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Author(s): Attila Tanyi

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# Sobel on Pleasure, Reason, and Desire

Attila Tanyi

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**Abstract** The paper begins with a well-known objection to the idea that reasons for action are provided by desires. The objection holds that since desires are based on reasons (first premise), which they transmit but to which they cannot add (second premise), they cannot themselves provide reasons for action. In the paper I investigate an attack that has recently been launched against the first premise of the argument by David Sobel. Sobel invokes a counterexample: hedonic desires, i.e. the likings and dislikings of our present conscious states. The aim of the paper is to defend the premise by bringing the alleged counterexample under its scope. I first point out that reference to hedonic desires as a counterexample presupposes a particular understanding of pleasure, which we might call desire-based. In response, following Sobel, I draw up two alternative accounts, the phenomenological and the tracking views of pleasure. Although Sobel raises several objections to both accounts, I argue in detail that the phenomenological view is not as implausible as he claims it to be, whereas the tracking view, on its best version advocated by Thomas Scanlon, is an instance of the phenomenological view and is therefore also defensible.

**Keywords** Sobel · Pleasure · Reasons for action · Desire · Scanlon

## 1 Against the Model: Reason-Based Desires

In the theory of normative reasons one particular approach enjoys widespread support: the Desire-Based Reasons Model (henceforth: the Model). The Model purports to give us an account of normative practical reasons (henceforth: reasons) in terms of desires. In Mark Schroeder's (2007: 193) most recent formulation the Model claims the following: "For  $R$  to

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A. Tanyi (✉)  
Department of Philosophy, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden  
e-mail: attila.tanyi@philosophy.su.se

A. Tanyi  
Zukunftskolleg, University of Konstanz, Konstanz, Germany

be a reason for  $X$  to do  $A$  is for there to be some  $p$  such that  $X$  has a desire whose object is  $p$ , and the truth of  $R$  is part of what explains why  $X$ 's doing  $A$  promotes  $p$ ". The idea is this. Take Schroeder's example (Ibid: 29). If Ronnie ( $X$ ) likes dancing ( $p$ ), then the fact that there will be dancing at the party ( $R$ ), helps explain why Ronnie's going to the party ( $A$ ) would promote Ronnie's desire to dance. "Explanation" here is meant in the metaphysical sense: explanations are facts about "what is true because of what" (Ibid: note 19). Hence this particular feature of Ronnie's situation, i.e. that there will be dancing at the party becomes a reason for Ronnie.<sup>1</sup>

This is a simple and powerful idea, which is both epistemologically and metaphysically attractive. Nevertheless, several contemporary philosophers are critical of it holding an alternative view of practical reason, which is often called valued-based (Dancy 2000: 29; Parfit 2001; Quinn 1993; Scanlon 1998: Chapter 1; Raz 1999).<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will not flesh out this view, nor will I defend it against possible attacks. Instead, I will consider one particular attempt to refute the Model, which advocates of the valued-based view often appeal to: the argument from *reason-based desires*.

The argument is built up from two premises. The first claims that when we desire something we desire it for reasons. That is, when we desire an object we take it that features of this object are reason-providing: they give us reason to pursue, have or in some other way relate to the object of the desire. In short, desires are had under the guise of reasons (Raz 1999: 5, 52–62; Scanlon 1998: 39–44; Quinn 1993: 247; Dancy 2000: 35).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, advocates of the premise do not deny that there can be non-cognitive mental states that do not fit the above characterization of desire. What they hold is that these mental states are mere *urges* that do not provide us with reasons. The most plausible ground for this distinction between urges and desires derives from a particular theory of action (Raz 1999: Chapters 1, 2, 53–7; Quinn 1993: 236, 241–2, 246–7, 252; Scanlon 1998: 20–1, 38; Dancy 2000: 36; 85–6). The idea is that unless one acts on the basis of one's normative judgments, one is not acting for reasons. Hence urges, which lack this normative element, do not prompt intentional action; consequently, they are not states that can provide reasons for action.

What the first premise establishes is that there is circularity in the analysis of reasons the Model offers. Take Schroeder's definition. He sets out to analyze reasons in terms of desires, but if the first premise is true, we must conclude that desires themselves must be analyzed in terms of reasons. The circularity is obvious: we must have an account of reasons at hand before we can make claims about the connection between reasons for action and desires. Our account of reasons must then come from elsewhere; the value-based theory is here to help us. The Model is refuted.

<sup>1</sup> There are other versions of the Model, depending on e.g. whether all desires are admitted, or only those that pass a certain test, or whether only actual desires of the agent matter. See Brandt (1979); Williams (1981, 1995a, b, 2001); Hubin (1996, 1999, 2001, 2003); Noggle (1999); Murphy (1999); Sobel (2001a,b). Since the argument I deal with is designed to tackle all of them, details do not matter.

<sup>2</sup> I use the label 'value-based' only for lack of a better term: I will use the terms 'reason' and 'value' interchangeably in the text. It is not my intention to take side in the debate, which is the primitive: reason or value. Accordingly, although the premise is often put in evaluative terms, in what follows I will assume that those who talk about goodness would also endorse the normative version insofar as they want to make claims about reasons for action by employing the present argument.

<sup>3</sup> I disregard the distinction between normative judgment and normative appearance, although the latter is also used to formulate the premise. See Scanlon (1998), pp. 39–44, Hurley (2001), and Tenenbaum (2007). Given the nature of the discussion to come, this and other, otherwise important refinements do not matter for the purposes of this paper.

However, this is too quick. Desires can get back in the picture, if they can add to the stock of reasons they are based on. This is what the second premise of the argument denies. If the first premise is true and we desire everything for reasons, the fact that we desire something provides no reason over and above the reasons for desiring it. Desire is nothing else but the endorsement of the reasons it is based on.<sup>4</sup> Hence to claim that it could add to these reasons would lead to double counting of these reasons, and this is unacceptable (Raz 1999: 61; Dancy 2000: 36–7). The premise has two applications (Dancy *ibid.*). The primary application claims that desire is not an additional reason to do the thing desired; the secondary application holds that desire is not an extra reason to do what promotes the desire. Note that since one way of promoting a desire is just to do the thing desired, if we accept the secondary application, we also affirm the truth of the primary application.

Together the two premises entail the following conclusion: desires are based on conceived reasons, which they transmit but to which they cannot add. Desires are merely channels for these conceived reasons, which may or may not turn out to be real reasons. The Model's picture of desires as setting ends and thereby providing reasons for action as means to those ends is false. For there are reasons to have those ends and these reasons are our reasons to take the means to those ends, i.e. to act.<sup>5</sup> Desire serves no normative role in this scheme: it only transmits the reasons for the ends to the means to those ends. The argument thus paints a two-faced picture of the field of allegedly reason-providing mental states: there are desires that only transmit reasons they are based on, and there are urges that neither transmit reasons nor do they provide reasons in their own right. No desires provide reasons; value-based reasons are all the reasons there are.

This is no doubt a controversial argument. In this paper I will focus on one particular challenge: David Sobel's argument against the first premise. It uses a counterexample, I label it 'hedonic desire', which trades on our account of pleasure and pain. The aim of the rest of the paper will be to accommodate this counterexample.<sup>6</sup> This is how I proceed. I first outline Sobel's rejection of alternative theories of pleasure. After this, I critically evaluate these arguments arguing that the phenomenological view is defensible, whereas the best version of the tracking view is in fact an instance of the phenomenological view, therefore it is also defensible. At the end of the paper I summarize my arguments and make some concluding remarks.

<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, I work with fairly brush strokes here. The relation between desire and the agent's normative judgment is a controversial issue. In particular, it is not clear whether the premise understands desire as necessarily related to normative judgment, or takes desire to have some kind of normative content. See Setiya (2007), Hurley (2007), Tenenbaum (2007), and Hawkins (2008) for further discussion along these lines.

<sup>5</sup> However, reasons for having desires may not be the same as reasons for action. In particular, if there are reasons provided by the state of desiring, it might be the case that one has reasons to desire something, but no reasons to act on this desire. See Scanlon (1998), p. 97, Parfit (2001), pp. 21–4, Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) for influential discussions on the buck-passing account of value (and, of course, the toxin puzzle can also be noted here).

<sup>6</sup> Unlike Sobel, I restrict my attention to the case of pleasure. Sobel clearly takes pain and pleasure to be symmetrical in their respective accounts; hence he takes his arguments to apply to pain as well, which he hardly mentions (except, peculiarly, in the title of the paper), focusing on pleasure instead. I think this is a mistake since there are important differences in our experiences (and available accounts) of pleasure and pain. Cf. Goldstein (1989); Hare (1972); Aydede (2000, 2005); Persson (2005), Chapter 1; Rachels (2000). For this reason, any proper investigation of the role of pain in this context would require separate discussion, which I cannot provide here.

## 2 Sobel's Counterexample: Hedonic Desires

Recently David Sobel has argued that certain desires, we can call them *hedonic desires*, are reason-providing without themselves grounded in value-based reasons. The reasons provided by these desires, Sobel says, are reasons of mere taste: they are “reasons to experience certain flavors, tactile sensations, color and pattern experiences, and simple auditory sensations, where we want to say that one’s reasons are determined by one in some sense ‘finding favor’ with the option” (Sobel 2005: 439). Sobel seems to be right; it is hard to see where the alleged value-based reason may come from. The object of these desires is not intrinsically valuable: the taste of coffee ice cream, for example, is not something that would be valuable in itself. And though these objects can be instrumentally valuable, they need not be: nothing guarantees that we find relevant considerations for each and every hedonic desire. Nor is it plausible to claim that these desires are urges that do not prompt intentional action. We are active in the face of these attitudes, they are under our control; we *have* these attitudes and are not merely impelled to act on them (Ibid: 441; cf. Copp and Sobel 2002: 259–263; Chang 2004: 69).

At this point, however, a defender of the premise can point out that we forgot about a crucial feature of these desires: that their satisfaction, i.e. attaining or pursuing their object is pleasurable. And this sort of sensory pleasure (henceforth: pleasure) is a consideration that is a reason in its own right, ungrounded in desire (Quinn 1993: 243; Raz 1999: 58; Scanlon 1998: 44). These desires are still had for reasons; they are still reason-based.

However, Sobel denies that this move could save the first premise. The best available account of pleasure, he holds, is desire-based. It claims that there is nothing more to pleasure than being an experience, “which is intrinsically wanted for its own sake and what is wanted is the way it feels when it is occurring” (Sobel 2005: 443). But it is not the feeling of the experience that makes these experiences pleasurable, but the desire; it is this that unites all our pleasurable experiences. As Ruth Chang (2004: 76) puts the point elsewhere, hedonic desires are the desiring of our present conscious states that *make* these states pleasant where the making relation is understood as one of *constitution*: the fact that for me the taste of coffee ice cream is pleasurable just consists in the fact that I like it. To put it more formally, the property of being pleasurable just is the property of being desired (Trigg 1970: 114; Heathwood 2007). We can call this the *desire-based theory* of pleasure. Consequently, if pleasure provides reason, it is desire that grounds this reason. If this theory of pleasure is true, reference to pleasure cannot save the first premise.

Sobel of course knows that there are alternative theories of pleasure, which are friendlier towards the first premise. He considers two candidates, but rejects them both.<sup>7</sup> One historically influential approach holds that all pleasurable experiences share a phenomenological commonality, also called ‘felt quality’ or ‘intrinsic nature’, which we call ‘pleasure’. On this view the pleasantness of an experience supervenes upon the phenomenology of the experience: there cannot be a change in pleasure without a change in qualia. We can call this the *phenomenological account*. Consequently, the reason giving power of pleasure lies in this phenomenology and not in the agent’s desire: pleasure is valuable by virtue of the way it feels.

<sup>7</sup> Sobel’s discussion focuses on the views of Thomas Scanlon and Derek Parfit. I will however only refer to their views when this is unavoidable and contributes to the discussion. I do so partly to avoid getting entangled in an exegesis of the views of these authors, and partly because Sobel’s own treatment of the subject suggests that he was really driven by his demand for a general account of pleasure and its relation to reasons with Scanlon and Parfit being merely targets of opportunity.

Sobel (2005: 444–5) has the following problem with this account. On the phenomenological account, he claims, it can happen that a phenomenological state occurs without the agent's having a favorable response to it. This is indeed the case. The common phenomenological core and desire are only contingently related. That is, in some possible world, but perhaps even in our actual world it can happen that pleasure understood as some phenomenologically distinctive experiential core is not desired by the agent and is nevertheless reason-giving. But, Sobel goes on, advocates of this account claim that the state gives reason to the agent to experience it even in this case. This, again, is true. But, Sobel says, this is implausible. For this implies that an ordinary sensation is reason providing even when the agent does not desire it. The analogy here is with sensations like pins and needles or the taste of chocolate: these are examples of the sort of phenomenological understanding we have of some concepts that have no conceptual connection to desire. However, we do not think that agents who do not like the taste of chocolate are making any mistake. On the contrary: to hold that sensations like these can provide reasons for agents to experience them regardless of the agents' response to them is something we say "only when joking", Sobel says.

However, even if we accept Sobel's rejection of the first alternative, we could still opt for a theory, which attempts to strike a middle ground between the phenomenological and the desire-based account. The idea is to accept that pleasure and desire is inseparable: an experience is pleasurable if and only if the agent is desiring it while it is occurring. But then add that this is so only because desire is a response to or evidence of pleasure's value where pleasure is still regarded as a phenomenological state common to all pleasurable experiences. The result is a version of the more general idea that desire can co-vary with valuable states without itself conferring value on them. This is a well-known idea that Sobel is also aware of (Dancy 2000: 15–20, 26–7; Sobel 2001a: 473, Sobel 2001b; Enoch 2005: 764). We can call it the *tracking view* since it is rooted in the claim that even if desire tracks goodness in the world, i.e. co-varies with it, it is still goodness what gives the agent reasons to act and not what tracks it.

But Sobel is not happy with this more concessive approach either. His refutation takes the following form (Sobel 2005: 449). He argues that if the desire-condition is introduced, the phenomenological state cannot ground the reason because it has no content other than being a state that is desired. His explanation is this. As we know from the discussion of the phenomenological view, the requisite phenomenological state can occur without being desired by the agent. However, on the present view this means that the phenomenological state will not qualify as pleasure, hence it will not provide reason. To deny this would amount to endorsing the phenomenological account, which has shown to be false. But this move creates another problem, Sobel goes on, because we do not know what, in the absence of desire, could ground the reason. All we know is that the phenomenological state counts as pleasure and provides reason when desired but does no such thing when not desired. On closer inspection then, the tracking view collapses into the desire-based account. Hence, in the absence of adequate rivals, the desire-based account is the best available theory of pleasure.

### 3 The Phenomenological Account: A Defense

There are problems with both parts of Sobel's argument. Take first his objection to the phenomenological view. His implausibility charge rests on his claim that the phenomenological view must take pleasure to be a garden-variety sensation analogous to pins and needles or taste

of chocolate. However, some advocates of the phenomenological view argue that this is not the case. Here are three views.

One view identifies pleasure with an attitude of liking: pleasure *is* a stance of affective openness, welcoming or immediate liking. Leonard Katz (1986: Chapter 5, 134–6, 2008: 414–6, 2006: 2.3.3) mentions this view at several places.<sup>8</sup> However, Katz points out, liking, unlike desire is a pre-intentional state, which need not have an object, need not be conscious, and which can but need not extend to, intentional and object-bound, desire.<sup>9</sup> Katz (2006: 1.1, 2.3.3, 3.2 and note 35, 2008: 415) insists on this potentially objectless, pre-intentional character of likings since he holds that certain diffuse good moods and meditative states also count as instances of pleasure. Pleasure, moreover, though is identified with liking, does not provide reasons by the fulfillment conditions of liking. Pleasure is understood phenomenologically on this view; it is identified with the feeling of the liking (Katz 2006: 1.1, 2.3.3, 3.2, Katz 2008: 415). It is, moreover, a feeling that is affective and not sensory in its nature (Katz 2006: 1.1. and note 3). Katz brings scientific support for this view (though he emphasizes that this is still early stage research, hence not decisive). There is evidence—based mostly on the work of the affective neuroscientist Kent Berridge—that the neural basis of liking and desiring is different, the latter located in the dopamine system (and associated with the neural core process of “wanting”), while the former is located in the  $\mu$ -opioid systems (Berridge 2009: 383–7; Katz 2006: 3.3, Katz 2008: 415).<sup>10</sup>

The next view is similar in important respects to the first. Murat Aydede (2000: 543, 554, 557–8) claims that pleasure is a reaction to, i.e. a liking of sensations proper. And he also emphasizes that pleasure is a qualitative feeling episode, an affective, not a sensory feeling (Ibid: 554, 557, 567). He takes liking, as opposed to desire with propositional content, to be a primitive, sub-personal affective reaction, i.e. beyond the reach of cognitive processes such as introspection, which is immediate and spontaneous belonging only to the moment (Ibid: 555–6, 557–560; 2005: 4.2, 6). Like Katz he notes that in certain cases—he is dealing with euphoric effects of opiates and of electric stimulation—pleasure is objectless, it is not directed to any thoughts or sensations proper (Aydede 2000: 556). He also adds that the experience of pleasure often comes with further emotional and cognitive elements, including the awareness that one feels pleasure, the emotions one may feel as a reaction to one’s pleasure, or the desire one has towards one’s pleasure (Ibid: 552, 558; 2005, 4.2.). Finally, he too makes use of the scientific literature to support his case, referring mostly to Melzack and Wall’s gate theory of pain, though in a later article he notes that Berridge’s research also supports his kind of analysis (Aydede 2005: 6, note 20). Melzack and Wall’s theory distinguishes two brain areas, the motivational-affective system,

<sup>8</sup> Katz’s view, as it appears in Katz (1986), is discussed as a version of the tracking view in Sobel (1999) together with Kagan (1992) who sets out to interpret Katz’s theory. Crisp (2007), pp. 104–5 also gives his own, different interpretation of these views. Whereas I believe Crisp’s interpretation may be correct as to these two writings, overall, as my remarks in the text show, I think both interpretations are mistaken.

<sup>9</sup> But may be phenomenally conscious, to borrow a distinction from Ned Block. This is important because pleasure is typically taken to be a conscious experience, cf. Schroeder (2004), pp. 82–3. But it is possible to argue that we should identify pleasure not with consciousness of pleasure but with bare pleasure, which is arguably phenomenally conscious, even if not cognitively accessible. See Katz (2005a), (2006), 2.3.3.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that “wanting” is also different from full-fledged desiring. As Berridge (2009), esp. pp. 378–9, 388–390 makes it clear, “wanting” need not be conscious, nor intentional, and it need not have an object. In effect, then, there are three attitudes concerned: desire (or wanting without quotation marks), “wanting”, and liking. These three attitudes can come apart, although they are normally congruent. Addiction is a good example: the agent may “want” as well as desire what she is addicted to without liking it, i.e. without getting any pleasure out of it.

found in the limbic system, and the sensory–discriminative system, found in the somatosensory cortex, and Aydede argues that pleasure should be located in the first.

The third view comes from David Bengtsson. He too makes a distinction between extrinsic desire and intrinsic liking. The former is a propositional attitude, whereas the latter is a non-propositional attitude (Bengtsson 2003: 44–5, 57, Bengtsson 2004). Bengtsson insists on this aspect of liking claiming—following Anscombe’s “grammar of enjoy”—that some attitudes can have non-propositional objects such as, in our case, experiences.<sup>11</sup> On this basis Bengtsson (2003: 45, 2004, 2009: 71–72) then understands pleasure as a complex state that contains within itself an immediate, spontaneous liking of some experience, typically some sensation proper. The idea is this. Pleasure is neither the liking, nor the sensation that is liked. Instead the two together, perhaps with other, cognitive and emotional elements, cause or constitute one complex experience and this *is* pleasure. This complex state, moreover, has a different phenomenology than the sensation or the liking: this is the phenomenology of pleasure. But this is because of the liking; it is the liking that affects the experience and makes it pleasurable. Hence pleasure, i.e. the complex experience is valuable by virtue of the way it feels: it is a qualitative feeling, which it is due, at least in part, probably the defining part, to the liking it has as its part. Finally, Bengtsson (2009: 67–8) claims that this view too is supported by Berridge’s aforementioned research.

Notwithstanding their differences, both scientific and philosophical, the three views agree on three points. First, on these views pleasure is understood as a feeling episode, a qualitative feeling in momentary consciousness. Second, this feeling is best understood in terms of the attitude of liking, which is responsible for the phenomenology of pleasure, hence for its reason-giving power. Pleasure is the liking (first two views), or it is caused or constituted, in part, by the liking (third view). Finally, this feeling is not sensory, but affective. Aydede, we saw, locates pleasure in the relevant affective–motivational area of the brain, and Katz (2006 1.1. and notes 1, 3) also emphasizes the historic and philosophical grounds for a sensory/affective distinction. In a similar fashion, Bengtsson (2009: Chapter 1) also distances himself from the sensory understanding of pleasure (he calls it the “Feeling View”), and favors instead an affective interpretation in the form of the attitude of liking.

Put together, these three points give us an initial answer to Sobel. While Sobel is right that our account of pleasure needs the attitude of “finding favor”, in fact, that it is identical with it or constituted by it, this attitude is not that of desire; it can extend to desire, i.e. pleasure can be desired, but this is indeed contingent. The reaction instead is that of liking, which is responsible for pleasure’s phenomenology. And it is this non-sensory, affective qualia that provides us with reasons; it is this qualia that the property of being pleasurable supervenes upon.

Turn now to Sobel’s implausibility charge. His claim can be seen as expressing the following doubt: if pleasure is a garden-variety sensation, i.e. if it is a sensation with a particular phenomenology, it is hard to see why it would feel good necessarily, the aspect the phenomenological view uses to account for pleasure’s reason giving potential. It simply does not, or so our every-day experience shows: people can fail to desire these feelings, and we do not fault them for this. And the thought would be that affective states do no better on

<sup>11</sup> This view appears in Bengtsson’s manuscript *The Hedonic Connection—Pleasure and Desire*, and refers to Anscombe (1967). Cf. also Bengtsson (2009), p. 69. Note also that Bengtsson (2003, 2004, 2009: 61–2) takes the liking to be self-referential: what the liking likes is the whole experience of which the liking is a part.



this count; in fact, *any* kind of phenomenological state is incapable of providing reasons just by the virtue of the way it feels (cf. Sobel 2005: 445).

However, unlike the view that pleasure is a sensation, the present reading of the phenomenological account is not bound to accept that its favored phenomenological state must feel in a particular way. What is in common to our pleasurable experiences is the liking. But it is plausible to say that this liking is not itself a state with a single feel; there is no particular way the liking feels. Moreover, the liking does not occur in isolation; it is always a reaction to some sensation. And then the way it feels is in large part determined by the kind of sensation it is a reaction to, and/or by the other elements the complex phenomenology of pleasure has. There is thus no *particular* feeling of pleasure; all we know about the feeling of pleasure is that it is *good*. That is, what is common to all these experiences is that they feel good, i.e. they are experiences that involve liking (Bengtsson 2004, Bengtsson 2009: 62; cf. Duncker 1941: 399–400; Rachels 2000: 198). To invoke a distinction from metaphysics, pleasure is the determinable, not the determinate (Funkhouser 2006; Crisp 2007: 109). Both are real experiences. The determinates are the particular instances of pleasure and are just as real as our experience of, say, redness is. The determinable is their feeling goodness, which is just as real as our experience of color is. But the property of being pleasurable supervenes upon the latter, not the former. And whereas one is not making a mistake if one does not desire particular experiences of pleasure, one *is* making a mistake if one does not desire the experience of pleasure. For then one does not desire what feels good. *Contra* Sobel, we need not be joking when saying *this*.

Sobel can still object to this theory, however.<sup>12</sup> First, he can point out that the liking *is* a desire on a suitably broad account of desire (cf. Copp and Sobel 2002: 254). Science may locate pleasure in a different brain area than where desire is, but, as noted, scientific results are not decisive (for a different use of the same scientific literature see Schroeder 2004: 76–83; though cf. Katz 2005b). Science, moreover, cannot settle the philosophical issue: what is the right concept of pleasure and what that concept refers to. And though it is tempting to cut this problem short by simply understanding desire as involving normative cognition in some way, this move would be question begging at this point. Hence what we have here is just another version of the desire-based theory of pleasure.

But this is not necessarily so. First, the claim that liking is a desire is a substantive claim. Take different theories of desire and their (imagined) views on likings. The phenomenological view of desire certainly comes handy in the present context: likings could qualify as desires on this reading since they certainly have phenomenological content. But only ‘could’; for it is a question what would then distinguish desires from sensations that also have phenomenological content. It is not obvious that the above mentioned affective/sensory distinction would help; it is at least not clear that desires correspond to the affective state of liking. And though we cannot discuss it in detail, we should note that the phenomenological view has serious independent problems (Smith 1994: 104–111). Finally, as I will soon spell out in more detail, the phenomenological view of desire may just affirm the truth of the phenomenological account of pleasure: it would be the quality of the experience that involves or is identical with the desire that would provide reasons, not the desire.

The perhaps most influential account of desire, the functionalist or dispositional analysis was born in part as a response to the problems of the phenomenological

<sup>12</sup> There are other objections Sobel refers to. See Sobel (1999), p. 230; Sobel (2002), pp. 241–2; Sobel (2005), pp. 444, 450. For responses see Crisp (2007), pp. 108–9; Aydede (2000), p. 565; Katz (2006), 1.3, and the considerations put forward in the text.

account, thus it is an obvious second candidate. This view defines desires according to the functional role(s) they play. Desiring, on this account, consists in having certain dispositions under certain circumstances (Smith 1994: 113). But the functionalist account understands desire as a propositional attitude; in fact, it takes its ability to account for this characteristic of desires as an advantage over other views, in particular, the phenomenological account (Ibid: 107–9; cf. Copp and Sobel 2002: 255 note 7; Schroeder 2004: 11). However, we have seen that Bengtsson explicitly denies that likings have propositional content, and both Katz and Aydede picture them as free-floating, sometimes objectless attitudes, whether this object is propositional or not. Consequently, it would be hard to analyze likings through the functional role their propositional content plays. In fact, as I have noted, Aydede understands likings in contrast with propositional desires.

Now, it is true that Sobel thinks that the most popular version of functionalist account, the direction-of-fit analysis of desire is oversimplified. Desires do not merely involve the disposition to make the world conform to them; there are many counterexamples to such an analysis of desire (Sobel and Copp 2001: 52–3; Copp and Sobel 2002: 262, 263–4). But Sobel does not reject functionalism itself. In analyzing Warren Quinn’s radio man who wants to turn on radios whenever he sees one, he claims that such an urge does not involve a thick enough set of dispositions to qualify as desire. “Normally a desire to do something”, he claims, “involves a tendency to think about doing it, a tendency to plan ways to do it, a tendency to object when obstacles are put in the way of one’s doing it and so on” (Copp and Sobel 2002: 262). This may be true. But this would not turn likings into desires; in fact, it would distance them further. Certainly, likings do not involve such a thick set of dispositions; they are too primitive, too sub-personal for that.

Another option is to say that desires are psychological states that are motivationally efficacious, and that being motivated in the right way by these states counts as acting for a reason (Schroeder 2007: 149). But this does not help Sobel’s case either. Likings, as Aydede and Katz emphasize, need not be attitudes about anything, they need not have intentional objects. In fact, as has been noted, Katz explicitly understands likings as pre-intentional. Furthermore, our passivity in the face of likings is apparent, for instance, in how Aydede pictures them. He notes that we are processing or reacting to “sensory qualia in the same sense in which ‘we’ are regulating our grandular activity or heart beat” (Aydede 2000: 560 note 34). We do not seem to *have* these attitudes, we do not seem to have any control over them; we are passive in the face of likings. It is not clear how such attitudes can qualify as intentional (cf. Chang 2004: 69). In general, intentionality enters the picture on these views only when likings integrate with other states such as intentional, propositional desires. This is why Katz (2006: 2.3.3, 3.2) adds that in this way likings may be taken to be minimally or potentially intentional. Likings are much more like the urges I mentioned in the first section; we do not have to invoke the normative account of agency mentioned there to think that this is so.

It is also not clear that likings would qualify as desires on a hedonic theory of desire since this theory takes pleasure to be the primitive notion, thus ontologically prior to desire (Schroeder 2004: 27, 105). Nor is it obvious that Timothy Schroeder’s reward theory of desire would produce the required result since this view too takes desires to be representational, propositional attitudes (Ibid: 131–4). Nevertheless, I do not deny that likings may qualify as desires. There is simply not enough space to decisively argue against this claim in this paper. Even so, the previous short discussion has shown two things. First, to defend the objection one must invoke a substantive theory of desire; not

just any theory would do.<sup>13</sup> Second, the invoked theory must have a very broad view of desire, which will make it less than obvious that desires provide reasons. This claim too will need defense.

Moreover, even if we accept that likings are desires, the desire-based theory of pleasure still will not follow. On the present understanding of the phenomenological view, although likings constitute, or are even identical with pleasure, they do not ground reasons through their fulfillment: what does that is the way pleasure, i.e. the liking or the experience containing the liking feels. Hence even if likings are desires, they do not provide reasons in the way the Model wants them to do, i.e. by virtue of their fulfillment by some action (cf. Bengtsson 2009: 64; Katz 2008, 415). Desires/likings are in this way really just subjective conditions for reasons: their presence is needed to ground reasons, but it is not them that do the grounding. True, if we admit that likings are desires, we find a case of a desire that is not based on reasons. However, as we saw, this desire is not reason-providing; its phenomenology is. That is, we end up with the somewhat peculiar situation that while likings are not reason-based, they do not support the Model either.

Turn finally to Sobel's last imagined objection. This would say that since the present versions of the phenomenological view introduce another attitude, that of liking, this only brings his objection to a different, more basic level but the objection remains the same. That is, he can now claim that it is the liking that may come apart from the experience of pleasure. Hence pleasure is still just an ordinary sensation, and this view, we granted, is false. But any claim concerning separation is just wrong (cf. Katz *ibid*). The liking on either of the above readings is inseparable from the experience of pleasure: it *is* the experience of pleasure (first two views), or it is a proper part of the experience of pleasure (third view). Sobel must come up with new objections to prove his case.

#### 4 The Tracking View

Sobel's rejection of the tracking view also raises questions. The idea, recall, was to maintain that pleasure is an identifiable phenomenological state while making it strongly bound up with desire: an experience would count as pleasurable if and only if the agent desires it when it is occurring. Sobel's criticism started from the assumption that we can nevertheless imagine cases when the phenomenological state occurs without the corresponding desire. But if such an experience, according to the theory (and to deny this would be to endorse the phenomenological account), does not count as pleasurable, it becomes difficult to see what remains to the content of the experience. If desire is present, the experience qualifies as pleasure; if desire is not present, though the same phenomenology is there, the experience does not count as pleasurable. And this looks very much like the desire-based theory, not an alternative to it.

<sup>13</sup> In his manuscript *On What Matters*, Parfit highlights other differences between what he calls *hedonic liking* that makes certain sensations pleasurable, and the *meta-hedonic* desire to have a pleasurable experience. For example, hedonic liking cannot be future-directed (also Scanlon 2002: 339; though cf. Chang 2004: 77–9; Sobel 2005: 454–5; Heathwood 2007: 32–34), and it cannot be fulfilled or unfulfilled. But it should be noted that, just as in Parfit (1984: 493), he still rejects the phenomenological view. His 'official' position seems to be that pleasure is a sensation that is hedonically liked by the agent, where it is the liking that confers value on the experience. However, now Parfit allows for the position that hedonic liking can affect the sensation turning it into a state that provides reasons by virtue of the way it feels. This admission takes him closer to Scanlon's view that I will soon discuss.

There are two ways to react to Sobel's argument. The first is to try to restore the strong connection between reason and desire. We can accept that this would not work with an account that requires desire always to occur when the requisite phenomenological state is present. But we can try to say that desire need not be a response while the feeling is occurring: it can be mediated through reflection, enhanced knowledge and reasoning skills, and appear only after (and, perhaps, only hypothetically) the feeling has occurred. In other words, we would have something like a dispositional theory of value with desire tracking the intrinsically valuable feeling-state called pleasure under idealized conditions (cf. Katz 1986: 104–5, Katz 2006: note 35; Christiano 1992; Rachels 2000: 197–8).

When Sobel (1999: 234) considers this response in the context of a discussion of Shelly Kagan's view, he says that, "If Kagan would consider this version of the theory [...] I believe [he] would find that the distinction he tries to draw between 'the desire satisfaction as tracking pleasure' and the 'desire satisfaction as pleasure' views cannot be made". The main thrust of Sobel's point, I believe, is this: in the absence of a specified desire-independent phenomenological measure, we have to use desire as our measure of value and reason (Ibid: 232–3). The possibility of metaphysical separation is only meant to bring this feature out. That is, Sobel can accept that there is necessary co-existence between desire and phenomenology. For his point is simply that we have no desire-independent account of this phenomenology, hence no desire-independent measure of reasons. Consequently, unless it is interpreted as a desire-based theory, the tracking view is too vague to be considered seriously: it says nothing about what pleasure is, or how it is to be measured. The real problem with the tracking view is that it brings in desire without telling us why this should be so, other than of course the (implicit) admission that the desire-based theory is true (Sobel 2005: 451–2). Advocates of the tracking view simply have no account of what pleasure is such that it looks to be a genuine account of reasons, and they try to cover this failure by smuggling desire into their theory.

I accept this charge against the tracking view. This brings me to the second way that is open to advocates of the tracking view. Sobel is aware of this option. He brings in Scanlon to introduce the idea. Scanlon's (2002: 340) claim is this:

"I conclude from this that desire plays a role in pleasure by affecting the experience itself. When we have reason to bring about an experience in virtue of its being pleasant, what we have reason to bring about is a complex experiential whole that involves, say, having a certain sensation while also desiring that this sensation occur. So these cases remain ones in which the quality of the experience (considered broadly) is a reason to bring it about, rather than cases of having a reason to do something because it will fulfill some desire."

Sobel interprets Scanlon's position in two ways. One is the tracking view discussed above, the other is the claim that the initial phenomenological state, the sensation gains a distinctive, reason-grounding content as a *consequence* of being desired. In this way, we would reintroduce the phenomenological element in the picture, while also accounting for the role of desire.

Sobel (2005: 450–1), however, thinks that it is meaningful to ask whether the new state itself must also be desired. And this question, he argues, reproduces the original dilemma: either we answer 'Yes', and then the new state by itself will not be able to ground reasons thereby taking us back to the original argument. Or we answer 'No', but then we have to face the further question why we invoked desire in the first stage. This last question arises, Sobel claims, because we now hold that the new state counts as pleasure and grounds reasons even if it is not desired, hence, his logic goes, why did we need desire in the first

stage? But there appears to be a simple answer to this question: we needed desire in the first case because this was the only way we could ensure that the phenomenological state has the ability to provide reasons by virtue of the way it feels. It was the desire that affected the original state in such a way that it acquired this distinctive feel. In the second case, on the other hand, we have this content already; hence we do not need the help of desire again.

This move again makes Sobel feel that a trick is being played against the desire-based theory. Scanlon employs desire to create the reason-giving phenomenology, and this, Sobel says, is nothing else, but a move that “backhandedly acknowledge[s] the normative force of desire while trying to repackage this acknowledgement in a way that looks compatible with a strongly objectivist framework” (Ibid: 451). Scanlon’s view, he continues, “is rigged up in just such a way as to not conflict with the direction desire points, yet allows [Scanlon] to claim that desires never ground reasons” (Ibid). But, Sobel asks, why do we need this circuitous route, this added complexity? This is just a desperate attempt to save Scanlon’s position given the implausibility of the phenomenological view, the only non-desire-based alternative theory of pleasure, an implausibility that, Sobel contends, Scanlon also acknowledges. So this is the same charge again: Scanlon cannot say anything (plausible) about the phenomenological state, thus he brings in desire to save the day.

But this time Sobel is wrong. Scanlon, on Sobel’s interpretation, wants to say that there is a qualitative difference between the two states and desire serves as a sort of bridge between the two. Now Sobel can inquire about how this new state feels such that it is reason providing, how this qualitative difference comes about and how it is compatible with the diversity of pleasurable experiences. And, indeed, he does just this (Ibid: 450). But this is not what prompts the above remarks, Sobel explicitly says that he sets these “daunting difficulties” aside (Ibid: 450, 451). But then what is his problem? Observe that although Sobel discusses Scanlon’s view as a version of the tracking theory, it belongs more to the camp of the phenomenological view. And as an advocate of this view, what matters for Scanlon is exactly the quality of the “complex experiential whole” he refers to. Scanlon may contend that the phenomenological view is implausible *if* this means that pleasure is an ordinary sensation. But why would he think that this is the only way to go for an advocate of the view?

It is instead Sobel who begs the question here. He presupposes that the new state, the complex experiential whole cannot be such that it provides reasons by virtue of the way it feels. And this is because no phenomenological state can do that. Here is Sobel: “The added complexity of Scanlon’s view fails to improve on a simple Benthamite hedonistic account of our reasons of mere taste. We reviewed the widely acknowledged implausibility of such story earlier in the paper” (Ibid: 451). This is straightforward talk, but it has nothing to do with the remarks above. According to Sobel the “simple Benthamite hedonistic account” holds that pleasure is a sensation, and this is implausible. But, again, does Scanlon think this? And where is the proof for the claim that Scanlon does not improve on the Benthamite theory? Again, Sobel’s real problem seems to be that he just cannot see how the new phenomenological state can be such that it avoids the fate of the Benthamite theory. His worry might be justified if we understand Scanlon as Sobel understands him: as claiming that desire influences, probably causally, the phenomenology of the experience in such a way that it becomes normatively significant. But I think this worry is due to Sobel’s mistaken interpretation of Scanlon’s view.

Speaking of “old” and “new” states as Sobel does, unless it is only figurative speech, suggests that we are dealing with the creation of some state from another state and this creation can be measured along some time scale; in other words, that there is a causal process of creation going on here. Scanlon, however, need not have this in mind. The

difference between the old and the new states only requires that there be two states, which require each other to form one total experience, which we call 'pleasure' and which provides reasons by virtue of the way it feels. On this picture desire does not cause one phenomenological state to change into another, but the total experience is caused or constituted to be different than it would have been otherwise. Pleasure is an experiential whole that is caused or constituted in part by desire, but it is not the desire, but the quality of the whole that provides reasons. The phenomenology of this whole is different from its parts, it is a pleasurable phenomenology, i.e. it feels good. But it acquires this feeling in part due to the desire it has as its part: the desire affects the experience itself.<sup>14</sup>

Observe the obvious parallel here with the third version of the phenomenological view in the previous section. All we have to do to get to that view is substitute 'liking' for 'desire'. This is not as wild a thought as it might first appear to be. Scanlon (2002: 340) at one point notes that the appetitive states of human infants and animals are different from ordinary desires. Perhaps he would be willing to understand 'desire' in his cited passage other than a full-blown propositional attitude. And this goes the other way round too. If the 'liking' of the third version of the phenomenological account turns out to be a desire, we get Scanlon's view. In either case, the point remains the same. What we have at hand is not a garden-variety sensation, but a complex, possibly affective state that provides reasons by virtue of the way it feels. Desires function as subjective conditions, nothing more. To doubt this, Sobel must doubt the very idea that phenomenology can ground reasons. And this, as has been noted in the previous section, simply need not be true once we get rid of the idea that pleasure is a particular sensation with a particular phenomenology. Scanlon's idea, as far as I can see, is compatible with this move; hence it is impervious to Sobel's objections.

## 5 Summary and Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have considered David Sobel's objections against theories of pleasure that are not desire-based. The context of the argument came from the debate concerning the argument that since desires are based on value-based reasons, which they only transmit but to which they cannot add, they are redundant in our account of reasons for action. Since in the case of certain desires, I called them hedonic, the only potential reason-giving consideration is that their satisfaction is pleasurable, it is important to see if the best available account of pleasure is itself desire-based. For if it is, the first premise of the above argument collapses. Sobel has claimed this to be the case arguing against alternative positions on pleasure. In the paper I have tried to defend these alternatives, the phenomenological and tracking views of pleasure respectively, against his objections. I ultimately claimed that the tracking view, on its most plausible Scanlonian version, is best interpreted as an instance of the phenomenological view, but this view, I claimed, can take plausible forms. Although there are other ways to argue against the idea of reason-based desires, insofar as Sobel's objection is concerned, The Model, as I called the Desire-based Reasons Model, remains rejected.

<sup>14</sup> Sidgwick (1907), p. 46 may be making a similar point. However, this is disputed, see Katz (1986), Chapter 2, 48 note 36; Christiano (1992), pp. 274–6; Sobel (2005), p. 443, note 13 and 444; Shaver (1997); Sobel (1997); Heathwood (2007), p. 26 note 9 for the debate. Also, one may be tempted by these remarks to hold that pleasure is an organic whole. See Rachels (2004), p. 24 for this view.

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