

Bitter Joys and Sweet Sorrows

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Consider pleasures understood in a broad sense, which include all positive affects: that is, bodily pleasures, but also intellectual pleasures, such as the pleasure of reading a great book, the pleasure of receiving a compliment, of winning the lottery, pleasures in activities such as the pleasure of playing, the pleasure of having a conversation, of hunting and, more generally, every episode of hedonically positive mental states such as joy, proudness, interest, relief, admiration, and so on. I will use “displeasure” as the antonym of “pleasures” understood in this broad sense. “Feelings” will refer to mental episodes which will either be pleasures or displeasures.¹ We sometimes experience pleasures and displeasures simultaneously: whenever we eat *sfogliatelle* while having a headache, whenever we feel pain fading away, whenever we feel guilty pleasure while enjoying listening to Barbara Streisand, whenever we are savouring a particularly hot curry, whenever we enjoy physical endurance in sport, whenever we are touched upon receiving a hideous gift, whenever we are proud of withstanding acute pain, etc. These are examples of what we call “mixed feelings”. *Mixed feelings are cases in which one and the same person experiences pleasure and displeasure at the same time.*

Mixed feelings raise two questions: (1) If pleasure and displeasure are contraries, how can mixed feelings be possible? (2) Does the excess of pleasure (or displeasure) that we feel when experiencing mixed feelings itself constitute a new feeling, that results from the co-occurrence of the first two? I will argue (1) that mixed feelings are possible and that their existence does not threaten the contrariety of pleasure and displeasure, and (2) that there are no resultant feelings: having a lot of pleasure and a little displeasure does not result in having *additional* mild pleasure. Finally, I will suggest (3) that although both false, scepticism towards the existence of mixed feelings, as well as the idea according to which resultant feelings exist, are inspired from a single and correct idea: that pleasure and displeasure do *fuse* in some cases.

¹ “Affects” would perhaps be a better term than “feelings” to designate pleasures in this broad sense, for not only feelings *stricto sensu*, but also emotions, moods, sentiments... count as pleasures and can be mixed. However, since the debate of interest here has been historically formulated in terms of “mixed feelings”, I shall stick with that term here.

1. *The possibility of mixed feelings*

Many discussions about mixed feelings concern their actual, and more generally possible existence². The main reason why the existence of mixed feelings is considered problematic is because it seems to threaten the relation of contrariety between pleasure and displeasure. The idea is the following: if we can experience pleasure and displeasure at the same time, it must be because pleasure and displeasure are not contraries. According to this idea, the three following propositions are incompatible:

P1 - Mixed feelings consist in the co-occurrence of pleasure and displeasure in a same subject at the same time.

P2 - Pleasure and displeasure are contraries: they cannot be found in a same subject at the same time.

P3 - Mixed feelings are possible.

Given that P1 must be accepted by definition, we are forced to reject either P2 or P3. Faced with this seeming incompatibility between mixed feelings on the one hand, and the contrariety of pleasure and displeasure on the other, some simply choose to give up the contrariety of pleasure and displeasure (P2) in order to save the possibility of mixed feelings. According to them, pleasure and displeasure, instead of constituting a same dimension and of being separated by a null indifference point — as positive and negative temperatures do —, are in fact independent dimensions of variations of one's experience — as hue and saturation are dimensions of colours.³

Others, on the contrary, preserve the contrariety of pleasure and displeasure by trying to show that, appearances notwithstanding, mixed feelings do not really exist, as against P3.⁴ Rather than simultaneously experiencing pleasure and displeasure, we would either be merely wavering between the two⁵, or one of the feelings would only be a pseudo-pleasure or

² See Titchener 1908, p. 45-54; Young 1918; Beebe-Center 1965 et Schimmack and Colcombe 2000 for different reviews of this debate.

³ Diener and Emmons 1984; Watson and Tellegen 1985 ; Cacioppo and Berntson 1994, Watson 2000, p. 26-33, 44-54; Larsen & al. 2004; Schimmack 2001, 2005. Rehmke, quoted by Titchener 1908, p. 56, already writes: “[p]leasure (*Lust*) and unpleasure (*Unlust*) are ‘incommensurable dimensions’, in the same way as sounds and colours”. See Massin (2014) for a critic.

⁴ Epicure (in Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 1, p. 115); Titchener 1908, p. 46-7; Young 1918; Russell and Carroll 1999.

⁵ Alechsieff 1907.

displeasure.⁶ Finally, others opt for an intermediate view according to which only certain pleasures and displeasures are contraries. Pleasures and displeasures *of the same type* would thereby be incompatible, but *not* pleasures *of different types*. For instance, it would be possible to have a bodily pleasure and a spiritual pleasure at the same time, but impossible to have a spiritual pleasure and a spiritual displeasure at the same time.⁷

I believe by contrast that these three propositions are fully compatible. The alleged incompatibility between them rests upon a univocal use of the terms “subject” and “in”. In P1, “subject” refers to a person, and saying that pleasures and displeasures are *in* a person is equivalent to saying that this person *has* certain pleasures and displeasures. In P2, “subject” refers to the bearer of the property of being a pleasure (or being a displeasure) in such a way that saying that pleasure is *in* a subject amounts to saying that this subject *is* a pleasure (or a displeasure). The subject that *has* a pleasure is a person. The subject that *is* a pleasure is a mental episode. There is no more contradiction in holding that pleasure and displeasure are contraries and that they can occur simultaneously in one and the same person, than in holding that black and white are contraries and that a chess board can be black and white at the same time. It is just that different parts of the chessboard are black and white and, in the same way, different mental episodes of the person are pleasant and unpleasant. When Paul looks forward to the spring whilst feeling sad about his grandfather’s death, his yearning for the spring is a pleasure, and his mourning the death of his grandfather is a displeasure. As soon as we distinguish between the mental episodes of a same person, mixed feelings do not threaten the relation of contrariety between pleasure and displeasure anymore.

For the relation of contrariety to be violated, we would need the very same mental episode to be at once a pleasure and displeasure: this would amount to saying that the same person can take pleasure and displeasure in the same object, under the same aspect, in the same way, at the same time. It is doubtful that such cases really do exist. Greenspan holds that cases such as friendly rivalry are instances of the sort, such as when Paul is both glad and saddened by his friend’s success in the competition in which they were both taking part.⁸ But this case can be understood as follows: Paul is *intrinsically* glad about his friend’s success, a success that saddens him *extrinsically* because it implies that *he*, Paul, has failed – which in turn? intrinsically saddens him (for an alternative analysis of ambivalent cases, see Calabi and Santambrogio’s chapter in this volume).

⁶ Young 1918; Duncker 1941, p. 410-2.

⁷ Scheler 1955, p. 338-9.

⁸ Greenspan 1980.

2. *The non-existence of resultant feelings*

Let us thus assume that mixed feelings exist and that pleasures and displeasures are indeed contraries. One can still wonder whether the concomitance of pleasures and displeasures yields a total feeling, resulting from their addition. Pleasure sometimes outweighs displeasure, displeasure sometimes outweighs pleasure, and sometimes they exactly compensate for each other. Do such excesses of pleasure or of displeasure constitute new feelings, distinct from the concomitant pleasures and displeasures?

In order to lay down the problem properly, we need to introduce the concept of hedonic balance. The expression *hedonic balance* refers to the algebraic sum of the positive values representing the intensity of all the pleasures and of the negative values representing the intensity of all the displeasures of a person at a time. One problem posed by this widely accepted concept⁹ is this: *is hedonic balance merely a theoretical fiction*, which merely reflects the fact that there might be more pleasure than displeasure in one person, *or does it correspond to a new mental episode?* In other words, is there a feeling *resulting* from the concomitance of pleasures and displeasures, that goes beyond those pleasures and displeasures? Suppose Paul has a pleasure of 3 “hedons” and a displeasure of -2 hedons: his hedonic balance is of 1 hedon. Now does Paul have a pleasure of 1 hedon corresponding to that hedonic balance? Those who answer positive believe in resultant feelings.

Wundt is one chief representant of that view.¹⁰ According to him, all the feelings that are present in the mind at a given time necessarily form a total or resultant feeling (*Totalgefühl*) that is unique and distinct from the partial or component feelings that compose it.¹¹

⁹ See however Rachels, 2004.

¹⁰ Wundt 1922, II, sec. 12, §12. Contrary to the widespread use that I endorse here, Wundt employs the term ‘feeling’ (*Gefühl*) or ‘affective tonality’ to refer not only to pleasures and displeasures, but to all subjective mental elements – by opposition to sensations, which are their contents. According to Wundt, feelings vary along three main dimensions: pleasure-displeasure, excitement-inhibition and tension-relaxation (Wundt 1922, I, sec. 5-7. See Reisenzein 2000 for an exposition).

¹¹ Bayne and Chalmers 2003 and Bayne 2010 defend a similar thesis that applies not only to feelings, but also to all conscious episodes. According to them, the different conscious episodes of a subject form a total conscious episode, that is more than their conjunction. Given the all-encompassing use he makes of the term ‘feeling’ (see previous note), Wundt’s thesis might not be that different from the unity of consciousness thesis endorsed by Bayne and Chalmers. Moreover, note that Bayne and Chalmers can be correct even if resultant pleasures and displeasures do not exist: it suffices that the conscious episode be neither pleasure nor displeasure.

Why should we believe in the existence of resultant feelings on top of component feelings? A first argument in favour of their existence would be that resultant feelings have some phenomenal quality. We can for instance easily answer the question “How are you feeling?”, and the question seem to be on how we feel on the whole. Indeed, there seems to be a certain way we feel at a certain time, and no hedonic calculus is needed in order to find out about it. Nevertheless, the way we feel might not correspond to a resultant feeling, instead it could be:

1. A *general* feeling: we feel tired, relaxed, depressed, energetic, etc. Such “feelings of general condition”, as Ryle¹² calls them, do not necessarily reflect one’s hedonic balance. They are themselves component feelings, which are factored in the hedonic balance. They do not necessarily represent the only feelings we may have: we can feel exhausted and happy to have reached a mountain peak, or feel in great shape and be annoyed to have missed our train.
2. A *salient* feeling: we can feel unwell because of a headache. The hedonic balance of a person may be positive even though the feeling that is attracting her attention is negative. This is what happens, for instance, whenever an intense displeasure is outweighed by many little pleasures. Salient feelings, similarly to feelings of one’s general condition, are component feelings that should be summed within the hedonic balance.

Once these two types of feelings are set aside, the existence of a total feeling reflecting our hedonic balance becomes less obvious. In order to answer the question “How are you *overall*, do you have at this very moment more pleasure or more displeasure?” it might be pointless to proceed to an introspective search of the effects of having more pleasure than displeasure. Some hedonic calculus may well be inevitable.

A second argument in favour of resultant feelings proposes that there is an intuitive difference between, on the one hand, an individual’s hedonic balance at a given time and, on the other hand, the hedonic balance of multiple individuals at a given time: the former seems less artificial than the latter. Broad thus argues that the sum of pleasures and displeasures of different individuals does not, in any way, represent an addition *in rerum natura*, contrarily to

¹² Ryle 1951.

the sum of pleasures and displeasures of one single individual¹³. Thus we could say that an individual is happy at a given moment when his hedonic balance is positive¹⁴. However, as Broad points out, it would be a category mistake to defend that a collection of individuals is happy when its hedonic balance is positive. Without resultant feelings, Broad argues, we would not be able to understand what exactly about the hedonic balance of one individual is more natural than the hedonic balance of several individuals.

This argument is hardly more convincing than the preceding argument from phenomenology. The reason why the hedonic balance of an individual seems more “natural” than the hedonic balance of several individuals might just be that one individual is a more natural entity than a collection of individuals. If the average life expectancy of pangolins seems less artificial than the average life expectancy of pangolins and artichokes, it is because the class of pangolins is less artificial than the class of pangolins and artichokes. It is not because the average life expectancy of pangolins represents some addition *in rerum natura*, contrary to the average life expectancy of pangolins and of artichokes.

Not only are the arguments in favour of resultant feelings inconclusive, the existence of such feelings faces the following dilemma¹⁵:

- Suppose first that a resultant feeling is fully distinct from all the component feelings: it is a new feeling emerging simultaneously on the basis of these component feelings, as Wundt would have it. This leads to a paradox: given that the hedonic balance of a person at a given time sums *all* his pleasures, it should also sum the resultant feeling. Paul has a pleasure of 3 “hedons” and a displeasure of -2 hedons: the hedonic balance is of 1 hedon. According to the resultant feelings hypothesis, this corresponds to a new pleasure of Paul, distinct from his component pleasures. It follows that Paul’s *complete* hedonic balance should take into account this pleasure of 1 hedon. Because Paul has three distinct feelings — his 3 hedons pleasure, his -2 hedons displeasure *and his new 1 hedon resultant pleasure* — Paul’s complete hedonic balance will then be of 2 hedons ($3 - 2 + 1$). In other words, if resultant feelings are feelings in their own right, distinct from component feelings, they must be taken into account in the hedonic balance. If this is the case, however, the 2 hedons result above is not enough yet. According to the resultant feelings hypothesis, the 2 hedons result corresponds to yet another new

¹³ Broad 1959, p. 249

¹⁴ A refined version of such a hedonic conception of happiness is defended by Feldman (2010).

¹⁵ Structurally the same objection holds against the existence of resultant forces qua distinct from component forces (Massin, 2016, §2.2).

pleasure of 2 hedons, which must in its turn be included in the following sum: $((3-2)+1)+2$). The hedonic balance is getting out of control.

- Suppose now that the resultant feeling is not *fully* distinct from all component feelings: it is either identical to one of the (dis-)pleasures, or part of one of them. But then, *which one*? In the case of Paul who has just *two* component (dis)pleasures, the answer should be obvious: his resultant pleasure corresponds to the *surplus* or *residue* of his component pleasure, that is, to the part of that pleasure which is not counterbalanced by his displeasure.¹⁶ But things become intractable in more complex (and usual) cases. Just consider a case involving three components (dis)pleasures. Julie is listening to Purcell (a pleasure of 5 hedons) whilst taking her bath (another pleasure of 5 hedons) and regretting having missed her train (a displeasure of -5 hedons). Her hedonic balance shows 5 hedons. Is Julie's resultant pleasure the one she gets out of listening to Purcell? Or the one she gets out of taking a bath? Or a bit of both?

I conclude that the results of hedonic calculus do not represent any new psychological reality.

3. *Fusions of Feelings*

An important idea of Scheler (and Wittgenstein) is that false philosophical theses often have some grain of truth¹⁷. If mixed feelings are so innocuous, why do they seem so baffling? If resultant feelings are so intractable, why do they remain so attractive? Here is a hypothesis. The views that mixed feelings violate the contrariety between pleasure and displeasure and that resultant feelings are real, are two false views motivated by one true thesis: the thesis according to which feelings might *fuse* under certain circumstances. The general idea is that in some contexts pleasure and displeasure behave in the same way as hot water and cold water blended in the same container do (a metaphor backed up by common language which is full of associations between affective episodes and liquids)¹⁸. Take some hot pleasure. Take the same quantity of cold displeasure. Pour it into one person. When some further conditions are met, you get a lukewarm, apathetic individual, who has neither pleasure nor displeasure.

¹⁶ See Massin (2016) for a residualist account of the composition of forces along these lines.

¹⁷ Mulligan 2017.

¹⁸ See Cervel and Sandra 2001; Kövecses 2003.

The nature of mixture and fusion is a delicate metaphysical question: one problem is to know whether the ingredients that have been blended are still present in the resulting mixture. If this is the case, in which sense is the mixture homogenous? If it is not, in which sense is it a mixture? In what follows, I want to discuss the case of affective *fusions* only, in contrast to the case of affective *mixtures* I shall not consider here. In affective fusions, the ingredients do not anymore exist alongside in the result: they have fused.¹⁹

In the same way that, once they have fused, hot and cold water vanishes and give way to lukewarm water (by contrast to a tea with milk where the initial ingredients remain present), in sentimental fusion (by contrast to affective mixtures), blending pleasure with displeasure may yield a single feeling (slight pleasure, slight displeasure, indifference). Given that the product of such a fusion consists either in pleasure, in displeasure or in indifference, and that several ingredients were originally present, some of them at least have been destroyed. As Bain writes:

Pleasure and pain are opposites in the strongest form of contrariety; like heat and cold, they destroy or neutralize each other.²⁰

At first, fusions of feelings may seem to support both the views that mixed feelings are impossible, and that resultant feeling are real. First, it might seem that affective fusions support the view that mixed feelings do not exist, for we then end up with one simple feeling. But this is not the case: fusions of feelings actually *entail the existence of* mixed feelings. For pleasure and displeasure to fuse or mutually destroy each other, they must *first* co-exist.

Second, fusions of feelings may seem to support the existence of resultant feeling, for the simple feeling which results from the fusion of different feelings may appear to be exactly the kind of resultant feeling we have been looking after in vain. But again, this is not the case: a fused feeling cannot be a resultant feeling, since the latter would have to exist *at the same time* as the component feelings. The fused feeling begins to exist only after the component feelings have disappeared. The multiplicity of pleasures and displeasures ceases to exist as soon as the fusion of feelings starts.

In no way do fusions of feelings plead against mixed feelings, nor in favour of resultant feelings. Quite the opposite. That being said, there is a grain of truth in the idea

¹⁹ On the contrary, when Wundt talks about blends or fusions of feelings, what he has in mind is a concept of blending where the initials ingredients subsist.

²⁰ Bain 1875, p. 12-13

according to which mixed feelings are impossible, as well as in the idea that there are resultant feelings, and the theory of fusions of feelings helps pinpointing it. First, some mixed feelings cannot *last* (because pleasure and displeasure fuse). Second, the hedonic balance of an individual with mixed feelings at t sometimes corresponds, at $t+1$, to a unique episode, distinct from pleasures and displeasures produced at t . Although possible, mixed feelings are often *ephemeral*. In such cases, a substitute of a resultant feeling appears as soon as pleasure and displeasure fuse.

What are the conditions under which concomitant pleasure and displeasure will fuse? In the quote above Bain applies the idea of fusion of feelings to *all* cases of concomitant pleasures and displeasures²¹. Others limit affective fusions to some specific co-occurrences of pleasure and displeasure only²². It seems to me that the latter view is right. Julie may feel deep shame when faced with her passion for photo-novels, and Paul can be madly in love with Julie whilst deploring her unrestrained taste for tacky literature. Such feelings do not fuse. The theory of fusion is valid when it comes to certain pleasures and displeasure only. Which ones?

Some feelings have objects, others don't. Julie may be sad about having lost her cat, but she may also be sad *tout court*, without her sadness being directed toward any particular object. My proposal is that *only objectless feelings may fuse*. Indeed, for pleasures and displeasures with an object to be able to fuse, their objects should be able to fuse as well, which is unlikely.²³ What would a fusion between Paul's love for Julie and his migraine look like? Nothing indicates that mixed feelings that contain pleasures with an object are doomed to an ephemeral existence, resulting in a fusion of feelings. However, as soon as pleasures and displeasures are set free from their objects, nothing keeps them apart from each other and they start behaving like liquids by spreading into their subject. They then end up mixing together. The theory of fusions of feelings is only valid when it bears on pleasure and displeasure that have no objects.

This necessary condition may not be sufficient though. A deep, objectless state of bliss, will not fuse with a pain in one's toe.²⁴ Scheler proposes that only feelings of a same level/strata/depth will fuse with each other: this arguably constitutes a second necessary condition for affective fusions.²⁵

²¹ See also Bain 1859, p. 441

²² Hume 2000, Bk II, Part III, sec. 9; Scheler 1973, p. 331; Sidgwick 1981, p. 141; Mulligan 1998, §6.

²³ Marshall 1889, p. 533.

²⁴ I here assume that pain, being located, has no object. See Massin (2014; 2017) for a defense.

²⁵ Scheler, 1973a, pp. 330-1.

To sum up, pleasure and displeasure may occur at once in the same person. The surplus of pleasure (or of displeasure) which this person has at this moment, is a theoretical fiction that corresponds to no psychological reality. However, when pleasure and displeasure have no object they cannot co-exist durably in the same person. In such case, they may fuse and produce either pure pleasure or pure displeasure, of which the intensity might be equal to the sum of the intensity of previous pleasures and displeasures.²⁶

(Most from of the material of this chapter comes from a former paper in French that has been translated from French by Mélanie Sarzano and Marie van Loon)

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