papineau 1984, p.562-565; Millikan 2005, p.171-173). These different theories of desire yield different versions of the desire theory.

The minimal definition of the attitudinal theory is neutral between the various versions of the theory. With the minimal definition at hand, I will examine what I take to be the three most significant challenges for the attitudinal theory: the Euthyphro challenge, the Separateness challenge, and the Togetherness challenge. Again, I will not assess whether those challenges succeed or fail, nor will I address how attitudinal theorists have responded to the challenges. My goal is to get the challenges on the table, so that we can begin exploring hybrid theories with an eye to avoiding them.

⁷ This is a somewhat loose way of talking. Strictly speaking, on Heathwood's theory, the object of my desire is not the experience *as such*. Rather, I desire *of the experience that it be occurring*. For the sake of readability—and following Heathwood—I will continue to talk in a loose way about desiring experiences. This should be understood as a shorthand for talking about desiring that certain experiences be occurring.

⁸ Jessica Moss provides a helpful exploration of Aristotle's views on desire and the so-called *guise of the good*. See Moss 2010.

§3.1 Euthyphro

On the attitudinal theory, it's a necessary truth that we bear certain attitudes towards our pleasures. The first challenge for the theory arises when we consider a Euthyphro-style question: do we bear those attitudes towards our pleasures because they are pleasurable, or are they pleasures because we bear those attitudes towards them?

For ease of discussion, I will henceforth adopt Heathwood's version of the desire theory. Whenever I talk about "desires", the desires I have in mind are the special sorts of desires described by Heathwood: contemporaneous, *de re*, non-instrumental desires. Using Heathwood's theory as a proxy for attitudinal theories generally, we can ask our Euthyphro question. Do we desire pleasures because those experiences are pleasurable, or are those experiences pleasurable because we desire them? Let $e(Qc)$ be a particular pleasurable experience—the experience I had yesterday when I took a bite of chocolate. Answering the Euthyphro question means accepting one—but not both—of the following explanations:

(E1) I desire that I have $e(Qc)$ because $e(Qc)$ is pleasurable.

(E2) $e(Qc)$ is pleasurable because I desire $e(Qc)$.

It seems clear enough that one cannot accept both E1 and E2. If I say that my experience is pleasurable because I desire it, then I cannot say that I desire it because it is pleasurable.

The trouble for the attitudinal theorist is that she is committed to E2, and therefore cannot accept E1. And this is a bad result, because E1 is quite plausible. As Aaron Smuts tells us:

Although pleasure is surely not the sole motivation for pursuing artworks or anything else, it would be strange to say that it plays no role whatsoever. But this is what the motivational theory of pleasure forces us to say. The theory holds that what makes something pleasurable is that we desire it, not the other way around. This is odd. Surely the reason we desire a massage is that it is pleasurable. The motivational theory of pleasure gets the order of explanation backwards. (Smuts 2011, 9)

Taken at face value, this Euthyphro challenge poses a serious problem for attitudinal theorists. Intuitively, we desire pleasures because those experiences are pleasurable. The attitudinal theorist would seem to have to deny this.

§3.2 Separateness

The second challenge to the attitudinal theory consists of purported counterexamples to the theory. On the attitudinal theory, there are some attitudes such that all pleasurable experiences are objects of those attitudes. On Heathwood's desire theory, for example, all pleasurable experiences are objects of desire. But, according to some philosophers, pleasure can be separated from desire (or from any other pro-attitude). There are experiences which are desired, but which are not pleasures. And there are experiences which are pleasures, but which are not desired.

Start with the first kind of case: cases in which one desires an experience *e*, but *e* is not pleasurable. Aaron Smuts purports to describe a case of this kind. In his example, he describes watching a tragic episode of *Scenes from a Marriage*:

I would not describe my experience of this episode as in any way pleasurable, but I find it to be one of the most effective affair fictions ever created. Indeed, pardon my gushing, it contains some of the most powerful moments in cinematic history. I would recommend it to others, largely for the experience. But it is not pleasurable. [...] I desire the overall sad experience while it is occurring. I am not merely retrospectively glad to have undergone the emotional turmoil. At several moments along the way, if you stopped the movie and asked me what I think, through a mist of tears, I would say that it is terrific and absolutely crushing. (2011, 7)

Roger Crisp describes another case with a similar structure (Crisp 2006, p.107). If Smuts and Crisp are describing real possible cases, then those cases are counterexamples to the attitudinal theory.

Stuart Rachels and Ben Bramble purport to offer another counterexamples of the second kind: cases in which a subject does not desire an experience *e*, but *e* is nevertheless pleasurable. Bramble and Rachels argue that we can experience pleasure without being aware of the pleasurable experience. And they argue that, insofar as one is unaware of one's pleasurable experience, it is implausible that one bears any sort of pro-attitude towards it. Bramble puts the point particularly forcefully:

At any given time, there are likely hundreds or even thousands of respects in which our experiences are subtly pleasurable. We are getting pleasures from the visual perception of colours, light, depth, the size of things, the shape of things, symmetries and asymmetries in our environment, and so on and so forth.

[...]

Is it really plausible that unconsciously we have a crystal clear understanding of all these various feelings we are having—that every one of them is known to us in all its detail or complexity—and that we are holding court unconsciously on the lot of them, simultaneously rendering hundreds of individual judgments concerning whether we want these to be occurring? This just seems like a fantasy. (2013, 206)

Stuart Rachels describes another case with a similar structure (2004, p.15). Again, if Bramble and Rachels are describing real possible cases, then those cases are counterexamples to the attitudinal theory. If there are any cases in which pleasure is separated from desiring (or from whichever attitude features in the attitudinal theory) then the attitudinal theory is false. So, taken at face value, the Separation challenge poses a serious problem for attitudinal theorists.

§3.3 Togetherness

The Separateness challenge arises because, *prima facie*, pleasure can come apart from desiring (or from any other pro-attitude). The Togetherness challenge arises because, *prima facie*, pleasure *cannot* come

apart from certain felt-qualities. Some kinds of experiences seem to be necessarily pleasurable. The experiences seem to be inextricably bound together with pleasurableness.

Attitudinal theorists are *prima facie* committed to denying this. On the attitudinal theory, whether or not a given experience is pleasurable or unpleasurable depends upon the attitudes we take towards that experience. So, an experience with any felt-quality might be pleasurable, unpleasurable, or affectively neutral. This result has seemed implausible to some felt-quality theorists. For example, Ben Bramble notes that:

Attitude-based theories entail that there is always some affectively neutral (i.e., neither pleasurable nor unpleasurable) bit of phenomenology that forms the "base" of every pleasure—i.e., a bit of phenomenology that we take up our attitude to in the first place. But this seems false. Consider, for example, a pleasurable experience of euphoria, or one of "just plain feeling good", or the pleasures of orgasm, and so on. What is the affectively neutral base in these pleasurable experiences supposed to be? What part of their phenomenology could be had without its being a pleasure? I find it hard to imagine.

These pleasures seem to be just pure pleasurableness. (2018, 3)

Here is a different way to express Bramble's point. Consider a moment in your life in which you felt an extremely pleasurable experience. Could you feel that way again—that is, have an experience with the same felt-quality—*without* feeling pleasure? *Prima facie*, this seems difficult to imagine. Pleasurableness seems to be bound up with the way the experience feels. The feeling itself is not "affectively neutral."

This point is more often made in connection with unpleasure, or pain.⁹ Consider a moment in your life in which you had an intensely unpleasant experience. Suppose you were to feel that way again, right now. Could that experience fail to be unpleasant? Again, it seems difficult to imagine.

⁹ See for example Irwin Goldstein 1989 (p. 261), 1980 (p. 351), Guy Kahane (p. 333-334) and especially Stuart Rachels 2004.

Unpleasantness seems to be bound up with the way the experience feels. Indeed, even Heathwood acknowledges the force of this intuition. He writes:

Imagine the feeling of stepping barefoot on a tack. Isn't it just part of the very nature of that feeling that it is painful? It can seem incredible to suppose that this feeling qualifies as painful only due to the attitude that we happen to take up towards it. (2007)

It seems to be part of the nature of some feelings that they are pleasurable or unpleasant. Taken at face value, this is a serious problem for attitudinal theorists. The attitudinal theory suggests that the relationship between felt-qualities and pleasure is contingent. Any kind of experience—from the feeling of orgasm to the feeling of being burned alive—might be pleasurable, unpleasurable, or neutral.

§3.4 EST

To sum up: attitude theories face three *prima facie* serious challenges. Of course, that does not mean the theory is hopeless. Attitudinal theorists have responded to the Euthyphro, Separateness, and Togetherness challenges. They have responded to the Euthyphro challenge by arguing that we do not in fact take up pro-attitudes towards pleasures because they are independently pleasurable (Heathwood 2007, p.38-39; Parfit 2011, p.53). They have responded to the Separateness challenge by arguing that we never fail to bear the relevant pro-attitudes towards pleasures, and we never bear the relevant pro-attitudes towards non-pleasures (Heathwood 2018; Feldman 2018).¹⁰ They have tended to consider the Togetherness challenge in connection with unpleasure, rather than pleasure. Attitudinal theorists have argued that, despite our intuitions to the contrary, experiences which feel just like unpleasant pains might fail to be unpleasant (Hall 1989). So attitudinal theorists have things to say in response to the EST challenges. Still, these are serious challenges which require responses from attitudinal theorists.

¹⁰ These arguments involve some refinements of Heathwood's theory as I have described it. But these refinements don't matter much for our purposes. So I'll continue to use contemporaneous *de re* non-instrumental desire as a proxy for whichever attitude is implicated in the best version of the attitudinal theory.

In contrast, the EST challenges do not even arise for felt-quality theorists. The felt-quality theory does not face a Euthyphro challenge, because it does not imply that pleasures are pleasurable in virtue of the attitudes we bear towards them. The felt-quality theorist has no special reason to deny we desire pleasures in part because they are pleasurable. The felt-quality theory does not face a Separateness challenge, because the theory does not imply that we bear certain pro-attitudes towards all and only pleasures. And it does not face a Togetherness challenge, because it allows—indeed it entails—that there are necessary connections between certain felt-qualities and pleasure.

4 Hybrid Theories

I have not claimed, nor do I believe, that the HONEST challenges are all equally forceful.¹¹ But I'm taking the challenges at face value. I'm granting that the HON challenges pose serious *prima facie* problems for the felt-quality theory, and I'm granting that the EST challenges pose serious *prima facie* problems for the attitude theory. We have seen that the HON challenges are avoided by the attitude theory, and the EST challenges are avoided by the felt-quality theory. In light of these results, it's natural to go looking for a hybrid theory. By developing a hybrid theory, we can aspire to replicate the successes of both the felt-quality theory and the attitudinal theory.

We can start by simply pairing versions of the felt-quality theory with versions of the attitudinal theory. For example, we can pair Ben Bramble's distinctive feeling theory with Chris Heathwood's desire theory. One hybrid theory is simply the conjunction of those two theories:

(Simple Conjunctive Theory): Necessarily, for any subject *s* and experience *e*, *e* is a pleasure for *s* iff *e* involves the distinctive feeling of pleasure, and *s* desires *e*.¹²

¹¹ For what it's worth, I rank the forcefulness of the six challenges as follows, from most forceful to least forceful: (1) Heterogeneity, (2) Togetherness, (3) Normativity, (4) Euthyphro, (5) Separateness, (6) Oppositeness. Taken together, I consider the challenges for felt-quality theories to be about as forceful as the challenges for attitudinal theories.

¹² Shelly Kagan sketches a view along these lines, although he appeals to a hedonic tone theory, rather than a distinctive feeling theory (1992, 173-174). Furthermore, David Sobel attributes something like this theory to T.M. Scanlon. See Sobel 2005, 448-449.

This conjunctive theory avoids the Normativity challenge, and it at least mitigates the Euthyphro challenge.¹³ This is already a promising result: we are avoiding one challenge for the felt-quality theory, and one challenge for the attitudinal theory. But the simple conjunctive theory does not avoid a HOST of other challenges. It does not yield any easy answers to the Heterogeneity, Oppositeness,¹⁴ Separateness, or Togetherness challenges. So if you accept the conjunctive theory, you'll have to go outside the theory to address those four challenges. Put another way: the composite theory comes with four *extra-theoretic commitments*.

You might be happy to take on those four extra-theoretic commitments. You might think that you can give a satisfactory answer to each of those challenges, even if your theory of pleasure does not yield any easy answers. Otherwise, you should try a different theory. For example, you might try a disjunctive theory:

(Simple Disjunctive Theory): Necessarily, for any subject *s* and experience *e*, *e* is a pleasure for *s* iff either *e* involves the distinctive feeling of pleasure, or *s* desires *e*.

The disjunctive theory, like the conjunctive theory, avoids some of the challenges for both felt-quality theories and attitudinal theories. It avoids the Heterogeneity challenge, and it at least mitigates the

¹³ The conjunctive theory entails E2; it entails that the fact that my chocolate-experience *e*(Qc) is a pleasure for me because I desire *e*(Qc). So, if we accept the conjunctive theory, we cannot accept E1. We cannot accept that I desire *e*(Qc) for the reason that *e*(Qc) is pleasurable. However, conjunctive theorists can say something very much in the ballpark of E1. They can say that I desire *e*(Qc) for the reason that it involves the distinctive feeling of pleasure.

¹⁴ There is some room to debate whether or not the conjunctive theory avoids the Oppositeness challenge. One might claim that it *does* avoid the Oppositeness challenge, on the grounds that—according to the conjunctive theory—pleasure and unpleasure essentially involve attitudes which are opposites of each other. But I do not think it is so easy for the conjunctive theory to escape the Oppositeness challenge. The theory posits that there are distinctive feelings of pleasure and unpleasure. Proponents of the theory ought to explain the sense in which these *feelings* are opposites. In this respect, they are in the same position as proponents of the distinctive feeling theory of pleasure. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

Separateness challenge.¹⁵ But it does not avoid the ONET challenges: it does not avoid Oppositeness, Normativity, Euthyphro, or Togetherness. So the disjunctive theory, like the conjunctive theory, comes with four extra-theoretic commitments.

The simple conjunctive and disjunctive theory provide an illustrative starting point for thinking about hybrid theories. They both avoid or mitigate challenges facing the felt-quality theory *and* the attitudinal theory. Even so, they leave a lot to be desired. Neither theory avoids more of the HONEST challenges than either the felt-quality theory or the attitudinal theory. And both of the theories are inelegant; they're both the result of simply slapping together two theories of pleasure.

We can begin to develop more sophisticated hybrid theories by considering the *relationship* between our attitudes and the felt-qualities of our pleasures. If there is some characteristic relationship between our attitudes and the felt-qualities of our pleasures, then we might leverage that relationship to build a hybrid theory. In this way, we could develop a theory which implicates both felt-qualities and attitudes, but without simply slapping together a felt-quality theory and an attitudinal theory.

In recent years, a few philosophers have gone in for this approach. And they have tended to converge on something like the following idea. There is some pro-attitude which is implicated in the nature of pleasure, and it feels like something to have that attitude. So, whenever we take the relevant attitude towards an experience, our *overall* experience includes the phenomenological aspect of the attitude. Versions of this general idea have been developed by Guy Kahane (2009, 2016), Murat Aydede (2018), and Eden Lin (2018). On this view, there is a very close relationship between our attitudes and the felt-qualities of our pleasures: our pleasures are *partly constituted* by the feeling of a certain favorable attitude. Lin develops this idea into a hybrid theory of pleasure, though he does not ultimately endorse it. Here's how he describes the theory:

¹⁵ The disjunctive theory does not allow that there be experiences which are desired, but which are not pleasures. It does allow that there be experiences which are pleasures, but which are not desired.

There is a kind of favorable attitude, A, that is partly constituted by a certain phenomenology, P. An attitudinal pleasure is an experience consisting, at least in part, of your tokening A toward a state of affairs. A sensory pleasure is an experience constituted by (i) an attitudinal pleasure whose object is an obtaining state of affairs consisting of your presently experiencing a particular sensation, S, and (ii) sensation S. (2018, 13)

Call this the **composite theory**.

At first blush, the composite theory seems quite similar to the simple conjunctive theory. There are a few differences, however. Whereas the simple conjunctive theory implicates a distinctive feeling of pleasure, the composite theory implicates P, a “certain phenomenology” which partly constitutes the attitude A. We might say that whereas the simple conjunctive theory implicates a *distinctive feeling of pleasure*, the composite theory implicates a *distinctive feeling of A*. The composite theory also differs from the simple conjunctive theory in that the attitude implicated in the composite theory is not directed at a pleasurable experience. Instead, the attitude A is directed at a *part* of a pleasurable experience. It’s directed at S, rather than the composite pleasure which consists of both S and P.

Despite these differences, it’s not clear that the composite theory fares any better than the simple composite theory with respect to the HONEST challenges. We have seen that the simple composite theory faces the HOST challenges. The composite theory seems to face those challenges as well. As far as the Heterogeneity and Oppositeness challenges go, it’s not clear that a distinctive feeling of A is an improvement over a distinctive feeling of *pleasure*.¹⁶ The Separateness challenge also seems to arise for

¹⁶ Eden Lin addresses the Heterogeneity challenge at some length. He grants that an experience of eating salty peanuts feels nothing like an experience of sunbathing. But he denies that those experiences are pleasures. Instead, on the composite theory, those experiences are partly constitutive of pleasures. The peanut-experience partly constitutes a peanut-pleasure; the sunbathing-experience partly constitutes a sunbathing-pleasure. And those *pleasures* do feel alike. Speaking for myself, I am not sure how to take Lin’s proposal. Setting aside theory for a moment: I know what it’s like to eat peanuts, and I know what it’s like to sunbathe. Those experiences are pleasurable, and they seem to feel nothing alike. So it seems to me that the composite theory

the composite theory, because the theory predicts that pleasure never comes apart from A. So the familiar counterexamples arise, according to which there could be pleasure without A, or A without pleasure. Lastly, the Togetherness challenge also seems to arise for the composite theory. Notice that one's experiencing P is *not* sufficient for one's experiencing pleasure, because P only *partly* constitutes the attitude A. So the theory seems to predict that no felt-qualities are necessarily connected with pleasure. So it seems that the composite theory, like the simple conjunctive theory, does not yield any easy answers to the HOST challenges.

Nevertheless, I think that the composite theory is on the right track. In developing a hybrid theory, we ought to be focusing on the relationships between our attitudes and the felt-qualities of our pleasures. The trouble with the composite theory is that it's focused on the wrong relationship. In the next section, I will develop a few theories which are focused on a different relationship: a *dispositional* relationship. Our pleasures dispose us to desire them because of the way that they feel, and this relationship can be leveraged into a hybrid theory of pleasure which avoids many or all of the HONEST challenges.

§5 Dispositional Theories

Think about what happens when you take a bite of chocolate, or some other delicious food. Speaking for myself: as soon as I'm aware of the taste experience, I feel myself moved to desire that I am having it. The desire is non-instrumental, and contemporaneous with the experience—I want the experience for its own sake, and I want to be having it at the very time that I am having it. It seems easy to explain why I am moved to desire the experience. It moves me because it feels the way that it does: it's

is on a par with the distinctive feeling theory. According to the distinctive feeling theory, there is a distinctive feeling of pleasure which partly constitutes all pleasures. On the composite theory, there is a distinctive attitudinal feeling which partly constitutes all pleasures. I don't see why a distinctive attitudinal feeling should be any less problematic than a distinctive feeling of pleasure. So it's not clear to me how Lin's proposal addresses the Heterogeneity challenge.

creamy, sugary, and so on. Precising somewhat, we can say that I have a certain disposition *vis a vis* the felt-quality Q_c . I'm robustly disposed to desire that I have an experience with felt-quality Q_c upon becoming aware that I'm having an experience with that felt-quality. That is why, upon becoming aware that I'm having an experience with that felt-quality, I tend to desire it.

Chocolate-experiences aren't the only experiences which I'm disposed to desire in this way. Other examples include the kinds of experiences I have when I listen to 80s pop-rock, watch a Los Angeles sunset, or get a back massage—in short, the kinds of experiences I would ordinarily describe as “pleasurable”. This suggests a theory of pleasure. For reasons which will emerge later, I'll call it the *weak dispositional theory*:

(Weak Dispositional Theory) An experience e of a subject s is pleasurable for s iff e has a felt-quality such that s is robustly disposed to non-instrumentally desire experiences with that felt-quality upon becoming aware that she is having an experience with that felt-quality.

The weak dispositional theory is a version of the attitudinal theory, with the relevant attitude understood in dispositional terms. But it is also recognizably a hybrid theory, in that it appeals to both our attitudes and the felt-qualities of our experiences.

According to the weak dispositional theory, the chocolate-experience I had yesterday was a pleasure for me. It moved me to non-instrumentally desire it, and it's *no accident* that it moved me in this way. It moved me because it had felt-quality Q_c , and I'm robustly disposed to desire that I have an experience with that felt-quality upon becoming aware that I'm having an experience with that felt-quality. The same goes for all other experiences which are pleasurable for me. Each such experience moves me to desire it, and does so because it feels the way that it does.

We can test the weak dispositional theory by seeing how it fares with respect to the HONEST challenges. The results are fairly promising. The Heterogeneity challenge doesn't arise, because the weak dispositional theory does not imply that all pleasures feel alike. The Oppositeness challenge can be

addressed in the same way that the desire theory addresses it. (The opposite of desiring that p is desiring that not- p .) The Normativity challenge does not arise, because the weak dispositional theory does not allow for creatures to be indifferent to their pleasures. Necessarily, if a creature is experiencing a pleasure, then it is robustly disposed to desire that it be having that experience upon becoming aware that it's having it. The Separateness challenge does not arise, because the weak dispositional theory allows that pleasure can come apart from desire. The theory allows that we can desire non-pleasures, and fail to desire pleasures.¹⁷

The Euthyphro challenge is a less clear case for the weak dispositional theory. Remember that the Euthyphro challenge is a challenge for theories which imply E2:

(E2) $e(Qc)$ is pleasurable because I desire $e(Qc)$.

The challenge arises because if one accepts E2, then one must reject E1:

(E1): I desire that I have $e(Qc)$ because $e(Qc)$ is pleasurable.

And this is a *prima facie* bad result, since E1 is independently plausible. If we accept the weak dispositional theory, we get the same bad result. The weak dispositional theory does not imply E2, but it does imply E2^D:

(E2^D): $e(Qc)$ is pleasurable because I am *disposed* to desire $e(Qc)$.

And it seems that if we accept E2^D, we cannot accept E1. Perhaps things are not as they seem, and one can accept both E2^D and E1. But for present purposes, it's enough to note that friends of the weak

¹⁷ One might worry that the weak dispositional theory gets the wrong results in some of the Separateness cases. Recall Aaron Smuts' case, in which he watches *Two Scenes from a Marriage*. Smuts finds the experience crushing—and not at all pleasurable—but he intrinsically desires it. Presumably, he is robustly disposed to react to the movie in this way. Doesn't the dispositional theory entail—erroneously—that his experience is pleasant? I don't think so. Smuts might be disposed to desire the experiences he gets from watching *Two Scenes from a Marriage*, but he is not disposed to desire experiences of crushing sadness. He desires those experiences only in very specific circumstances: when he watching a film and is poised for aesthetic appreciation. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

dispositional theory will have to say something about the Euthyphro challenge. Their theory does not avoid it.

Finally, we come to the Togetherness challenge. The weak dispositional theory certainly does not avoid that challenge. It does not rule out that any given subject might or might not be disposed to desire any experience with any particular felt-quality. For all that the weak dispositional theory tells us, the connections between desire and felt-quality may be wholly contingent. If so, then any sort of experience—from the feeling of orgasm to the feeling of a third-degree burn—might be pleasurable, unpleasurable, or affectively neutral.

To sum up: the weak dispositional theory avoids four out of six of the HONEST challenges. It avoids the HONS challenges, but not the ET challenges. These are fairly promising results—none of the other theories we've considered thus far have avoided as many as four HONEST challenges. But it's also somewhat disappointing. Four out of six isn't bad, but we might have hoped for more. Thankfully, we can still aspire to more. We can adjust the weak dispositional theory so as to avoid more of the HONEST challenges.

To avoid the ET challenges, we can appeal to a *necessary* relationship between our attitudes and the felt-qualities of our pleasures. Thus we arrive at the strong dispositional theory:

(Strong Dispositional Theory) There is a non-empty set of felt-qualities $[Q^*]$ such that necessarily, if a subject has an experience with a felt-quality which is a member of $[Q^*]$, then that subject is robustly disposed to non-instrumentally desire that experience upon becoming aware that she is having an experience that felt-quality. An experience is a pleasure iff it has a felt-quality which is a member of $[Q^*]$.

If the strong dispositional theory is true, and if my chocolate-experience is pleasurable, then the felt-quality Q_c bears a necessary connection to desire. Necessarily, if a subject has an experience which

feels *like that*, then that subject is robustly disposed to non-instrumentally desire it upon becoming aware of it.

To see that the strong dispositional theory avoids the Togetherness challenge, notice that the theory is actually a version of the felt-quality theory, in addition to being a version of the attitudinal theory. It tells us that there is a set of felt-qualities [Q] such that an experience is pleasurable just in case it has one of those felt-qualities. According to the strong dispositional theory, [Q] is the set of felt-qualities which bear a necessary dispositional connection to our desires.

The strong dispositional theory is also well-positioned to avoid the Euthyphro challenge. According to the strong dispositional theory, pleasure bears a necessary connection to both desires and felt-qualities. But it is open to us to claim that pleasures are pleasurable in *virtue of* their felt-qualities, and *not* in virtue of their connections to our attitudes. In this way, we can avoid saying that we desire those experiences—or that those experiences are pleasurable—in virtue of our attitudes towards them. In lieu of E2 or E2^D, we can accept E2^Q:

(E2^Q) e(Qc) is pleasurable because it has felt-quality Qc.

It certainly seems that we can accept both E1 and E2^Q. E1 explains my desire by appealing to the pleasurable-ness of my experience, and E2^Q explains the pleasurable-ness of my experience by appealing to its felt-quality. There is no threat of circularity here, assuming that my having an experience with felt-quality Qc is distinct from my having a disposition to desire an experience with that felt-quality. For ease of reference, I will call this assumption Distinctness:

(Distinctness): Having an experience with a certain felt-quality is distinct from having a disposition to desire an experience with that felt-quality.

If Distinctness is true, then we can accept both E1 and E2^Q, and the Euthyphro challenge is avoided.

There's a worry looming in the background, however. The worry probably occurred to you as soon as I suggested that there are necessary connections between felt-qualities and attitudes. If we accept

Distinctness and the strong dispositional theory, we must reject Hume's Dictum: the thesis that there are no necessary connections between distinct existences. Many philosophers endorse Hume's Dictum.¹⁸ And indeed, this endorsement has led some philosophers to reject the idea that there are necessary connections between felt-qualities and our attitudes.¹⁹

I think this rejection is too hasty. First, it is far from obvious that Hume's Dictum is true. When it comes to properties of experience, in particular, it seems much more intuitive to deny Hume's Dictum. It hardly seems to be a contingent matter that my feeling itchy tends to make me want to scratch, or that my feeling tired tends to make me want to lie down.²⁰ Second, and more importantly, Hume's Dictum is consistent with the claim that there are necessary connections between felt-qualities and attitudes. If you accept Hume's Dictum, and you're inclined to accept something like the strong dispositional theory, you can reject Distinctness. You can reject the idea that felt-qualities and attitudes are "distinct existences".

As it happens, many philosophers of mind already reject Distinctness. Many philosophers of mind are *role functionalists*, and role functionalists will deny that felt-qualities are distinct from our attitudes. According to the role functionalist, properties of experience—along with all other mental properties—are individuated by their causal or theoretical roles. To instantiate an experience *e* with felt-quality *Q_c* is to instantiate some property which "plays the *e*(*Q_c*) role". And the functionalist might hold that "playing the *e*(*Q_c*) role" is partly a matter of disposing one to desire that one instantiates an experience with felt-quality *Q_c*. On the resulting theory, *Q_c* is *not* distinct from the disposition to desire that one instantiates an experience with felt-quality. Part of what it is to have an experience with that felt-quality is to be disposed to desire that you have an experience with that felt-quality. So, for the

¹⁸ For more on the sociology of Hume's Dictum, as well as a thorough examination of the thesis, see Wilson 2010.

¹⁹ See for example Bramble 2013 (p.212), and Rachels 2000 (p.200-202).

²⁰ For a more thorough treatment of this line of thought, see Hawthorne 2004 and especially Mørch 2014 p.101-113.

functionalist, E1 and E2^Q are *prima facie* circular. The functionalist does not avoid the Euthyphro problem—this is the price she pays for holding onto Hume’s Dictum. Still, the functionalist avoids all the other HONEST challenges.

We are left with three versions of the dispositional theory: the weak dispositional theory, and two stronger versions. The first of the strong versions embraces necessary connections between distinct existences. On this view, there are necessary connections between some experiences and our (distinct) attitudes towards those experiences. Call this the necessitation theory.²¹ The second of the strong versions embraces functionalism. Call this the functionalist theory. The weak dispositional theory avoids four of the HONEST challenges; the functionalist theory avoids five of them. The necessitation theory avoids all six challenges.

6 Honest Answers

We have considered how the six HONEST challenges bear on quite a few different theories of pleasure.

It’s time to take stock:

	H	O	N	E	S	T
Distinctive Feeling Theory				x	x	x
Desire Theory	x	x	x			
Simple Conjunctive Theory			x	x		
Simple Disjunctive Theory	x				x	
Composite Theory			x	x		
Weak Dispositionalist Theory	x	x	x		x	
Necessitation Theory	x	x	x	x	x	x
Functionalist Theory	x	x	x		x	x

²¹ The necessitation theory has a spiritual predecessor in the theory of pleasure described by Thomas Sprigge. On Sprigge’s view, pleasurable experiences are pleasurable because they feel the way that they do. But Sprigge urges that we “not be afraid of the idea that pleasures and pains are of their very nature liable to affect behavior in certain directions” (1987, 131-132).

An 'x' marks that the theory avoids the relevant challenge, or yields a clear answer to it. You might disagree with some of the reports of the chart—maybe you think that an unmarked box should be marked, or vice versa. Certainly there is room for debate. Still, the chart gives us some perspective on the options for theorizing about pleasure.

The upshot is that things look good for hybrid theories of pleasure. The dispositional theories are my proof of concept—I have shown that they avoid more HONEST challenges than either “pure” felt-quality theories or “pure” attitudinal theories. Importantly, however, I have not tried to show that the dispositional theories are the only hybrid theories worth taking seriously. The field of hybrid theories is wide open, and very promising. On balance, we ought to think that pleasure bears an intimate connection to both felt-qualities and attitudes. Pleasure, it seems, is a many-splendored thing.

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