**Varieties of Hedonism**

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In this paper I will consider, under the heading of hedonism, three rather different views. Each of the positions agrees that only pleasurable experiences are capable of improving an agent's intrinsic well-being and that only displeasurable experiences are capable of negatively affecting an agent's intrinsic well-being. Hedonist views, as I shall be using the term, therefore maintain, unlike desire or preference views, that only states of mind (and not states of the world) can affect an agent's well being in the sense that, for example, one's well-being could not be affected after one's death. However hedonists differ significantly in their understanding of the meaning of pleasure and this causes the agreement above to give the illusory impression that the different hedonistic positions form a tighter family than they actually do.

The first understanding of pleasure is that pleasure is a sensation like a tickle or "pins and needles".[[1]](#footnote-1) The second hedonistic understanding of pleasure is that which "the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be desirable."[[2]](#footnote-2) The third is that taking pleasure in an experience is whatever it is that makes the continuation of the experience intrinsically more wanted.[[3]](#footnote-3) I will refer to these three views as the "pleasure as sensation", "pleasure as desirable consciousness", and "adverbial view of pleasure" positions respectively. In this paper I will attempt to explicate these different hedonistic positions, point out the different directions that each thesis could take, and suggest reasons to abandon each of these understandings of an agent's well-being.

Pleasure as a Sensation

William Frankena usefully distinguishes between two positions that the hedonist who thinks of pleasure as a type of sensation might hold. These two positions are quantitative and qualitative hedonism. The quantitative hedonist holds that "the intrinsic goodness of an activity or experience is proportional to the quantity of pleasure it contains"[[4]](#footnote-4) while qualitative hedonists deny this. Bentham famously held the former thesis by denying the existence of qualitative differences between kinds of pleasures which make a difference in intrinsic value. Thus he could claim that "Quantity of pleasure being equal, pushpin is as good as poetry." Qualitative hedonists hold that all and only pleasures are of intrinsic value but insist that some kinds of pleasures are intrinsically more valuable than others for reasons other than quantitative superiority. Mill, for example, insisted that pleasures of the intellect are qualitatively higher than sensual pleasures in the sense that the former are intrinsically more valuable than the extent to which they provide sensations which the lower pleasures also provide.

It is crucial to this quantitative hedonist's position (in so far as they purport to offer a commensurating scale of value) that the different experiences of pleasure differ only in intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, and extent,[[5]](#footnote-5) where each of these dimensions of pleasure is conceived of as only differing in quantity and never in quality. Similarly it is crucial to this qualitative hedonist's position that she offer clear criteria explaining how to weight qualitatively different pleasures against each other. Mill's solution to this later problem, at least in some passages, seems to be to lexically order the value of higher pleasures over the value of lower pleasures.[[6]](#footnote-6) Failure of the qualitative or quantitative hedonist to live up to the demands that her theory imposes will result in the failure to commensurate values.

I will argue that quantitative hedonism faces at least two significant objections. First, there is no single sensation which is common to all and only the different experiences of intrinsic value. Second, the hedonist's account of value is too sharply at odds with our intuitions about goodness. These objections are related in that neither alone is likely to move the hedonist, but together they seem sufficient. This is because the first objection necessarily presupposes some rough account of what is valuable to an agent to substantiate the claim that all experiences of value are not attended with any common sensation of pleasure. Thus, to the first objection, the hedonist may reply that it is the presupposed theory of value, not hedonism, that is defective. This necessitates the second objection which will argue that the reforming account of goodness that the hedonist offers, such that a singular experience of pleasure is involved in all and only intrinsically valuable states of affairs, is too radically at odds with our common understanding of an agent's well-being to serve that role. I will consider these objections in order, offering what I take to be, in both cases, the pleasure-as-a-sensation quantitative hedonist's best reply.

The first objection to quantitative hedonism is that there is no single sensation which is common to all our different experiences of intrinsic value. The pleasures of walking barefoot through the grass arm in arm with one's love have so little phenomenologically in common with the pleasures of winning a tense tennis match or eating a good burger or working through a challenging philosophical problem that we do not understand the instruction to maximize the sensation that these different activities share.

Typically the hedonist will tell us little about what the sensation is like that allegedly underlies the experience of all intrinsically valuable experiences. Indeed this hedonist's inarticulateness about what this experience is like should make us suspicious of the alleged experiential commonality.[[7]](#footnote-7) The phenomenological commonality that all and only intrinsically valuable experiences are alleged to have cannot be put solely in terms of desirability if this hedonistic proposal is to avoid slipping into one of the types of "desire satisfaction" views which will receive independent treatment below. Many have introspected in vain searching for this alleged experiential commonality between the full array of human pleasures. Sidgwick admirably expressed this introspective finding.

Shall we then say that there is a measurable quality of feeling expressed by the word "pleasure", which is independent of its relation to volition, and strictly indefinable from its simplicity?--like the quality of feeling expressed by the feeling "sweet", of which also we are conscious in varying degrees of intensity. This seems to be the view of some writers: but, for my own part, 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 gratification, no less than the coarser and more refined sensual enjoyments--the only common quality that I can find in the feeling so designated seems to be that relation to desire and volition expressed by the general term "desirable"[...].[[8]](#footnote-8)

It is possible to say more in defense of the claim that there is no common commensurating sensation which is felt when and only when we have experiences of intrinsic value than that, for oneself, one notices no such common sensation. I will briefly list two compelling arguments for this position, beyond the evidence from introspection, which are familiar from the literature. First, the hedonist who conceives of pleasure as a sensation must allow that it is an empirical question if people go for that particular flavor of feeling since the distinctiveness of this position lies in the fact that pleasure is defined independently from wanting or motivational force. But the sensations that we are familiar with can be either pleasant or unpleasant, agreeable or disagreeable, depending on the agent and the context.[[9]](#footnote-9) This hedonist must claim that there is a sensation that we will always benefit us and this seems radically at odds with our experience with sensations which we are confident are sensations. Thus the suggestion that pleasure is a sensation would make it a sensation of an unfamiliar sort.

Second, there is another way in which pleasure does not seem to behave like other sensations. As Alston points out

It would seem that any sensation if it would become sufficiently acute, will tend to monopolize consciousness and interfere with concentration with anything else. On the view under consideration, the more pleasure we get out of, say, playing the piano, the more intense the sensation of pleasure would become the more our attention would be taken up with the sensation of pleasure, and the harder it would be to concentrate on playing. But quite the reverse is the case. The more pleasure we get out of doing something, the easier it is to concentrate on it.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Thus if all pleasures were united by a common sensation it would be a sensation in several ways unlike those we are familiar with. This is a reason to suspect that the hedonist here under consideration is misplacing pleasure when she classes it with sensations.

 The quantitative hedonist could stick to her guns and claim that although people seem to enjoy things other than the sensation of pleasure in fact everyone would be best off if they maximized the amount of this sensation that they experience. This reply will be considered in response to the second objection to hedonism considered below. Alternatively the quantitative hedonist could attempt to widen her conception of pleasure so as to include all experiences which are found to be intrinsically valuable. Thus perhaps she might suggest that we maximize the experience of positively valanced sensations. With this move the clear-headed quantitative hedonist would need to confess that no single sensation underlies all positively valanced sensations. But this admission mortally wounds this quantitative hedonist's attempt to commensurate value. Once the hedonist expands her account of pleasure in an attempt to have it encompass everything that is found to be intrinsically valuable, she abandons any legitimate claim to equate pleasure with a sensation. And since this quantitative hedonist's project is to commensurate value by reducing all value to the degree to which a sensation is experienced, the failure to produce this sensation results in a failure to commensurate value.

The second critique of quantitative hedonism is addressed to the quantitative hedonist who sticks with an account of pleasure which is genuinely a sensation. For this hedonist the problem is not the one above of recommending that we maximize something which is not genuinely a sensation, but rather with normativity. Many genuinely naturalistic accounts of the good, such as this hedonist's are possible. Among the more humorous, Railton mentions the proposal that something is intrinsically good for an agent to the extent that it is cholesterol-laden.[[11]](#footnote-11) Clearly the problem with this proposal lies not in any incoherence or non-existence of the alleged good-making property, but rather in the failure of the proposed commensurating scale to measure anything like what we are trying to capture with our ordinary notion of an agent's well-being.

For many years it was thought that to establish that no naturalistic property could be identified with goodness all one needed to show was that the two properties were not transparently identical. Moore's open question argument was held to show that no natural property or combination of natural properties could serve as an analysis of the meaning of goodness since we could always meaningfully assert "I grant that this act has that naturalistic property, but it is still unclear to me if the act is good." Thus, Moore held, the meaning of goodness could not be captured by any naturalistic definition because

whosoever will attentively consider with himself what is actually before his mind when he asks the question 'Is pleasure (or whatever it may be) after all good?' can easily satisfy himself that he is not merely wondering whether pleasure is pleasant.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Moore's argument, or at least one strand in it, seems to run like this. G is transparently identical in meaning to G, but N is not transparently identical in meaning to G so N cannot be identical in meaning to G since G's meaning has a property that N's meaning lacks, and terms identical in meaning do not so differ in properties.[[13]](#footnote-13) If we switched this argument from making a claim about meaning to being a claim about reference we would have an argument that the morning star could not be the evening star since the former is transparently identical to itself while the former is not transparently identical to the later. To see that the problem with Moore's argument is not limited to cases in which we are arguing about whether or not two terms have the same meaning but extends to cases of referent we need only consider a case that Moore himself found troubling. Consider that one could list necessary and sufficient conditions for being a cube--perhaps having twelve edges, symmetrical, and composed of squares of equal size- yet "a man may know that an object that he sees is a cube without knowing that it has twelve edges"[[14]](#footnote-14) and hence be unaware that the two terms have the same meaning.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Clearly there is no sensation which is transparently identical to 'the good' and hence hedonism fails Moore's "open question" argument. But this now seems to show very little. If we are to resist equating the sensation of pleasure with the good we must have further reasons beyond conceptual non-identity.[[16]](#footnote-16) But these further reasons are not hard to find. First, there is Nozick's example of an experience machine.[[17]](#footnote-17) Suppose one could be hooked up to electrodes which would stimulate the pleasure centers of one's brain such that one would experience the maximal amount of the sensation of pleasure possible. Would such a life contain more value to the person living the life than any other type of life imaginable? It is important to have the right question before one here. The issue is not if this life is the most valuable. It could easily be that those who feed the homeless or cure diseases create the greatest amount of pleasure through their actions. The issue is what sort of life creates the most value for the person living it. Quantitative hedonism's answer is clearly that the sort of life hooked up to pleasure stimulating electrodes is the best life for the agent (provided we make certain assumptions such as the pleasures experienced are not counter-balanced by pains created by the electrode process, that one could live an ordinary life span hooked up in such a way, etc.). Quantitative hedonism's answer strikes most as wildly implausible.

We think that a life filled with significant goals and genuine accomplishment contains far more intrinsic value than a maximally pleasant life hooked up to electrodes.[[18]](#footnote-18) So quantitative hedonism is refuted. This is surely too quick. The concept of intrinsic goodness is very broad and vague. Any theory of intrinsic goodness is sure to rub some of our intuitions the wrong way. However our intuition that the person hooked up to electrodes is not experiencing the most value a person could experience is firmly held and strikes at the heart of hedonism. When a theory clashes this directly with central intuitions the theory can regain plausibility by either 1) clarifying our intuition such that we come to see that when we properly understand the intuition we see that it is not actually incompatible with the theory or 2) explain away the intuition by telling a story which undermines the credibility of the intuition.

Quantitative hedonists can attempt the former strategy by reminding us not to allow the lack of moral value in the life of the electrode-wearing person in question to affect our judgment concerning such a life's intrinsic value. The quantitative hedonist hopes we will come to find that once we really screen from consideration the moral value of a life we will see that the electrode wearer really does lead the best life. Insofar as we are properly inculcated into our culture's moral system we will ordinarily take a dim view of fortunate lives completely spent on maximizing self-pleasure. Thus, it could be suggested, our ordinary intuitions are geared towards moral appraisal. The quantitative hedonist may attempt to diagnose our initial judgment that the electrode wearer is not living the best life as a moral judgment. This move by the hedonist seems rather unsuccessful. Even those who are practiced at considering moral value and intrinsic value to the agent separately continue to maintain that there are better lives to lead, in terms of intrinsic value to the agent, than would be led by the electrode wearer.

The quantitative hedonist who conceives of pleasure as a sensation could adopt the second strategy of attempting to undermine our faith in the intuitions which run counter to the theory by telling a convincing story about the genesis of such intuitions which would explain why we have them while revealing them to be misleading in the cases in which they run counter to hedonism. Hare[[19]](#footnote-19) and Railton[[20]](#footnote-20) tell just such a story about many of our non-utilitarian intuitions (though neither embraces hedonism). Briefly the story that the quantitative hedonist would try to make convincing is that even our intuitions which run counter to hedonism can be explained by the truth of hedonism. Intuitions should be shaped to help us deal well with common situations. Typically severing one's ties with external reality and retreating into a stupefying euphoric state will not lead to long-term pleasure because, for example, one will eventually get hungry or come down painfully from the drug's effect. Similarly, in the moral case, the quantitative hedonist can explain our powerful intuitions against murdering others because typically such behavior decreases pleasure. But in both cases we can see, the hedonist might try to convince us, that the point of the intuition is best served by overriding the intuition in special cases such as being hooked up to electrodes (and fed intravenously) or Williamsesque cases in which our murdering one results in less murdering overall.

The quantitative hedonist would ask us to regard our value intuitions not only as straightforward responses to value but also as crude psychological forces which can be used to indirectly help us better achieve value. No doubt many norms are actually shaped like this. The norm of not running a red light even when there seem to be no cars coming is, at best, a sort of useful habit. No one doubts that there are cases in which it would be for the best that one run a red light. This thought peacefully coexists with the general consensus that it is good to inculcate the rule "Do not run red lights" such that running a red light is done only with some psychological cost. If we came to believe that our non-hedonistic intuitions are similarly tactically placed to maximize pleasure in ordinary situations this would undermine the force of our non-hedonistic intuitions in extraordinary circumstances. However, there are two important objections to this story of the genesis of non-hedonistic intuitions.

First, it is unclear what reason we are being given to believe that our non-hedonistic intuitions have the sort of genesis that this hedonist suggests. It cannot be reasonably claimed that we should expect creatures with such indirectly pleasure maximizing intuitions to fare better in the gene pool. The amount of pleasurable sensations in one's experiences has no straightforward correspondence to inclusive fitness (as I'm sure many parents can attest). But it is also implausible to think that those persons in past generations responsible for the adoption and passing down of moral and non-moral value intuitions were overwhelmingly hedonists who consciously determined which intuitions would best maximize pleasure in future generations given the type of situations such persons were likely to encounter. Finally it is not plausible that each person with non-hedonistic intuitions placed in themselves such indirect mechanisms of pleasure maximization and then forgot that they had done so. How then is our hedonist's story supposed to go?

There is another type of story that the hedonist can gesture towards here. Mill wrote that

Life would be a poor thing, very ill provided with sources of happiness if there were not this provision of nature by which things originally indifferent, but conducive to, or otherwise associated with, the satisfaction of our primitive desires, become in themselves sources of pleasure more valuable than the primitive pleasures, both in permanency, in the space of existence that they are capable of covering, and even in intensity.

 Virtue, according to the utilitarian conception, is a good of this description. There is no original desire of it, or motive to it, save its conduciveness to pleasure, and especially to protection from pain. But through the association thus formed it may be felt a good in itself, and desired as such with as great intensity as any other good [...].[[21]](#footnote-21)

With this move the hedonist need not claim that we desire only pleasure but rather only that pleasure is the original motive of all desiring. That is, that an end can only come to be felt to be intrinsically valuable to us through its persistent association with pleasure or pain. If the end were never conjoined with pleasure or pain, or another end which we came to care about through its association with pleasure or pain, we would remain indifferent to that end. Thus the hedonist's claim could be, with Mill, that our value intuitions are originally shaped by pleasure even though we can come to intrinsically desire things other than pleasure. If this claim could be established would that be enough to make hedonism true?

It would seem that even if the hedonist could demonstrate that there was some sort of original position where all ends were indifferent to us but pleasure and pain and that any other end only came to be intrinsically desired (or found to be worthy of desiring) by that end's association with pleasure or pain, or association with another end which itself ultimately derived its attractive force from association with pleasure or pain, this would not establish the truth of hedonism. Rather, it seems, this would only show that there was a moment--the moment of the original position--when hedonism was true.

This hedonist's central claim is that only experiences which are pleasurable can be intrinsically good for an agent. But one could accept the above account about ends only becoming positively valenced which are associated with pleasure or pain (or with other ends which ultimately derive their valence from pleasure or pain) and not at all be committed to the view that only sensations which are pleasurable can be intrinsically good for an agent. Why not think the agent has changed what is good for her through this associative process? In effect, this argument on behalf of the hedonist admits the centrality of our desires in formulating our good, but it tries to appropriate desire to its own side. Thus part of the attractiveness of the view stems from the thought that desire, at least for a time, tracks pleasure. But why think that when desire and pleasure come apart that one's well-being tracks pleasure and not desire?

What would seem to be needed to be added to Mill's account is the claim not only that pleasure is the unique originator of intrinsic desire, but also that desire tracks pleasurable sensations such that "we generally do (and can, on reflection, see that we would) cease to enjoy the pursuit of, and cease to desire, any goal that we cease to regard with pleasure."[[22]](#footnote-22) If this claim could also be substantiated it would become overwhelmingly plausible that desire aims at experiences that are pleasurable. We would likely come to regard our residual desire for an experience that once was associated with pleasure (assuming we know that this desire will decay now that the association with pleasure has been broken) as a typically reliable mechanism which currently misleads such that we would be rational to ignore the promptings of such desires.

In this way the hedonist can offer us a story which vindicates hedonism while admitting the phenomena of intrinsic, albeit fleeting, desires for experiences which are not pleasurable.[[23]](#footnote-23) This maneuver abandons the claim that we can introspect the truth of hedonism because it abandons the claim that we can introspect that we desire only pleasurable sensations. The argument for hedonism here is to be found in the causal history of our desires but "we normally can introspect not the causal histories of our desires, but what it is that we desire."[[24]](#footnote-24) Thus it would seem that behavioral psychologists, not philosophers, are best placed to undertake the necessary research to determine if this line of hedonistic argumentation is borne out by the facts of human desiring.

It does seem however that any such attempted hedonistic story about the causal history of intrinsic desires would face a serious roadblock which constitutes the second objection to any attempted hedonistic interpretation of seemingly non-hedonic desires. This hedonistic maneuver can seemingly explain away intrinsic desires for that which is not maximally pleasurable by suggesting that such desires are 1) not formed with full information of what all the different options would be like, 2) the decaying remnants of once pleasure maximizing desires or 3) heuristically useful desires in that typically such desires are maximally pleasure producing even while such desires occasionally lead to sub-optimal outcomes in atypical cases. But none of these methods of explaining away non-hedonic desires seem to be plausible analysis of many of our desires. Many desire to mimic Socrates dissatisfied (to the extent that they can) rather than the satisfied fool. There is no reason to think that such desires would extinguish granted full information. Such desires have been prevalent in mature persons for a very long time. Finally, we have so many opportunities to act on this sort of desire that it seems implausible to claim that such options are atypical. Our non-hedonic desires are not aroused only by atypical situations and they persist despite the lack of promise of pleasure. It seems the best this hedonist can suggest is unconvincingly to claim that desires which cannot be explained away as indirectly or subconsciously hedonistic are irrational.

Qualitative hedonism has two significant problems of its own which have prevented it from playing a larger role in the history of thought about intrinsic value. First, the quantitative hedonist obviously must provide an explanation as to why, which, and to what extent certain pleasures are more valuable than others. Such an account, to the extent that it is convincing, threatens to make superfluous (or conflict with) the hedonistic aspect of the qualitative hedonist's theory. This, it seems, is what happened in Mill's case. The competent judge's test was compelling enough to justify the claim that pleasures differed in quality, but it threatened both to provide a self-sufficient theory of value and to conflict with the only aspect of the qualitative hedonist's doctrine which makes it a variant of hedonism; namely the claim that all and only pleasurable sensations are capable of containing intrinsic value.

A second problem for the qualitative hedonist is the crudeness of the methods available to her of commensurating the value of qualitatively different pleasures. The qualitative hedonist who conceives of overall pleasure as the weighted sum of a few different fundamental pleasurable sensations can either propose an algebraic formula for assessing the relative value of qualitatively different values (e.g. where x= sensual pleasure and y= intellectual pleasure, Value= 2x + 5y) or, as Mill, at least at times suggests, rank some pleasures lexically higher or lower than other pleasures.

Both options have a crucial problem; they force each of the qualitatively different pleasures to have the same value for every person. That is, these methods of commensurating value are not geared to individuals and the differences between them, but rather seem forced to assert that the value of a unit of each kind of pleasure is equally intrinsically valuable for each person. But clearly different people enjoy different pleasures to a greater and lesser extent. Undoubtedly problems like this led many away from hedonism towards modern versions of decision theory or full information views which are equipped to allow each person to commensurate her own intrinsic value individually.

Pleasure as Desirable Consciousness

Discouraged at the prospect of discovering a particular sensation which accompanies all and only intrinsically valuable experiences, the hedonist may seek an understanding of pleasure which does not presuppose the existence of such a sensation. The second hedonistic understanding of pleasure is that pleasure is experienced (axiom-obeying and/or informed) preference satisfaction. Sidgwick seems to have held this position.[[25]](#footnote-25) The view is in essentials very similar to the modern (informed) preference satisfaction views that I will discuss in the second and third sections below, with the stipulation that we consider a preference satisfied only if the agent experiences the preference as having been satisfied. Taking utility to be dependent in this way on states of mind rather than states of the world can be motivated by the seeming oddness of the latter theory's implication that an agent's well-being can be affected without the agent's subjectivity being affected.[[26]](#footnote-26)

This hedonist most likely will attempt to analyze away preferences which appear to be for states of affairs rather than states of mind as either 1) actually aiming for a state of mind, 2) a moral preference (and hence not one whose satisfaction affects the agent's own well-being), or 3) an irrational preference. However, most people have many preferences which seem unable to be happily analyzed in either of the first two ways and the charge that such preferences are irrational looks rather ad hoc and question begging.[[27]](#footnote-27) At any rate it does not seem open to this hedonist to allow that the agent rationally, and intrinsically prefers that the state of the world come about yet claim that it is no part of this agent's well-being that the state of affairs actually obtain as this would seem to undermine the force of the claim that such desires are, in other cases, definitive in determining where one's well-being resides.

 Happily however we need not be drawn into this debate between those who find that our well-being is determined by states of the world and those who find that our well-being is dependent only on our states of mind. There are persuasive, at least to my mind, criticicisms of what I take to be the most plausible versions of the (informed) preference satisfaction view without the experience requirement.[[28]](#footnote-28) Thus I find such views to be deeply problematic and therefore any theory which is parasitic on them, as the experienced preference satisfaction view seems to be, will be seen to be deeply problematic in the same way. Obviously if these criticisms of the (informed) preference views concerned their lack of an experience requirement this would not threaten the experienced preference satisfaction position. However, these criticisms of the (informed) preference satisfaction views are quite distinct from these issues such that they retain what force they have against (informed) preference satisfaction views which add an experience requirement.

The Adverbial View of Pleasure

Once the hedonist recognizes that there is no unitary tone of experience sufficient to commensurate value standing behind the diversity of intrinsically enjoyable experiences, she must search for another definition of pleasure truly capable of uniting and commensurating intrinsically enjoyable experiences. But if saying that an experience gives pleasure is not saying that that experience is conjoined with a particular sensation, then what can it mean to say that an experience is pleasurable beyond the claim that an experience is experienced? Proponents of the adverbial view of pleasure

are unwilling to talk of pleasure or enjoyment as a further element of experience over and above the pursuit enjoyed. [Rather, the adverbial view has it that] the pleasure is in the eating, the playing, the walking or whatever it may be, and calling it a pleasure adds that it is done willingly, with desire, without obstruction, glowingly, or something of this sort.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The adverbial view's strategy is to try to unite the experiences of intrinsic enjoyment not around what they feel like but rather around how they are experienced or sought. For example it seems quite natural to say that

a person who is enjoying his game of golf differs from the one who does not in the way in which he goes about it. A person who is easily distracted, easily discouraged, keeps looking at his watch, and in various ways shows us that his heart is not in it. By contrast a man who is enjoying his game shows this by the spring in his step, by impatience with interruptions or delays, by the eagerness with which he proceeds to each new shot, and perhaps the disappointment with which he greets the eighteenth tee.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Thus an adverbial view which suggested that to intrinsically enjoy an activity is to engage in it vigorously and wholeheartedly might find motivation. But such a view is obviously seriously inadequate. Many of the things we enjoy we enjoy because they are the opposite of vigorous and whole-hearted. For example, it is absurd to suggest that a luxurious bath is not being enjoyed because the bather is not bathing vigorously. Indeed, most of the adverbs which seem to plausibly be associated with pleasurable experiences--such as wholeheartedly, eagerly, glowingly, etc.-- get there plausibility from a limited range of cases. This initial plausibility quickly vanishes, however, when we reflect on the full range of ways in which enjoyable activities may be pursued.

However one particular adverbial view deserves singular attention. This is the view that "an experience is pleasant if and only if it makes its continuation more wanted."[[31]](#footnote-31) Thus a person's experience, O, is pleasurable if and only if

his central nervous system at t is such that if he judged (thought with belief) that a certain act by him at t would tend to bring about O, then, even in the absence of further judgments about O (such as its probable further effects) not contained in the concept of O, there would be an increase in his tendency to perform that act.[[32]](#footnote-32)

However, even this adverbial view quickly runs into grave difficulties. First, there are cases in which it is rather unclear what it would mean for one's tendency to perform acts instrumentally effective in achieving a certain state to increase. Many acts which we take pleasure in are pleasurable for their uniqueness or unrepeatability. Is there no such thing as taking pleasure in buying one's first car since one could not increase one's tendency to do so? Second, Brandt's theory of pleasure would seem to make it a conceptual impossibility that the fact that a person had enjoyed an experience could cause the tendency to pursue that experience to decline. But many people intrinsically enjoy an experience, such as going to Graceland, and in doing so completely satisfy their desire to have that experience. Thus even in cases where it is clear what it would mean for one's tendency to do acts which are instrumentally effective in bringing about an experience which is pleasurable, there is no necessary connection between having enjoyed an experience and a tendency to want it to occur again. It is not even true that enjoying an experience implies that one wants that experience to last longer. As Gosling points out the pleasant experience might be "enjoying a subtle whiff of scent, where the pleasure is in the ephemeral quality of the experience, and the person would be nauseated at the thought of lingering over it."[[33]](#footnote-33)

In response to these criticisms of the adverbial view, a defender might try to rescue the view by redescribing what it was that was found pleasurable. For example, the defender might claim that in the case of the first time car buyer what was really enjoyed was something which it is intelligible to increase one's tendency to try to get--perhaps in this case ownership of a significantly better means of transportation than one owned before. Further, in the case of the traveler to Graceland, our defender might claim that the lack of desire to return to Graceland is no argument against her theory because the pleasure was actually taken by the traveler in visiting a famous place that she had never been before. But this strategy of describing the object of pleasure in a way to protect the adverbial view will not work for at least two reasons. First, the redescriptions are bound to seem ad hoc until we are given reason to think one cannot take pleasure in a singular event or have one's craving for an experience pleasurably satisfied. Second, this strategy makes the adverbial view unfalsifiable. One can always find some description of the chosen option which rescues one's pet theory of what the agent actually desired.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Finally, there is Gosling's objection that such views of pleasure seem to undercut our ability to explain why an agent tends to repeatedly go for an activity by pointing out that she takes pleasure in the activity.[[35]](#footnote-35) We provide information and a sort of explanation when we claim that Sally regularly eats Hershey bars because she gets pleasure from doing so. But if we accepted this adverbial view of pleasure then to say that she buys a certain candy bar more frequently than others because she takes pleasure in them would be just to say that she buys them more often because she buys them more often. Claiming that an experience is pleasurable in some cases seems to explain the increasing tendency to take actions which result in the pleasurable experience. This adverbial view makes it mysterious why it should seem like an explanation of an agent's tendency to x to say that doing x gives her pleasure.

This sophisticated adverbial view of pleasure, like the simpler ones which suggested that pleasurable experiences are experiences which are had wholeheartedly, eagerly, glowingly, etc., turns out to have gained its plausibility from a limited range of cases of intrinsically enjoying an experience. But when the full range of experiences that we intrinsically enjoy are considered even the sophisticated adverbial views seem seriously inadequate.[[36]](#footnote-36)

1. Bentham and, less straightforwardly, Mill subscribed to this understanding of pleasure. Bentham, in *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Prometheus Books, 1988) p. 30, writes that

when the value of any pleasure or pain is considered for the purpose of estimating the tendency of any act by which it is produced, there are two other circumstances to be taken into account; these are, 5. Its fecundity, or the chance it has of being followed by *sensations of the same kind*: that is pleasures, if it be a pleasure, pains, if it be a pain. 6. Its purity, or the chance it has of not being followed by *sensations of the opposite kind*: that is, pains, if it be a pleasure: pleasures if it be a pain.

The case of Mill's understanding of pleasure is notoriously more difficult to decipher. However much other aspects of Mill's doctrine seem to point beyond hedonism and pleasure as sensation views, Mill does, at crucial times, speak as a hedonist and of pleasure as a sensation. In the heart of *Utilitarianism* (Hackett Publishing, 1979) where he makes his case that the competent judges test demonstrates there to be higher and lower pleasures Mill continues to speak of pleasure as a sensation. There, in chapter two, in speaking of the higher pleasures, he refers to them as "the nobler feelings". In the next paragraph he writes

On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, *or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings*, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowing of both, or if they differ, that of the majority amongst them, must be admitted as final."

A few sentences later, still discussing the same issue he writes "What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, *or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations*, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both?" (emphasis added).

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Hackett Publishing, 1981) p.131. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford University Press, 1979), p.40-1. He continues that the transformation to the definition of pain should be obvious. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Frankena, *Ethics* (Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 68-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The list is Bentham's, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mill, in *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2, writes

If I am asked what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. [...] If one of the two is, by those who are completely acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 68, shows that Mill's test is inadequate. She writes

Mill's test marks a difference in quality, but not a difference in the rank of goods. Many goods are such that a person would not prefer to give up either for any amount of the other. I feel this way about the pleasures of reading fiction and of eating chocolate.

Quite generally, Anderson is persuasive that "Common sense does appear to express judgments that one good is incomparably higher in worth than another, through norms that prohibit trade-offs of higher for lower goods in certain contexts." (68-9) She argues that attempts to model our common sense morality through lexical ordering of values fails to capture the contextual aspect of when common sense permits trade-offs and when it does not. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gosling, in *Pleasure and Desire* (Clarendon Press, 1969), extensively discusses and develops this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, p.127. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I believe Gilbert Ryle was the first to develop this line of criticism. See his *The Concept of Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1954), chapter 4, especially p. 109. Alston, in "Pleasure," (in Paul Edward's *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) and Gosling, in *Pleasure and Desire*, take up this criticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Alston, "Pleasure," p. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Railton's "Naturalism and Prescriptivity," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 7, p. 151-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Plato was the first to use an argument of this form. His clearest argument for the existence of the Forms, at *Pheado* 74a8 seq., is best interpreted as a more consistent usage of the above style of argumentation than Moore employed. See my manuscript "*Phaedo* 74a8-c8 and Surrounding". Plato demonstrates that if this line of argumentation were successful, we would have more Forms than just that of 'The Good'. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Moore, *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (ed. Schilpp), p. 665. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. One might be tempted, as Frege was, to suggest that insofar as the two concepts are not conceptually identical they have a different sense and therefore a different meaning. However, the best modern accounts of meaning, derived from Putnam and Kripke, have reference determining meaning. Clearly if reference determines meaning, Moore's argument is hopeless. Moore uses conceptual non-identity to imply difference in meaning, but the morning star and the evening star example show that conceptual non-identity does not imply a difference in reference. Thus if reference fixes meaning, conceptual non-identity cannot imply a difference in meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See the first few pages of Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton's "Toward *Fin de siecle* Ethics: Some Trends". They point out that the open question argument "establishes an 'is'/'ought' gap only in the sense that it also establishes a 'brother'/'male sibling' gap." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974), p.42-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. It might be better to agree with Velleman, in "Well-Being and Time," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, March 1991, p. 60, that "self interest is not a unitary dimension of value. Rather a person has two distinct sets of interests, lying along two distinct dimensions--his synchronic interests, in being well off at particular moments, and his diachronic interests, in having good periods of time and, in particular, a good life." Velleman's position entails that the electrode-wearer's life could be consistently very pleasurable yet not amount to a good life for the person living it because an "event's meaning is what determines its contribution to the value of one's life." And an event gets meaning, in Velleman's sense, by fitting into a life narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford University Press, 1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," reprinted in Scheffler, *Consequentialism and Its Critics* (Oxford University Press, 1988). In "Naturalism and Prescriptivity" Railton offers, without embracing, the outlines of how a hedonist could make such a case. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Leonard Katz, *Hedonism as Metaphysics of Mind and Value* (Princeton University dissertation, 1985), p. 80. However I would not have thought it most crucial how we regard the state of affairs but rather how the state of affairs affects us as we are experiencing it. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Sidgwick, in his *Methods of Ethics*, p. 52, notes and too hastily rejects the hedonist's hypothesis that "Pleasure, though not the conscious aim of human action, is yet always the result to which it is unconsciously directed." [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Katz, *Hedonism as Metaphysics of Mind and Value*, p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Sidgwick, in *The Methods of Ethics*, p.131, writes

Let, then, pleasure be defined as feeling which the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be desirable;--desirable that is when considered merely as a feeling, and not in respect of its objective conditions or consequences, or any facts that come directly within the cognizance and judgment of others besides the sentient individual.

For a helpful account of Sidgwick's reasoning towards his view of intrinsic value see Schneewind's *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1977), chapter 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Kagan's paper "The Limits of Well-Being," in Paul, Miller and Paul (eds.) *The Good Life and the Human Good* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) offers a quite stimulating discussion of some of the considerations which tell for and against this hedonistic claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Griffin, in *Well-Being* (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 9, writes

I prefer, in important areas of my life, bitter truth to comfortable delusion. Even if I were surrounded by consummate actors able to give me the sweet simulacra of love and affection, I should prefer the relatively bitter diet of their authentic reactions. And I should enjoy it not because it would be morally better, or aesthetically better, or more noble, but because it would make for a better life for me to live. Perhaps some such preferences, looked at with a cold eye, will turn out to be of dubious rationality, but not all will. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. David Sobel, "Full Information Accounts of Well-Being" *Ethics* 104: 784-810 and "On the Subjectivity of Welfare" *Ethics* 107: 501-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire*, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire*, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 40-1. Sidgwick, in *Methods of Ethics*, p. 127, reminds us that this view had been held much earlier. He quotes Spencer's *Principles of Psychology*, part ii, chapter ix, as claiming that pleasure is "a feeling which we seek to bring into consciousness and retain there." Sidgwick also cites Bain as holding a similar view. Bain, in *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 392, writes that "pleasure and pain, in actual or real experience, are to be held as identical with motive power." Sidgwick offers an interesting criticism of this rival hedonistic view. He claims that "a protracted pain of moderate intensity and free from alarm--such as a dull toothache--seem sometimes to lose its felt stimulus to action without loosing its character as pain." It seems true that we tend to take action when we think that action will result in the desired outcome such that if we despair of producing the desired outcome we might cease to struggle to attain it. I take it that this is the point of Sidgwick's case above. But while Sidgwick's objection may be telling against Spencer and Bain, it does not seem to work against Brandt's position because Brandt's theory is put in the conditional form (i.e. if he judged his action would be effective, then he would be more likely to do it). Having said that, it now seems that Brandt might have problems accounting for the pleasurableness of experiences that we steadfastly believe there is nothing we could do to bring about (e.g. it being a sunny day). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 32. Such a view of pleasure has obvious attractions to logical positivists, and more specifically behaviorists, since it offers clear verification conditions for what otherwise might have been thought to have been an unverifiable mental state. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire*, p. 65. Compare Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 253. He claims that "We smell two perfumes and know at once which has the more pleasant odor--it is the one with which we want to linger." [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For a clear presentation of this point see Hurley's *Natural Reasons* (Oxford University Press, 1989), chapter 4. Amos Tversky, I believe, in "A Critique of Expected Utility Theory," *Erkenntnis*, 9 (1975), p. 163-73, first made this case which importantly complicates any "revealed" preference account. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire*, p. 64. I amend his criticism somewhat. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I gratefully thank Elizabeth Anderson, Daniel Jacobson, Peter Railton, and David Velleman for their help on this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)