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# **The Nature, Value and Paradoxes of Pleasure**

A thesis  
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of the requirements for the degree  
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# Abstract

This thesis addresses some of the most important objections to Prudential Hedonism. Prudential Hedonism is a theory of wellbeing—the good life for the one living it. Substantively, Prudential Hedonism consists in the claim that pleasure is the only intrinsic prudential good for the subject’s life and pain the opposite. Formally, Prudential Hedonism claims that pleasantness and painfulness are respectively the only prudential value- and disvalue-makers.

In Part 1, philosophy of mind, phenomenology and neuroscientific evidence are employed to investigate pleasure’s nature. Normative claims about pleasure have been rejected for lacking a convincing account of what unifies diverse pleasures while still making them good for the one experiencing them. In this Part, I criticize some recent attempts to define pleasure and argue that Non-separatist Phenomenalism—a new theory according to which pleasure is best described as a feeling that might contribute to an experience showing intentionality—is the most plausible theory of pleasure, and one that addresses the extant criticisms.

In Part 2, the experimental philosophy on experience machine thought experiments is discussed. These thought experiments are addressed because for decades most philosophers have considered them a knock-down argument against Prudential Hedonism. However, in the last decade, the tides have turned and the strength of these thought-experiments in showing Prudential Hedonism’s falsity has been re-considered. This sea-change is thanks mainly to insights descending from an experimental method. The most recent attempt to revive the experience machine objection to Prudential Hedonism, the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument, is considered and dismissed. It does avoid some of the issues raised by the experimental philosophy, but it suffers from a structural problem—the Freebie Problem. This problem is a structural issue that occurs when an argument effectively creates a false choice by unfairly making it irrational to choose one of the options. As such, Part 2 concludes that the experience machine thought experiments, including the more recent versions of them, do not prove the falsity of Prudential Hedonism.

In Part 3, the literature on the paradoxical effects of pursuing happiness is critiqued. Philosophical reasoning and psychological evidence are employed to conceptualize the most plausible description and explanation of the Paradox of Hedonism and to identify strategies to avoid Prudential Hedonism’s potential self-defeatingness. A political version of the paradox is also considered, but the Political Paradox of Happiness is rejected as an objection to Hedonistic Utilitarianism and the politics of happiness. Part 3 concludes that the Paradox of Hedonism

constitutes a contingent practical problem with no damaging implications for the theory of Prudential Hedonism on an individual or political level.

Overall, this thesis concludes that pleasure and pain are still plausible candidates to be, respectively, the intrinsic prudential value and disvalue of a theory of wellbeing. This might have important implications, for example, for some of the latest developments in psychology and public policy that involve the promotion of people's pleasure.

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# Introduction

Prudential Hedonism, the theory that is the focus of this thesis, is a type of Ethical Hedonism concerning wellbeing or what it is for a life to go well for the one living it.<sup>1</sup> At the substantive level, Prudential Hedonism is understood as the claim that pleasure is the only ultimate good for the subject's life and pain the opposite. At the formal level, Prudential Hedonism consists in the claim that pleasantness and painfulness are respectively the only prudential value- and disvalue-makers.<sup>2</sup>

Prudential hedonists understand the good life for the one living it to be the happy life and happiness to consist, according to the quantitative hedonistic version, in a “preponderance of pleasure over pain”.<sup>3</sup> In other words, Prudential Hedonism is the theory according to which the best life for the one living it is the one with the most net-pleasure and the worst life is the one with most net-pain. For “net-pleasure” or “pleasure minus pain”, Quantitative Hedonism means the result of a mathematical operation where dolors (units of pain) are subtracted to hedons (units of pleasure).<sup>4</sup>

The word “hedonism” derives from the Ancient Greek for “pleasure”.<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Bentham, a prominent hedonist in modern philosophy, affirmed both Psychological and Ethical Hedonism: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain, and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do”.<sup>6</sup> Psychological Hedonism holds pleasure or pain to be the only things that motivate us. In other words, all our actions are directed by a conscious or unconscious desire to experience pleasure or avoid pain. Ethical Hedonism affirms that only pleasure is valuable and only pain is disvaluable.<sup>7</sup>

The non-philosophical use of the word “hedonism” stands in need of explanation. For example, hedonism is variously defined by psychologists as “pleasure and sensuous gratification for

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<sup>1</sup> Crisp, Roger. “Well-Being.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Sander, David, and Tobias Brosch. *Oxford Handbook of Value: The Affective Sciences of Values and Valuation*. Oxford University Press, 2015, ch. 14; According to Rodogno, a theory of well-being is substantive if it directly attributes prudential value to something; the theory is formal if it tries to identify why something is good in terms of pointing to a value-maker. Rodogno, Raffaele. “Prudential Value or Well-Being.” *Oxford Handbook of Value: The Affective Sciences of Values and Valuation*, edited by David Sander and Tobias Brosch, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 289-290.

<sup>3</sup> Weijers, Dan. “Hedonism.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 29 Jan. 2020.

<sup>4</sup> DeNicola, Daniel R. *Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*. Broadview Press, 2018, pp. 108-109.

<sup>5</sup> Cassin, Barbara, et al. “Pleasure.” *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 789.

<sup>6</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.

www.historyofeconomicthought.mcmaster.ca, accessed 9 May 2018, ch. 1, para. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Moore, Andrew. “Hedonism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018.

oneself”<sup>8</sup> or “pleasure, doing things that bring gratification for oneself”.<sup>9</sup> Malgorzata Sobol-Kwapinska describes hedonists as “those for whom pleasure is the most important thing and who do not pay too much attention to the past or the future. These individuals tend not to take into account the consequences of their own behavior”.<sup>10</sup>

These definitions are closer to what Dan Weijers calls “folk hedonism”.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, when the word “hedonism” is employed in ordinary language, its meaning is different from the meaning it takes when used in philosophers’ discussions. To “the folk” a hedonist is a person that pursues pleasure shortsightedly and selfishly—without any particular regard for her long-term happiness or the happiness of others.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for non-philosophers, a stereotypical hedonist is epitomized by the slogan, “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll”, with the additional subtitle: “I want it all, and I want it now, the consequences be damned”.

These multiple meanings of the word “hedonism” should not surprise us. Lexical Semantics, the study of word meaning, considers the meaning of a word as completely reflected by its context. The meaning of a word is determined by its contextual relations. Language changes as its function changes; it differs according to the situation. A register is the name that is given to a variety of a language according to use. It is only by considering the various situations, and situation types, in which language is used that it is possible to understand its function and its differences.<sup>13</sup> Given that, we should not be surprised if “hedonism” has different meanings within different registers. The meaning of “Hedonism” in the philosophical register is different from the meaning of “hedonism” in the psychological register and in the every-day register.

However, even within philosophy, “Hedonism” can cause confusion. Laurence Lafleur pointed out the misunderstandings that surround this theory in philosophical debate. Lafleur wrote that this set of theories have been objected to by some on grounds that clearly involve a misapprehension of their claims, as in the case of those who consider Hedonistic Utilitarianism to be an egoistic theory or those who identify happiness as necessarily consisting of the non-social or the purely physical pleasures.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Philosophical Hedonism does not prescribe a particular

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<sup>8</sup> Schwartz, Shalom H., and Anat Bardi. “Value Hierarchies Across Cultures Taking A Similarities Perspective.” *Journal Of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2001, pp. 268-90.

<sup>9</sup> Sortheix, Florencia M., and Jan-Erik Lönnqvist. “Personal Value Priorities and Life Satisfaction in Europe: The Moderating Role of Socioeconomic Development.” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2014, pp. 282-99.

<sup>10</sup> Sobol-Kwapinska, Malgorzata. “Hedonism, Fatalism and ‘Carpe diem’: Profiles of Attitudes Towards the Present Time.” *Time & Society*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2003, pp. 371-90.

<sup>11</sup> Weijers. “Hedonism.”

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Cruse, Alan, et al. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge University Press, 1986; Halliday, MAK. et al. *Cohesion in English*. Longman, 1976, pp. 87-89.

<sup>14</sup> Lafleur, Laurence J. “In Defense of Ethical Hedonism.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1956, pp. 547-50.

kind of pleasure to be pursued. In philosophy, Hedonism corresponds to a set of theories that attribute to pleasure a primary role. Ethical Hedonism is the theory in moral philosophy that identifies happiness as the only ultimate value (and not as an instrumental value or one ultimate value among several). The pursuit of this value via the so-called “base or disgusting pleasures” (e.g. sex, drugs, sadism), indifference to long-term consequences on happiness (e.g. rejecting delayed gratification), and the lack of concern for others (e.g. taking pleasure at another person’s expense), despite being features attached to the common use of the word, are not necessarily part of the philosophical understanding of Hedonism.

Similarly, Prudential Hedonism does not make claims about how pleasure should be pursued. Pleasure can be pursued in a variety of ways, from delight of the senses to ascetic spiritual practice, all of which are acceptable to Prudential Hedonism if they are successful.<sup>15</sup> Prudential Hedonism does not usually make any claims about the time-span we should focus on (immediate pleasure vs future pleasure), since pleasure is valued whenever it occurs. Nor does Prudential Hedonism claim that pleasure should be pursued anti-socially. To reiterate, Prudential Hedonism, certainly in its general form,<sup>16</sup> is silent about the source or temporal location of pleasures or whether pleasure can be derived from pro-social behaviors.

In studying Prudential Hedonism, since pleasure is identified as an affect, this thesis can be seen as adopting the research methods of nascent affective science. Affective science can be explained by reference to cognitive science. Cognitive science is defined by Paul Thagard as the multidisciplinary study of cognition. Since the mid-1970s scholars studying cognition started to unite their efforts leaving aside the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, linguistic, anthropology, etc.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, a parallel process of multi-disciplinarity recently emerged in study of affect that is sometimes called affective science.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, this thesis, while having a philosophical approach, strongly relies on empirical evidence, mainly from neuroscience, psychology, and experimental philosophy. In Part 1, neuroscientific evidence is employed to assist the understanding of pleasure’s nature. In Part 2, empirical evidence from experimental philosophy is discussed in relation to the experience machine thought experiment. In Part 3, empirical evidence from psychology is employed and criticized in relation to the Paradox of Hedonism.

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<sup>15</sup> Sheldon, WH. “The Absolute Truth of Hedonism.” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 47, no. 10, 1950, pp. 285-304.

<sup>16</sup> Some versions of Prudential Hedonism could specify otherwise.

<sup>17</sup> Thagard, Paul. “Cognitive Science.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 12 Set. 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Feldman Barrett, Lisa, and James J. Gross. “The Emerging Field of Affective Science.” www.psychologicalscience.org, accessed 12 Set. 2020.

Within philosophy, I aim at contributing to the debate on philosophy of well-being, a sub-field of normative ethics that explores the good life as distinguished from the morally good life.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the description of pleasure in Part 1 is also relevant to philosophy of mind.

Concerning the significance of the research, first of all, as claimed by Willem van der Deijl with regard to Mental Statism about well-being, Prudential Hedonism has gone through a partial resuscitation in recent philosophical scholarship.<sup>20</sup> For many decades, philosophers have reached a consensus that Robert Nozick's experience machine thought experiment was the final nail in the coffin for Prudential Hedonism.<sup>21</sup> However, in the last decade, the tides have turned and the effectiveness of this thought experiment in proving the falsity of Prudential Hedonism has been reconsidered. In fact, as stated by Roger Crisp, "the trend of quickly dismissing Hedonism on the basis of a quick run-through of the experience machine objection is not methodologically sound".<sup>22</sup> In addition to that, in the last years, the interest in virtual reality technologies has boomed.<sup>23</sup> It seems possible that in a not too far future we could actually face the choice of whether to plug into an experience machine.

Second, neurosciences are a burgeoning field. Interest in the nervous system has increased contemporaneously to our understanding of it.<sup>24</sup> It seems that our increased knowledge of the biology of happiness will also increase our ability to manipulate it.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it seems topical to deepen our understanding of happiness' prudential and moral value. Let's give an example: perhaps, in the near future we will be able, through pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, to select embryos with "happy genes", or to genetically engineer "super-happy" embryos.<sup>26</sup> Is it good for the life of the yet-to-be-born person? An accurate analysis of Prudential Hedonism might be essential to answer this question.

Third, research on Prudential Hedonism seems topical if we consider some latest developments in psychology and public policy. Concerning psychology, positive psychology has recently grown into a mainstream research agenda.<sup>27</sup> Positive psychology also aims at enhancing

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<sup>19</sup> As claimed by Moore and Crisp, someone's good (well-being) is conceptually distinct from the good of others and good simpliciter. Moore, Andrew, and Roger Crisp. "Welfarism in Moral Theory." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 74, no. 4, 1996, p. 599.

<sup>20</sup> "Historically, after having gone from the status quo to a nearly extinct view in the past century, such theories now appear to be undergoing a revival". van der Deijl, Willem. "Is Pleasure All That is Good About Experience?" *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 176, no. 7, 2019, p. 1770.

<sup>21</sup> Weijers. "Hedonism."

<sup>22</sup> Crisp. "Well-Being."

<sup>23</sup> Matthews, David. "Virtual-reality Applications Give Science a New Dimension." *Nature*, vol. 557, no. 7703, 2018, pp. 127-28.

<sup>24</sup> LaBar, Kevin S. "Advances in Neuroscience." *Science Advances*, vol. 3, no. 11, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Walker, Mark. "In Praise of Bio-Happiness." *IEET White Paper*, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Seligman, Martin, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. "Positive psychology: An introduction." *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2000, pp. 5-14.

pleasant mental states.<sup>28</sup> So understanding the prudential value of these mental states seems important for this fairly new scientific enterprise. Concerning public policy, the problems with GDP as a measure of welfare have recently led to the popularity of the “politics of happiness” with policy-makers.<sup>29</sup> Countries such as Ecuador, France, Italy, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden and the United Kingdom have employed happiness-measures to design their policies.<sup>30</sup> Again, research on Prudential Hedonism seems topical to evaluate the moral and political value of these policies. In fact, given that these policies aim at increasing citizens’ happiness, to evaluate them seems necessary to assess the value of happiness for people’s lives.

Concerning the structure of the thesis, the research is divided in three parts that respectively address what I see as three key, and quite different, objections to Prudential Hedonism: Part 1 deals with the heterogeneity problem, Part 2 with the experience machine thought experiment, and Part 3 with the Paradox of Hedonism. I also provide a descriptive account of pleasure (Part 1), reject Heathwood’s Motivational Theory of pleasure (Part 1), object to Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory of pleasure (Part 1), dismiss the “argument from worthless pleasure” (Part 2), object to Kagan’s “deceived businessman” thought experiment (Part 2), and introduce and dismiss the “Political Paradox of Happiness” (Part 3).

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<sup>28</sup> “Positive psychology.” [www.dictionary.apa.org](http://www.dictionary.apa.org), accessed 11 Sep. 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Syrquin, Moshe. “GDP as a Measure of Economic Welfare.” *ICER Working Paper*, no. 3, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> The Global Happiness Council. *Global Happiness Policy Report 2018*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2018.

# Part 1—Pleasure: The Prudential Good

Part 1 aims at answering this question: what is pleasure? This might initially seem a peripheral concern for Prudential Hedonism. However, in the past, normative claims about pleasure have been rejected on the grounds of lacking a coherent account of their good. Therefore, presenting a coherent descriptive account of pleasure that still captures its prudential value is an important part of a defense of Prudential Hedonism. Ch. 1 has an informative nature: it is directed at introducing the debate about which Part 1 deals. Thus, special attention is devoted to explaining the terminology, assumptions, and research methods adopted in the following chapters. Ch. 2 concerns desire-based intentionalist theories. In particular, Heathwood's Motivational Theory of pleasure is addressed. As I show, it seems that this theory and desire-based theories in general have serious issues that render them unconvincing. Both neuroscientific evidence and phenomenological reflection seem to discredit them. Ch. 3 addresses Feldman's Attitudinal Theory of pleasure and, indirectly, Feldman's Attitudinal Hedonism. Contrary to Feldman, I claim that pleasure's "feels like" is a desideratum for a descriptive theory of pleasure. *Mutatis mutandis*, Attitudinal Hedonism is not a convincing hedonistic theory because it fails to account for pleasure's felt-goodness. Although, I suggest that the concept of attitudinal pleasure might be able to serve some other purpose. Building on my attempt to resuscitate pleasure's phenomenology in Ch. 3, Ch. 4 spells out my phenomenalist account of pleasure. The view combines the claims of the Distinctive Feeling View and Hedonic Tone Theory, thereby defending the "simple picture" of pleasure.

# Chapter 1—Describing Pleasure: The Heterogeneity Problem

In this chapter, I set the stage for the arguments of Part 1. First, I present Phenomenalism about pleasure (Phenomenalism) as a class of descriptive theories of pleasure. Then, I introduce the heterogeneity problem, namely the claim that pleasures appear very different one from the other and we cannot therefore identify only one thing as “pleasure”, in other words, pleasure cannot be a unitary concept. Next, I introduce the group of descriptive theories that emerges from the heterogeneity problem, Intentionalism about pleasure (Intentionalism). Intentionalism descends from the heterogeneity problem because it was developed to solve it and is sometimes considered a viable solution to it.

## Simple Picture: Feeling Good Written in Biology

This section introduces the *simple picture* of pleasure. On the simple picture, pleasantness is a characteristic feeling.<sup>31</sup> Yet, scholars considered to endorse the simple picture were not oblivious of the variety of pleasurable experiences: Bentham himself identified fourteen kinds of pleasures and nine subtypes of sensory pleasures.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that, according to the simple picture, different pleasures are ultimately only differently caused.<sup>33</sup> The pleasure of chocolate and the pleasure of knowledge are both *pleasure*. Chocolate and knowledge might be different causes of pleasure, while pleasantness still consists in a uniform feeling.

Also, according to Katz, pleasure is, first of all, a biological phenomenon.<sup>34</sup> This circumstance is presupposed by the functioning of psychoactive substances such as drug therapies for depression. Other biological facts about pleasure include that: it tends to variate with sleep, body-temperature, nutrients, and it increases immune response.<sup>35</sup> Also, although my research

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<sup>31</sup> Katz, Leonard D. “Pleasure.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 4 July 2019. In Part 1, being a mental state is considered a first-order property and pleasantness is considered a high-order property. Often I will employ the familiar term “pleasure”; at other times, to avoid confusion, I will use “pleasantness” for the property and “pleasant experience/mental state” for the mental state that instantiates the property.

<sup>32</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Prometheus Books, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Thayer, Robert E. *The Biopsychology of Mood and Arousal*. Oxford University Press, 1989; Thayer, Robert E. *The Origin of Everyday Moods: Understanding and Managing Energy and Tension*. Oxford University Press, 1996; Rosenkranz, Melissa, et al. “Affective Style and *In vivo* Immune Response: Neurobehavioral Mechanisms.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A.*, vol. 100, no. 19, 2003, pp. 11148-52.

focuses on human beings, it seems that other animals can experience pleasure too.<sup>36</sup> For example, scientists have explored rats' gustatory pleasure.<sup>37</sup> They observed that rats respond to sweet and bitter taste stimuli with typical facial reflexes and postural responses. Similar results were observed in birds.<sup>38</sup> Pleasure seems, first of all, a biological event.

Below, the word "pleasure" is used in its broad sense: all "feeling good" is included.<sup>39</sup> This broad use of pleasure is generally accepted by philosophers and is also uncontroversial in non-philosophical language.<sup>40</sup> In fact, in the main European languages, the language of pleasure derives from Platonism. Archaic Greek distinguished "to feel joy" ("chairein") from pleasure in the object ("terpein"). Plato is responsible for the linguistic unification under "hêdonê".<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the broad use of pleasure seems not to be specific to European languages and Western philosophy: the linguist Wierzbicka shows how all languages can express "feeling good".<sup>42</sup> Notice that I employ "displeasure" rather than "pain" as the opposite of pleasure. In fact, while all pain involves displeasure, not all displeasure involves pain.<sup>43</sup> For example, according to common sense, a mosquito-bite is unpleasant but it is not painful. Instead, a headache, by being painful, is also unpleasant.

The broad use of "pleasure" is also coherent with Hedonic Monism, a theory that I defend in Ch. 4. Hedonic Monism includes the claim that the properties of being a mental episode and pleasantness are necessary properties of pleasure.<sup>44</sup> These properties are not arbitrary: they exist independently of the way we speak about or conceive of them. Because of the pleasantness-property, it is not arbitrary to class these mental states, pleasures, together.

Given the heterogeneity problem that is discussed below, notice that in modern and contemporary English the vocabulary of pleasure is indeed heterogeneous.<sup>45</sup> Bentham identified

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<sup>36</sup> Cabanac, Michel. "Do Animals Know Pleasure?" *Mental Health and Well-being in Animals*, edited by FD. McMillan, Iowa State University Press, 2005. pp. 29-46.

<sup>37</sup> Grill, Harvey, and Ralph Norgren. "The Taste Reactivity Test. I. Mimetic Responses to Gustatory Stimuli in Neurologically Normal Rats." *Brain Research*, vol. 143, no. 2, 1978, pp. 263-79.

<sup>38</sup> Gentle, Michael J., and Catherine Harkin. "The Effect of Sweet Stimuli on Oral Behaviour in the Chicken." *Chemical Senses*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1979, pp. 183-90.

<sup>39</sup> Moore, Andrew. "Hedonism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Katz. "Pleasure"; The *Oxford Dictionary of English*, for example, adopts the broad use of "pleasure": "the condition of consciousness or sensation induced by the enjoyment or anticipation of what is felt or viewed as good or desirable." Simpson, John, and Edmund Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 1031.

<sup>41</sup> Cassin, Barbara, et al. "Pleasure." *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 768-99.

<sup>42</sup> Wierzbicka, Anna. *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 279-82, 292-93.

<sup>43</sup> Schroeder, Timothy. *Three Faces of Desire*. Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> Massin, Olivier. *On Pleasures*, 2011, University of Geneva, PhD dissertation, www.unine.academia.edu, accessed 15 Feb. 2020, p. 41.

<sup>45</sup> Aydede, Murat. "How to Unify Theories of Sensory Pleasure: An Adverbialist Proposal." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 119-33.

fifty-four synonyms of “pleasure.”<sup>46</sup> McCloskey noticed that pleasure-expressions can take all of these grammatical forms: noun, adjective, active or passive verb, and adverbial phrase.<sup>47</sup> Given this variety of pleasure-expressions, we should not be tricked by the semantic and grammatical heterogeneity concerning pleasure. When we discuss the heterogeneity problem we are not dealing with a linguistic issue but a phenomenological one—that the apparently large difference in how diverse pleasures feel to us brings into doubt the existence of a unified feeling of pleasantness (and so also the “simple picture” of pleasure).

## **Descriptive Theories of Pleasure**

What is pleasure? Has pleasure a characteristic phenomenology, a “something it is like”? Has it an intentionality? These are just a few of the questions that the philosophical study of pleasure generates. In response to questions like these, philosophical understandings of pleasure can be grouped in two classes. Phenomenalism holds pleasantness to correspond to a distinct feeling (or hedonic tone). Intentionalism holds pleasantness to be an attitude.<sup>48</sup> Below, I start to introduce the debate between these classes of descriptive theories of pleasure. The possible relations between these classes of theories are also analyzed.

The main reason for the paradigm-shift from Phenomenalism to Intentionalism is phenomenological, the heterogeneity problem that is analyzed below.<sup>49</sup> Put briefly, in philosophy of mind, sensations, desires, and beliefs have been considered the fundamental building blocks of all mental states.<sup>50</sup> Phenomenalism has traditionally built the picture of pleasure on the model of sensations, while Intentionalism describes pleasure through certain desires or beliefs. Notice that Intentionalism consists in a claim about pleasure’s intentionality, its intrinsic directedness toward some object,<sup>51</sup> it is not a claim about pleasure’s relationship with the will, as “intention” may suggest.<sup>52</sup> Also notice that the terminology of this debate is not uniform: some scholars employ

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<sup>46</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. “Table of the Springs of Action.” *Deontology; Together with A Table of the Springs of Action; and the Article on Utilitarianism*, edited by Amnon Goldworth, Clarendon Press, 1983.

<sup>47</sup> McCloskey, Mary A. “Pleasure.” *Mind*, vol. 80, no. 320, 1971, pp. 542-51.

<sup>48</sup> Bengtsson, David. *Pleasure and The Phenomenology of Value*. [www.citeseerx.ist.psu.edu](http://www.citeseerx.ist.psu.edu), accessed 29 Jan. 2020.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Helm, Bennett W. “Felt Evaluations: A Theory of Pleasure and Pain.” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Spear, Andrew D. “Edmund Husserl: Intentionality and Intentional Content.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu), accessed 29 Jan. 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Moore. “Hedonism.”

Internalism and Externalism to name the sets of theories.<sup>53</sup> Others call them Felt-quality and Attitudinal.<sup>54</sup> Bramble uses the terms Phenomenological and Attitudinal.<sup>55</sup>

How do Phenomenalism and Intentionalism interact? Radical intentionalist accounts hold that pleasure has not a common phenomenal or felt character.<sup>56</sup> There is not a shared feeling that allows us to class pleasures together. These accounts are inconsistent with phenomenalist accounts, which claim that pleasure does have a typical felt character. According to A. Moore, Moderate Intentionalism, instead, holds that pleasures are both intentional and phenomenal, making it consistent with Moderate Phenomenalism.<sup>57</sup> Moderate Phenomenalism is likewise consistent with Moderate Intentionalism: it considers pleasure to have both a phenomenal and an intentional character. Moderate Phenomenalism and Moderate Intentionalism are seen by A. Moore as hybrid accounts. Some phenomenalist accounts cannot be considered radical nor moderate because they are indeterminate in respect to intentionality.<sup>58</sup> In Ch. 3, I will argue in favor of a non-separatist phenomenalist account—a view that does not deny the intentionality of certain pleasures but that considers pleasure’s felt-character essential for the description of it.

### **Philosophy of Mind’s Broader Picture**

This section firstly shows how the Phenomenalism/Intentionalism debate about pleasure seems to depend on a more foundational debate. In philosophy of mind, the scopes of intentionality and phenomenology are matter of debate. Since this debate concerns the nature of all mental states, it also affects the description of pleasure. Next, I describe the research methods of Part 1.

Intentionality is, for Brentano, the characteristic that distinguishes mental states from physical states.<sup>59</sup> For him, mental states have the feature of being directed toward certain states of affairs. Intentionality is thought to be the common feature of attitudes, cognitive states like beliefs and desires.<sup>60</sup> Thus, building on ancient cognitive models, Brentano considered pleasure to denote a

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<sup>53</sup> Crisp, Roger. *Reasons and the Good*. Oxford University Press, 2006; Sumner, Leonard W. *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*. Clarendon Press, 1996; van der Deijl, Willem. “Is Pleasure All That is Good About Experience?” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 176, no. 7, 2019, pp. 1769-87; Driver, Julia. “Pleasure as The Standard of Virtue in Hume’s Moral Philosophy.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 2, 2004, pp. 173-194.

<sup>54</sup> Carson, Thomas L. *Value and the Good Life*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2000; Heathwood, Chris. “The Reduction of Sensory Pleasure to Desire.” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 133, no. 1, 2007, pp. 23-44.

<sup>55</sup> Bramble, Ben. “The Distinctive Feeling Theory of Pleasure.” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 162, no. 2, 2013, pp. 201-17.

<sup>56</sup> Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism*. Oxford University Press, 2004; Shafer-Landau, Russ. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Moore. “Hedonism.”

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Brentano, Franz. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Routledge, 1995; Morgan, Alex, and Gualtiero Piccinini. “Towards a Cognitive Neuroscience of Intentionality.” *Minds and Machines*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2018, pp. 119-39.

<sup>60</sup> Castelli, Fulvia. “Mind, Theories of.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier, 2015, pp 539-44.

mental act of willing or loving directed to a cognitively presented object.<sup>61</sup> Brentano, while holding that pleasure is a mental state, argued that mental episodes are directed at objects different from themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Are Brentano and his followers correct? Do all mental states have intentionality? Many philosophers do not agree with Brentano's claim that intentionality is the mark of all conscious experiences.<sup>63</sup> Concerning pleasure, Hamilton and Reid rejected this claim and argued that bodily pleasures are non-intentional mental episodes.<sup>64</sup> They appealed to reflexive consciousness: bodily pleasures are mental because they are self-conscious, they are directed only toward themselves. In other words, according to this view, we are conscious of the experience of pleasure, but not necessarily in the intentional way that characterizes reflection, when we think and make judgments about the experience. In this view, pleasure is necessarily reflexive without necessarily being reflective.

Stump and Husserl objected to Brentano's view on different grounds. They argued against Brentano's claim that all pleasures are mental phenomena: bodily pleasures are non-mental non-intentional phenomena.<sup>65</sup> In other words, they equated bodily pleasures with what Brentano considered physical phenomena. For them, bodily pleasures are neither intentional acts nor self-conscious feelings, they are intentional objects akin to colors and smells.

That said, in philosophy of mind, phenomenal consciousness is often contrasted with intentionality.<sup>66</sup> For a mental state to have a phenomenal character, there is something that is like to have that mental state.<sup>67</sup> The scope of phenomenal character is a matter of controversy. For example, according to some, there is a cognitive phenomenal character.<sup>68</sup> There is more in a

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<sup>61</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>62</sup> Massin, Olivier. "The Intentionality of Pleasures and Other Feelings. A Brentanian Approach." *Themes from Brentano*, Brill Rodopi, 2013, pp. 307-38.

<sup>63</sup> Jacob, Pierre. "Intentionality." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 20 Feb. 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, William. *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*. Edited by HL. Mansel and J. Veitch, William Blackwood and Sons, 1882; Reid, Thomas. *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. Edited by D. R. Brookes, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> Stumpf, Carl. "Apologie der Gefühlsempfindungen." *Gefühl und Gefühlsempfindung*, Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1928, pp. 103-40; Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. Translated by JN. Findlay, Routledge, 1970.

<sup>66</sup> Kind, Amy. "Qualia." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 28 Feb. 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Schiller, Henry. "Phenomenal Dispositions." *Synthese*, vol. 197, no. 9, 2020, pp. 3969-80.

<sup>68</sup> For cognitive phenomenology, see: Crane, Tim. "Unconscious Belief and Conscious Thought." *Phenomenal Intentionality*, edited by Uriah Kriegel, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 156; Chudnoff, Elijah. "Intellectual Gestalts." *Phenomenal Intentionality*, edited by Uriah Kriegel, Oxford University Press, 2013; Goldman, Alvin. "The Psychology of Folk Psychology." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 15-28; Pitt, David. "The Phenomenology of Cognition, or What Is It Like to Think That P?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1-36; Pitt, David. "Intentional Psychologism." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 146, no. 1, 2009, pp. 117-38; Pitt, David. "Introspection, Phenomenality, and the Availability of Intentional Content." *Cognitive Phenomenology*, edited by T. Bayne and M. Montague, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 141-73; Searle, John. "Mind, Brains, and Programs." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1980, pp. 417-57; Searle, John. *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge University Press, 1983; Searle, John. "Consciousness, Unconsciousness, and Intentionality." *Philosophical Issues*, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 45-66; Siewert, Charles. *The Significance of Consciousness*.

cognitive episode than just information-processing describable from an external, third-person perspective.<sup>69</sup> For them, conscious thoughts possess a phenomenology.<sup>70</sup> According to others, not all mental states are characterized solely by how they feel or have a feel at all.<sup>71</sup> The occurrent belief that the Moon is cold is often thought to be feeling-less, it is often thought to not have a “feels like”.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, it is often thought that I can distinguish my experience of warm water from my experience of cold water by how they feel.<sup>73</sup> Still, my research adopts an expansive view on phenomenology. It holds that there is something that it is like to consciously believe, consciously desire, and so on. A conscious cognitive state is considered to have a phenomenology.

So, it is controversial whether all intentional states also have a phenomenology and whether all phenomenal states also have intentionality.<sup>74</sup> Some scholars hold that phenomenal consciousness reduces to intentional content, while others claim the opposite. Others argue against both positions.<sup>75</sup> However, this debate exceeds the scope of my research. I restrict my discussion to the Phenomenalism/Intentionalism debate about pleasure. My interest in Part 1 lies in descriptive accounts of pleasure relevant for Prudential Hedonism.

My investigation ultimately adopts a phenomenological approach. It is directed at analyzing pleasure from a first-person perspective, in contrast with, for example, explaining what biological function it serves. Especially under the spotlight of a hedonistic theory, it does not seem useful to ground pleasure’s value on biological functioning. After all, Prudential Hedonism considers the happy life, not the life of perfect evolutionary functioning, as the good life. Even if natural selection and pleasure may have important connections, Prudential Hedonism values the latter independently of the former.

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Princeton University Press, 1998; Siewert, Charles. “Phenomenal Thought.” *Cognitive Phenomenology*, edited by T. Bayne and M. Montague, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 236-77; Strawson, Galen. *Mental Reality*. MIT Press, 1994; Strawson, Galen. “Cognitive Phenomenology: Real Life.” *Cognitive Phenomenology*, edited by T. Bayne and M. Montague, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 285-325.

<sup>69</sup> Dewalque, Arnaud. “Külpe on Cognitive Attitudes.” *Discipline Filosofiche*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2017, pp. 157-76.

<sup>70</sup> Hansen, Mette Kristine. “Cognitive Phenomenology.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 11 June 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, David Woodruff. “Phenomenology.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 11 Feb. 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Schiller. “Phenomenal Dispositions.”

<sup>73</sup> Smith DW. “Phenomenology.”

<sup>74</sup> Kind. “Qualia.”

<sup>75</sup> There is no consensus on whether mental states can be phenomenally-conscious while not also being conscious in the functionally/representational sense or vice versa. Functionalism is the theory that holds a mental state to be a functional state, a state that is definable in terms of causal relations with inputs, outputs, and other mental states.

Representationalism consists in the idea that an experience’s phenomenal character reduces to its representational content. For Representationalism, then, pleasantness can be explained in terms of pleasure’s content. Carruthers, Peter. “Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 4 July 2019; For Functionalism see: Block, Ned. “Are Absent Qualia Impossible?” *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 89, no. 2, 1980, pp. 257-74; For Representationalism see: Cutter, Brian, and Michael Tye. “Tracking Representationalism and the Painfulness of Pain.” *Philosophical Issues*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2011; Bain, David. “Evaluativist Accounts of Pain’s Unpleasantness.” *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Pain*, edited by Jennifer Corns, Routledge, 2017.

However, I do not follow the explicit anti-naturalist program of Husserl's phenomenology.<sup>76</sup> Husserl saw himself as "fighting against the naturalization of consciousness".<sup>77</sup> Instead, given that pleasure seems first of all a biological phenomenon, I proceed by considering also neurosciences. It seems that our progress in understanding pleasure is strictly related to the new results of natural sciences and their philosophical interpretation.<sup>78</sup>

Introspective cogency and accordance with neuroscientific evidence end up being the main desiderata for my descriptive account of pleasure. Given my phenomenological approach and my expansive view on phenomenology, in Ch. 2, I appeal to the distinct phenomenologies of pleasure and desire. In Ch. 3, I argue for the resuscitation of attitudinal pleasure's "feels like". In Chs. 3 and 4, I claim that pleasure does have a distinct and unified quale. Qualia are the intrinsic qualities of experience that are available to introspection.<sup>79</sup> They are the phenomenal properties of the experience.<sup>80</sup> Given my neuroscientifically-informed approach, empirical evidence is discussed in relation to desire-based theories of pleasure (Ch. 2), the affective understanding of pleasure (Ch. 3), and the heterogeneity problem (Ch. 4).

## Phenomenalism About Pleasure

Phenomenalist accounts claim that pleasantness is a or property characterized by a certain phenomenology, feel, felt character, tone.<sup>81</sup> Pleasantness is understood through the feel of the experience.<sup>82</sup> In other words, according to this set of theories, pleasantness is some sort of feeling.<sup>83</sup> Historically, Phenomenalism has been adopted by Hume, Bentham, and Mill.<sup>84</sup> More recently, advocates of Phenomenalism include: G. Moore, Broad, Schlick, Sprigge, Tännsjö, Crisp, Bradley, Labukt, Kagan, Duncker, Smuts, and Bramble.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Albertazzi, Liliana. "Naturalizing Phenomenology: A Must Have?" *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 9, no. 1933, 2018.

<sup>77</sup> Husserl, Edmund. "Philosophy as Rigorous Science." *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, edited by Q. Lauer, Harper, 1965, pp. 69-147.

<sup>78</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>79</sup> Tye, Michael. "Qualia." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Kind. "Qualia."

<sup>81</sup> Moore. "Hedonism"; Smuts, Aaron. "The Feels Good Theory of Pleasure." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 155, no. 2, 2011, pp. 241-65; Crisp, Roger. "Hedonism Reconsidered." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2006, pp. 619-45.

<sup>82</sup> Alwood, Andrew. "How Pleasures Make Life Better." *Kriterion-Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-24.

<sup>83</sup> Feldman, Fred. "The Good Life: A Defense of Attitudinal Hedonism." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2002, pp. 604-28; Feldman, Fred. "On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures." *Ethics*, vol. 107, no. 3, 1997, pp. 448-66; Van der Deijl. "Is pleasure"; Bramble, Ben. "The Experience Machine." *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2016, pp. 136-45.

<sup>84</sup> Crisp. "Hedonism Reconsidered"; Moore. "Hedonism."

<sup>85</sup> Moore, George E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge University Press, 1903, p. 64; Broad, Charlie D. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. Routledge, 1930, pp. 229-233; Schlick, Moritz. *Problems of Ethics*. Prentice-Hall, 1939, ch. 2; Sprigge, Timothy LS. *The Rational Foundations of Ethics*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, ch. 5; Tännsjö, Torbjörn. *Hedonistic Utilitarianism*. Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 84; Crisp. "Reasons", pp. 103-109; Bradley, Ben. *Well-*

Given that pleasures are seen as experiences that share something it is like to have them—a certain phenomenal character—any cognitive process, implicit or explicit, is not necessary.<sup>86</sup> Pleasure does not need to be intentional (although it can be for moderate accounts). Intentionality and cognition are not necessary because the experience is a pleasure in virtue of its phenomenal qualities, not in virtue of an attitude.<sup>87</sup> Eventually, an attitude can have pleasure as its object but this is not a conceptual necessity. Pleasure can be an immediate experience that does not require cognitive accessibility.<sup>88</sup> In fact, scholars that support the simple picture, identify the value of pleasure in its immediate experience, rather than in the cognitive awareness of it.<sup>89</sup>

### The Heterogeneity Problem

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the stark differences between the phenomenology of different pleasant experiences have convinced many philosophers to abandon a phenomenalist conception of pleasure.<sup>90</sup> The simple picture has been contested at least since Plato claimed that pleasure is so heterogeneous that it is not possible to generalize about it.<sup>91</sup> Thus, Usher claims, the debate between Phenomenalism and Intentionalism about pleasure can be traced back at least as far as Ancient Greek philosophy.<sup>92</sup> However, the problem is often thought to emerge with Sidgwick and be popularized by Ryle in the late 1940s.<sup>93</sup>

Sidgwick could not find any feeling that was present in all pleasant experiences, i.e. there is not a shared feeling between the pleasure of chocolate, the pleasure of knowledge, the pleasure of painful art, and so on.<sup>94</sup> Sidgwick therefore advanced that “pleasure” refers to experiences that do

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*Being and Death*. Oxford University Press, 2009; Labukt, Ivar. “Hedonic Tone and the Heterogeneity of Pleasure.” *Utilitas*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2012, pp. 172-99; Kagan, Shelly. “The Limits of Well-being.” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1992, pp. 169-89; Duncker, Karl. “On Pleasure, Emotion, and Striving.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1941, pp. 391-430; Smuts. “The Feels Good”; Bramble. “The Distinctive Feeling.”

<sup>86</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>87</sup> Alwood. “How Pleasures.”

<sup>88</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>89</sup> Block, Ned, et al. *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*. MIT Press, 1997; Block, Ned. “Biology Versus Computation in the Study of Consciousness.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1997, pp. 159-65; Block, Ned. “Concepts of Consciousness.” *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by David Chalmers, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 206-18; Katz, Leonard D. “Opioid Bliss as the Felt Hedonic Core of Mammalian Prosociality—and of Consummatory Pleasure more Generally?” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2005, p. 356.

<sup>90</sup> Aydede, Murat. “A Contemporary Account of Sensory Pleasure.” *Pleasure: A History*, edited by Lisa Shapiro, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 239-66; Crisp. “Hedonism Reconsidered.”

<sup>91</sup> Plato. “Philebus.” *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, translated by R. Hackforth, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton University Press, 1973, 12B-13C.

<sup>92</sup> Plato is considered an early advocate of Intentionalism. Usher, Mathew. “Felt-quality and Attitudinal Accounts of Pleasure and Pain in Ancient Greek and Contemporary Philosophy.” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Special no. Australia and New Zealand, 2017, pp. 41-55.

<sup>93</sup> Bengtsson. “Pleasure.”

<sup>94</sup> Katz. “Pleasure”; Heathwood. “The Reduction.”

not share any specific introspected quality but rather an intrinsic desirability.<sup>95</sup> Pleasure, he said, is “a feeling, which, when experienced by intelligent beings, is at least implicitly apprehended as desirable”.<sup>96</sup> In other words, Sidgwick claimed that pleasure corresponds to different feelings accompanied by a desire for them: pleasures can be understood as experiences for which the subject has an intrinsic desire at the time he experiences them.

Ryle, influenced by Behaviorism<sup>97</sup>—a psychological theory that aimed at explaining feelings away—argued against the conceptualization of pleasure as a sensation.<sup>98</sup> According to him, pleasure implies a rationalization on behalf of the subject.<sup>99</sup> Inspired by Aristotle, he understood pleasure as a mode of engagement in activity.<sup>100</sup> Although he was admittedly not able to give a non-metaphorical account, Ryle understood this engagement as being absorbed.<sup>101</sup> In Ryle’s view, pleasure is a disposition rather than an episode.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, between the late-1950s and the mid-1970s several philosophers debated whether pleasure is episodic or dispositional.<sup>103</sup> After, Ryle’s logical dispositionalism was rejected: contemporary debate assumes that pleasure is an episode.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, Ryle had popularized Sidgwick’s concern, the heterogeneity problem.<sup>105</sup>

The heterogeneity problem is considered an objection to phenomenalist theories of pleasure.<sup>106</sup> Bramble formalizes the argument based on it this way:

- 1) Phenomenalist theories entail that all pleasures feel alike in some way.
- 2) All pleasures do not feel alike in some way.

Therefore,

- 3) Phenomenalist theories are false.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>96</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. Macmillan, 1930, p. 127.

<sup>97</sup> Aydede, Murat. “An Analysis of Pleasure Vis-à-vis Pain.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2000, pp. 537-70.

<sup>98</sup> Ryle, Gilbert. “Pleasure.” *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*, edited by DF. Gustafson, Anchor Books, 1964.

<sup>99</sup> Bonasio, Giulia. “Aesthetic Pleasure: Cognition and Emotion in the Aesthetic Concepts. Remarks after Sibley’s Works.” *Rivista di Estetica*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2014, pp. 183-201.

<sup>100</sup> Ryle, Gilbert. *The Concept of Mind*. Penguin Classics, 2000; Wolfsdorf, David. *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy. Key Themes in Ancient Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2013; Lobel, Diana. *Philosophies of Happiness. A Comparative Introduction to the Flourishing Life*. Columbia University Press, 2017, app. 1; Bengtsson. “Pleasure.”

<sup>101</sup> Wolfsdorf. “Pleasure.”

<sup>102</sup> Wolfsdorf, David. *Ancient and Contemporary Philosophical Conceptions of Pleasure*. www.temple.edu, accessed 28 Apr. 2020.

<sup>103</sup> Wolfsdorf. “Ancient.”

<sup>104</sup> Nowell-Smith, Patrick Horace. *Ethics*. Penguin, 1954; Penelhum, Terence. “The Logic of Pleasure.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1957, pp. 488-503; Armstrong, David M. *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. Routledge, 1968; Lyons, William. *Gilbert Ryle: An Introduction to his Philosophy*. Harvester and Atlantic Highlands, 1980; Wolfsdorf. “Ancient.”

<sup>105</sup> Bengtsson. “Pleasure.”

<sup>106</sup> Aydede. “How to Unify”; Heathwood. “The Reduction.”

<sup>107</sup> Bramble, Ben. “A New Defense of Hedonism about Well-Being.” *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2016.

According to this line of thought, pleasures are so dissimilar that there is no singular phenomenalist concept of “pleasure” that could capture all instances of pleasure.<sup>108</sup> In other words, pleasures can correspond to such heterogeneous experiences that there is not a unified experience we can call “pleasure”. What is denied is that pleasures share a phenomenal character corresponding to pleasantness.<sup>109</sup> Several philosophers have agreed with Sidgwick in holding that pleasures do not feel alike.<sup>110</sup> They thus concluded that pleasures, rather than being experiences sharing a specific felt-quality, are a class of mental states that share a favorable attitude.

### **Intentionalism About Pleasure**

Intentionalist theories emerged as a reply to the heterogeneity problem. If there is no feeling that is common to all instances of pleasure, then a phenomenalist analysis of pleasure will not succeed.

What are the alternatives? An intentional analysis is one of the main contenders.

Phenomenalism describes pleasure in a common-sense way.<sup>111</sup> Consider an orgasm, why is it good? “Because it feels good”, the layperson would likely reply.<sup>112</sup> Rather, according to Sidgwick, it is good because I want it. For folk psychology, Intentionalism counter-intuitively inverts the order of explanation. According to common sense, someone desires an orgasm because it feels good.<sup>113</sup> Accordingly, Schroeder rejects Intentionalism and claims that the burden of proof should fall on whomsoever denies common sense.<sup>114</sup>

Still, although Intentionalism contradicts the common understanding of pleasure,<sup>115</sup> philosophers often study phenomena that “the folk” take for granted and take pride in challenging commonsense convictions. Indeed, the belief that phenomenalist theories of pleasure have been knocked down by the heterogeneity problem has led several philosophers to favor intentionalist theories. Intentionalism is sometimes considered the leading view amongst descriptive theories of pleasure.<sup>116</sup> Philosophers endorsing Intentionalism include: Chisholm, Crane, Parfit, Alston,

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<sup>108</sup> Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Bain, David, and Michael Brady. “Pain, Pleasure and Unpleasure.” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1-14.

<sup>110</sup> Scholars considering the heterogeneity problem a genuine issue include: Alston, William. “Pleasure.” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Collier-Macmillan, 1968; Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 493; For the heterogeneity of displeasures see: Korsgaard, Christine M. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 148.

<sup>111</sup> Bramble. “A new Defense”; Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Bramble. “A new Defense.”

<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Aristotle claims that we desire things because we think that they are good, rather than think that they are good because they satisfy our desires. Aristotle. “Metaphysics.” *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by J. Barnes, Princeton University Press, 1984, 1072a.

<sup>114</sup> Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Glucklich, Ariel. “Pain and Ecstatic Religious Experience.” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, www.oxfordhandbooks.com, accessed 18 Feb. 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone”; Bramble. “A new Defense.”

Carson, Heathwood, and Feldman.<sup>117</sup> According to them, pleasures' unity can be guaranteed by pleasantness being a distinct attitude.<sup>118</sup> Pleasures' disunity is thought to be a consequence of the varying intentional content of the attitude.<sup>119</sup>

Given that, what is an attitude? Unfortunately, there is not a standard use of "attitude" in philosophy and psychology.<sup>120</sup> At this level of analysis, let's consider attitudes as a class of mental states in various relations to thoughts, with belief and desire as the paradigmatic cases.<sup>121</sup> For example, one might take a range of attitudes to the thought "It's raining"—one might believe that it's raining, desire that it will rain, or take pleasure in the fact that it's raining after a long drought. Since they involve thinking, beliefs, desires, and attitudes in general are taken to be cognitive processes that are about something other than themselves.<sup>122</sup> Notice that, in the case of desires, "conative" is a more precise term. However, as claimed by Millán, in many uses of "cognitive" the distinction is blurred.<sup>123</sup>

For Intentionalism, pleasantness corresponds to a single attitude that can be directed at varying contents.<sup>124</sup> The type of attitude is, in this view, what all cases of pleasure share.<sup>125</sup> Different intentionalist accounts point to different attitudes, e.g. apprehending as desirable, enjoying for its own sake, wanting it to continue for its own sake, taking immediate pleasure in it, finding it intrinsically enjoyable.<sup>126</sup> These theories are supposed, through a single attitude, to solve the heterogeneity problem by accommodating the phenomenological disunity of pleasures while maintaining their unity in a distinct attitude.

To reiterate, intentionalist accounts consist in the thesis that pleasure is an intentional state with the structure "subject-mode-content".<sup>127</sup> In other words, Intentionalism claims that pleasure is an intentional state, in the pleasure mode, with an object. Wolfsdorf makes an example concerning

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<sup>117</sup> Chisholm, Roderick M. *Brentano and Intrinsic Value*. Cambridge University Press, 1986; Crane, Tim. *The Elements of Mind*. Oxford University Press, 2001; Parfit. "Reasons and Persons"; Alston. "Pleasure"; Carson. "Value"; Heathwood. "The Reduction"; Feldman. "Pleasure and the Good Life."

<sup>118</sup> Feldman. "On the Intrinsic."

<sup>119</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>120</sup> Katz. "Pleasure"; The related term "propositional attitudes" was coined by Russell and descends from the fact that their content can be understood as the proposition they point to. Propositional attitudes are entities that demand sentence-like objects. It is not settled whether all intentional states are propositional attitudes. Oppy, Graham. "Propositional Attitudes." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1998, pp. 779-87; Fodor, Jerry A. "Propositional Attitudes." *The Monist*, vol. 61, 1978, pp. 501-23; The related term "pro-attitude" corresponds to an attitude in favor of something. Blackburn, Simon. "Pro-attitude." *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 384.

<sup>121</sup> Rey, Georges. "Philosophy of Mind." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com, accessed 31 Jan. 2020; Castelli. "Mind, Theories of."

<sup>122</sup> Connors, Michael H., and Peter W. Halligan. "A Cognitive Account of Belief: A Tentative Road Map." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 1588, 2015; Millán. "Nussbaum."

<sup>123</sup> For the different meanings of "cognitive": Millán. "Nussbaum."

<sup>124</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>125</sup> Feldman. "On the Intrinsic"; Feldman. "Pleasure and the Good Life."

<sup>126</sup> Feldman. "On the Intrinsic."

<sup>127</sup> Moore. "Hedonism"; Smuts. "The Feels Good."

the pleasure of lavender's scent: for Phenomenalism this pleasure is the good feeling that accompanies the experience, for Intentionalism this pleasure consists in a favorable attitude toward the scent, such as believing the scent to be pleasant or preferable to others.<sup>128</sup> According to Intentionalism, pleasure's phenomenal character is reduced to its intentional character.<sup>129</sup>

### Significance for the Research on Prudential Hedonism

These different descriptive accounts of pleasure have implications for Prudential Hedonism. Below, I discuss two points of tangency between the philosophy of mind's debate on the nature of pleasure and philosophy of well-being's debate on its prudential value.

Monism about pleasure is the view that there is only one property corresponding to it. Pluralism about pleasure consists in the claim that there are multiple sufficient conditions for pleasure: there is no distinct/homogenous element in all pleasures.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the move from Phenomenalism to Intentionalism about pleasure was not the only strategy available to accommodate the heterogeneity problem. Yet, the literature generally overlooks pluralist phenomenalist accounts.<sup>131</sup> Philosophers have generally not concluded that there are multiple feelings of pleasure without questioning Phenomenalism.<sup>132</sup>

However, if pleasure is not a coherent class, Phenomenalist Quantitative Prudential Hedonism (PQPH) would lose its axiological monism, a practical strength and conceptual elegance of the theory. PQPH would become a pluralist theory of well-being.<sup>133</sup> In other words, if we hold that there is more than one kind of pleasantness, then there is a plurality of hedonistic good-makers. This Pluralism would be a troublesome feature for PQPH—the theory that my research concerns.<sup>134</sup> It would make pleasures incommensurable even when the relevant intensity and duration

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<sup>128</sup> Wolfsdorf. "Ancient."

<sup>129</sup> Moore. "Hedonism"; For the reduction of phenomenal character to intentional character concerning pain: Bain, David. "Intentionalism and Pain." *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 213, 2003, pp. 502-23; For the reduction of phenomenal character to intentional character concerning moods and emotions: Mendelovici, Angela. "Pure Intentionalism About Moods and Emotions." *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Uriah Kriegel, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>130</sup> Moore. "Hedonism."

<sup>131</sup> Labukt. "Hedonic Tone."

<sup>132</sup> Alwood, Andrew. "The Value of Heterogeneous Pleasures." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 19, no. 8, 2018, pp. 2303-14.

<sup>133</sup> Labukt. "Hedonic Tone"; Massin. "The Intentionality."

<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, Pluralism seems necessary for Phenomenalist Qualitative Hedonism in order to avoid the collapse of pleasure's quality into its quantity or non-hedonistic values. For this theory, pleasures, in addition to varying in their quantity, vary in their quality. Imagine the pleasure of reading an essay compared to the pleasure of lying on the beach. Phenomenalist Qualitative Hedonism might claim that the former pleasure is more valuable than the latter. For the coherence of the theory, the higher value of reading an essay cannot depend on its higher felt-pleasantness or on the non-hedonistic value "knowledge". So, if there are multiple feelings of pleasure, each one may contribute non-instrumentally more or less to well-being. The specific pleasant feel of reading an essay might be considered more valuable for well-being than the specific pleasant feel of lying on the beach. The resulting hierarchy of pleasures would not be based on felt-intensity or non-hedonistic values. Moore. "Hedonism."

information is known. The trades-off between different pleasures would have to be devised in terms different than just the quantity of pleasure. As claimed by Weijers, if pleasures are incomparable, PQPH would not be able to compare lives, and therefore, choices and behaviors.<sup>135</sup> In this case, PQPH would lose part of its normative force by being an unpractical theory of well-being.

To reiterate, beyond certain descriptive endeavors within philosophical psychology, the heterogeneity problem is also a thorn in the side of hedonistic normative theories.<sup>136</sup> If pleasures do not form a coherent class, this is also an issue for theories that hold pleasure and only pleasure to be prudentially or morally valuable. Anscombe and Rawls, for example, have rejected Ethical Hedonism for this reason.<sup>137</sup> Thus, defenders of hedonistic normative theories need a meaningful definition of pleasantness that unifies the apparently disunified list of pleasures.

Moreover, the debate about the heterogeneity problem is directly relevant for Prudential Hedonism in another way. In fact, descriptive theories such as Feldman's Attitudinal Theory, a prominent one in the contemporary debate, are supposed to accommodate the heterogeneity problem.<sup>138</sup> However, Feldman's Attitudinal Theory, by adopting a feeling-less understanding of pleasure, is problematic in the context of Prudential Hedonism because unfeeling attitudes are not pleasures in the sense that is relevant for this theory of well-being.

Feldman's understanding of pleasure makes it unrecognizable as the prudential good that makes Prudential Hedonism intuitively plausible.<sup>139</sup> Consider what Goldstein wrote: "that there is something in a pleasant experience worth having and something in a painful experience worth avoiding is obvious".<sup>140</sup> Feldman's feeling-less pleasure seems unable to account for this "obvious" goodness of pleasure. When feeling good is cut off from the picture, the intrinsic value of pleasure loses its intuitiveness. Consequently, Feldman's Attitudinal Hedonism—the theory that holds feeling-less attitudinal pleasure to be the intrinsic prudential good—has been thought by Weijers and Olsaretti to collapse into Desire-satisfactionism.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, Heathwood concludes that Attitudinal Hedonism and Desire-satisfactionism are the same theory.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Weijers, Dan. "Hedonism." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 29 Jan. 2020.

<sup>136</sup> Moore. "Hedonism"; Weijers. "Hedonism."

<sup>137</sup> Anscombe, Elizabeth. *Intention*. Blackwell, 1963, pp. 77–78; Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 489–90, n. 28.

<sup>138</sup> Feldman, Fred. "Two Questions about Pleasure." *Philosophical Analysis: A Defense by Example*, edited by David Austin, Springer, 1988, pp. 59–81.

<sup>139</sup> Smuts. "The Feels Good."

<sup>140</sup> Goldstein, Irwin. "Why People Prefer Pleasure to Pain." *Philosophy*, vol. 55, no. 213, 1980, pp. 349–62.

<sup>141</sup> Weijers. "Hedonism"; Olsaretti, Serena. "The Limits of Hedonism: Feldman on the Value of Attitudinal Pleasure." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 136, no. 3, 2007, pp. 409–15.

<sup>142</sup> Heathwood, Chris. "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 128, no. 3, 2006, pp. 539–63; Feldman denies that: he claims that his theory of well-being values people enjoying what they get rather than getting what they want. Feldman. "Pleasure and the Good Life", pp. 69–71.

To summarize, for Prudential Hedonism, pleasure needs to be intuitively attractive. This explains why there are reasons to pursue pleasure. The rationality of pursuing pleasure implies that there is a fact about pleasure that makes the pursuit of it to be preferred to other choices.<sup>143</sup> The Attitudinal Theory of pleasure, if used as a building block for a theory of well-being, makes Prudential Hedonism unconvincing because it fails to account for the intuitive goodness of its prudential good.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I introduced the literature upon which Part 1 elaborates. First, I presented Phenomenalism as a class of theories. Phenomenalism understands pleasantness as a feeling. Since pleasantness is thought to pick out a feeling, that feeling is at least one way all pleasures are phenomenologically alike. Second, I introduced the heterogeneity problem, an issue that is considered an objection to phenomenalist theories of pleasure. The difficulty in pointing out a shared “feels like” between different pleasures is thought to undermine any theories (Phenomenalism) that require pleasures to share a phenomenology. Third, I presented Intentionalism which is sometimes thought to accommodate the disunity of pleasures by pointing to a shared attitude that unify them. According to Intentionalism, these disunified feelings that pleasure picks out are unified only by being liked by the subject experiencing them. Pleasure is thought to be an attitude, a cognitive process with an intentional structure. Finally, I explained how the debate descending from the heterogeneity problem is directly relevant for PQPH. In fact, axiological monism is, especially practically, a strength of this theory. Thus, in Part 1, I defend PQPH’s axiological monism by defending Phenomenalist Monism about pleasure. In fact, a prominent alternative to Phenomenalist Monism, Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory, does not seem able to account for the goodness of pleasure—Prudential Hedonism’s ultimate value.

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<sup>143</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

## Chapter 2—Desire-based Theories and Heathwood’s Motivational Theory

In this chapter, I address desire-based intentionalist theories of pleasure, a group of theories that identify desire as the attitude that unifies all pleasures. Heathwood’s Motivational Theory of pleasure is the central target. Thus, I investigate how desire fits into the picture of pleasure. I investigate whether the relationship that exists between pleasure and desire is more likely a conceptual/empirical necessity or an empirical tendency. I conclude that desire is not the relevant attitude for a descriptive theory of pleasure because desire does not seem to be a constant attitude among every episode of pleasure.

### Desire-based Intentionalist Theories

According to desire-based intentionalist theories, desire is the relevant attitude for the conceptualization of pleasure. Remember that the heterogeneity problem claims that there is no shared feeling of pleasure identifiable in all pleasures. Desire-based intentionalist theories claim to resolve the heterogeneity problem by uniting disparate pleasures through desire.<sup>144</sup> All pleasures are desired. In this way, desire is considered to be the attitude that unifies the supposedly heterogeneous feelings that are usually grouped under “pleasure”.

As we have already seen, for Sidgwick, a feeling is a pleasure because the subject finds it desirable.<sup>145</sup> For him, pleasure’s relation to desire, all pleasures’ desirability, is what the many diverse feelings of pleasure share. Indeed, we can agree that pleasure and desire have important connections. For example, people often desire pleasure or goods that are likely to produce pleasure. Analogous connections can be established between desire in the form of aversion and pain.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, philosophers such as Findlay and McDougall held pleasure as necessarily related to desire.<sup>147</sup> For Morillo, episodes of pleasure are episodes of desire and vice versa.<sup>148</sup> Desire-based

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<sup>144</sup> Heathwood. “The Reduction”; de Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna, and Peter Singer. *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 240-246.

<sup>145</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *Methods of Ethics*. University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 131.

<sup>146</sup> Heathwood. “The Reduction.”

<sup>147</sup> Findlay, John N. *Values and Intentions*. Macmillan, 1961, pp. 175-178; McDougall, William. *Body and Mind*. Macmillan, 1911, pp. 324-325; Notice that also the Tracking View establishes a necessary relation between pleasure and desires. For the Tracking View, net-satisfaction of desire or net-increase in satisfaction of desire are represented by pleasure. Tanyi, Attila. “Sobel on Pleasure, Reason, and Desire.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, pp. 101-15; Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3; Schroeder, Tim. “Desire.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 11 Feb. 2020; Schroeder, Timothy. “Pleasure, Displeasure and Representation.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2001, pp. 507-30.

<sup>148</sup> Morillo, Carolyn R. “The Reward Event and Motivation.” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 87, no. 4, 1990, pp. 169-86.

theories of pleasure have also been advanced by Spencer, Kagan, Korsgaard, Brandt, Alston, Carson, and Parfit.<sup>149</sup>

Let's conclude the introduction to desire-based intentionalist theories by reiterating one of the several issues they generate—the Euthyphro problem. The problem lies on the fact that pleasure seems logically antecedent to desire. Instead, this class of theories implies that what makes an experience a pleasure is the desire we have for it, rather than desire for the experience being a consequence of it being a pleasure.<sup>150</sup> Usually, we explain desire in terms of pleasure rather than pleasure in terms of desire. In other words, “I want it because it pleases”, rather than “it pleases because I want it”, seems to be the natural order of explanation.<sup>151</sup> Because of that, the claim of desire-based intentionalist theories—desire explains pleasure—is counter-intuitive.

### **Heathwood's Motivational Theory**

Heathwood's Motivational Theory of pleasure is a prominent desire-based intentionalist theory. For example, Smuts claims that Heathwood's theory represents the most compelling desire-based intentionalist theory of pleasure.<sup>152</sup> And Dietz elaborates on the Paradox of Hedonism by grounding his account on Heathwood's theory.<sup>153</sup>

According to Heathwood's Motivational Theory of pleasure: “S is intrinsically pleased at  $t$  that  $p$  if S intrinsically desires at  $t$  that  $p$  and believes at  $t$  that  $p$ ”.<sup>154</sup> In other words, an individual has a pleasure if he has an intrinsic desire—a desire for a state of affairs that is wanted for its own sake<sup>155</sup>—and the belief that this desire is satisfied. Although a true belief is not required (someone might get pleasure from believing something false), belief that the desire is satisfied is necessary for the Motivational Theory of pleasure to deem something a pleasure.<sup>156</sup> According to Heathwood's Motivational Theory of pleasure, I might intrinsically desire that the stranger I met on the train get well, have the belief that the stranger is well (even if a false belief), and thus have pleasure.

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<sup>149</sup> Spencer, Herbert. *The Principles of Psychology*. D. Appleton and Co., 1871, par. 125; Kagan, “The Limits”; Korsgaard. “The Sources”, pp. 147-148; Brandt, Richard B. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*. Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 38; Alston. “Pleasure”, p. 345; Carson. “Value”, p. 13; Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 493.

<sup>150</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>151</sup> Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3; Heathwood. “The Reduction.”

<sup>152</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>153</sup> Dietz, Alexander. “Explaining the Paradox of Hedonism.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 97, no. 3, 2018, pp. 497-510.

<sup>154</sup> Heathwood. “Desire Satisfactionism.”

<sup>155</sup> Schroeder. “Desire.”

<sup>156</sup> Heathwood. “Desire Satisfactionism.”

According to Heathwood, pleasure is explainable in terms of desire.<sup>157</sup> This theory is reductive because it holds that facts about pleasure are just facts about desire. Pleasure consists in intrinsically desiring a state of affairs and believing this state of affairs to be the case.<sup>158</sup> Pleasure ends up consisting in a belief about desire-satisfaction. Pleasure is thus understood through the attitudes of desire and belief.<sup>159</sup>

### **Action-based Theory of Desire**

In this section, I make explicit an assumption about desire that is held through this chapter. In fact, in Ch. 2, I assume an Action-based Theory of Desire, the most widely held theory of desire.<sup>160</sup> According to the Action-based Theory of Desire: “for an organism to desire *p* is for the organism to be disposed to take whatever actions it believes are likely to bring about *p*.”<sup>161</sup> In other words, desire disposes us to act, although an action does not necessarily follow the desire. Given this theory of desire, the existence and strength of desires can be identified through their causal power regarding actions (points a1 and a3 below). For example, if two desires are not jointly satisfiable, desire *a* is considered stronger than desire *b*, if the agent is disposed to act upon *a* rather than upon *b*.<sup>162</sup>

Notice that an Action-based Theory of Desire is vulnerable to counter-examples of mental states, that we commonly call desires, but do not seem to correspond to action-producing dispositions, e.g. desires about the past. Nevertheless, advocates of the Action-based Theory reply by denying the status of desires to such mental states.<sup>163</sup> Wall also claims that, in these cases, dispositions to action do exist but they are not acted upon by reasonable subjects.<sup>164</sup> Overall, these counter-examples seem unable to prevent the popularity of the Action-based Theory of Desire.

My adoption of an Action-based Theory of Desire is also justified by the need of coherence with the neuroscientific evidence that I present. In fact, Berridge identifies desire with the motivation of pursuing a reward.<sup>165</sup> “Wanting” is described as an “elementary form of goal directedness, which could guide behavior in the right direction in advance of experiencing the

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<sup>157</sup> Heathwood. “The Reduction.”

<sup>158</sup> Dietz. “Explaining.”

<sup>159</sup> Heathwood. “Desire Satisfactionism.”

<sup>160</sup> Schroeder. “Desire.”

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Wall, David. “Are There Passive Desires?” *Dialectica*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2009, pp. 133-55.

<sup>165</sup> Berridge, Kent C., and Elliot S. Valenstein. “What Psychological Process Mediates Feeding Evoked by Electrical Stimulation of the Lateral Hypothalamus?” *Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 105, no. 1, 1991, pp. 3-14.

goals”.<sup>166</sup> According to this research, the mesolimbic dopamine system in the brain determines the pursuits that bring reward.<sup>167</sup> This phase of motivated behavior is often called “appetitive”, “preparatory”, or “instrumental”. In fact, motivational stimuli often happen to be at physiological or psychological distance from the organism: the organism has to engage in behaviors to bring them closer.<sup>168</sup> Thus, the neuroscience that I present already adopts an Action-based Theory of Desire: desire is seen as a disposition to pursue a reward.

Given an Action-based Theory, desire is taken to be a future-oriented mental state.<sup>169</sup> In other words, desires can only be about the future. This has an implication for Heathwood’s claim concerning simultaneous desire and desire-satisfaction. In fact, Heathwood claims that a person can enjoy “something he didn’t have a desire for, so long he forms a desire for it the instant he starts getting it”.<sup>170</sup> But this is impossible if desires are future-oriented. Heathwood elaborates on the case of an unexpected massage from his wife. He claims that, if she would ask him “shall I keep it up?”, he would immediately have an occurrent desire for it. In this fashion, Heathwood claims, he experiences an occurrent desire for his wife’s massage and the simultaneous satisfaction of this desire.<sup>171</sup> However, since this is held to be illogical, I will interpret his claim in terms of an arising desire for the continuation of the experience.

## Desire’s Phenomenology

In this section, I make explicit a second assumption about desire. In this chapter, I hold desire to have a phenomenology.<sup>172</sup> When you want something there is a way this desire feels to you. Consider, for example, the difference between the feeling of strongly desiring food and of a strong belief that food is good for my health. Because it implies an uncomfortable lack of something, a yearning for something, according to Stampe, desire is roughly identifiable as an unpleasant mental state.<sup>173</sup> Also, when we desire, something is, at least vaguely, anticipated.<sup>174</sup> Consider again intense hunger and the vigorous *anticipation* that it implies. Coherently with this phenomenology, the schools of antiquity were extremely concerned with the problem of desire and the therapies to make

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<sup>166</sup> Berridge, Kent C. “Wanting and Liking: Observations from the Neuroscience and Psychology Laboratory.” *Inquiry*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2009, p. 378.

<sup>167</sup> Salamone, John D., and Mercè Correa. “The Mysterious Motivational Functions of Mesolimbic Dopamine.” *Neuron*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2012, pp. 470-85.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Sumner. “Welfare”, pp.128-130.

<sup>170</sup> Heathwood. “Desire Satisfactionism”, p. 558.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Duncker. “On Pleasure”; Schroeder. “Desire”; Tye. “Qualia.”

<sup>173</sup> Stampe, Dennis W. “The Authority of Desire.” *Philosophical Review*, vol. 96, no. 3, 1987, pp. 335-81.

<sup>174</sup> Duncker. “On Pleasure.”

happiness possible.<sup>175</sup> Desire, rather than the relevant attitude for pleasure, was seen as pleasure-reducing.

Anticipation, although possibly present in pleasant anticipation, is not characteristic of pleasure's phenomenology. The Buddhist Canon portrays the divergence among pleasant anticipation (a pleasant desiring state) and (pure) pleasure with this comparison: imagine the mental state of a thirsty and sweaty desert traveler when seeing an oasis in a fresh forest, in contrast to his state while enjoying the oasis.<sup>176</sup> The second, less mixed with vigorous anticipation, is preferred.<sup>177</sup> Pleasant anticipation might be explained, in line with the Hedonic Tone Theory that I will discuss in Ch. 4, as the sum of the different phenomenologies of pleasure and desire.

Nevertheless, anticipation is neither sufficient nor necessary for pleasure. So, it helps us distinguish the phenomenology of desire from the phenomenology of pleasure (point a2 below). Thus, the phenomenologies of pleasure and desire are not taken to be easy to confuse. If we take desire to be unpleasant, it seems difficult to mistake it with pleasure. The “feels like” of wanting a glass of water and having a glass of water are different.<sup>178</sup> The discomfort of being thirsty feels different from the pleasure of the related relief.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, the discomfort of wanting a better job feels different from the pleasure of the related relief. These apparently obvious remarks, as we will see, are not redundant if we consider the laxity with which desire-based intentionalist theorists point to a desire necessarily accompanying every pleasure.

Notice that adopting a phenomenological method implies the quick dismissal of appeals to unconscious desires (point a2 below). Conscious experience is central to phenomenology.<sup>180</sup> Unless someone proves, perhaps neuro-scientifically, the reality of unconscious desires inextricably linked to pleasure, we are facing a speculation—as much as psychological hedonists claiming that the soldier jumped on the grenade because of an unconscious desire to avoid pain or pursue pleasure. Actually, neuroscientific evidence, as discussed in this chapter, seems to deny this claim: pleasure does not seem to be accompanied by any unconscious desire.<sup>181</sup> So, given that only standing desires that reach the subject's consciousness are phenomenologically relevant, and that neurosciences

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<sup>175</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton University Press, 2018; Hadot, Pierre. *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Harvard University Press, 2004; Boone, Mark J. *The Conversion and Therapy of Desire: Augustine's Theology of Desire in the Cassiciacum Dialogues*. Wipf and Stock, 2016; Katz. “Pleasure”; As an example of ancient discussion see: Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe, Oxford University Press, 2002, viii: 1099a 24–31 and *EE* I, i: 1214a 1–6.

<sup>176</sup> Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*. Translated by LM. Pruden, Asian Humanities Press, 1990, p. 161.

<sup>177</sup> Buddhaghosa. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Translated by Ñāṇamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, 1979, ch. 4.

<sup>178</sup> Duncker. “On Pleasure.”

<sup>179</sup> Chan, David K. “Are There Extrinsic Desires?” *Noûs*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 326-50.

<sup>180</sup> Smith. “Phenomenology.”

<sup>181</sup> Berridge. “Wanting and Liking.”

deny the existence of an unconscious desire matching every pleasure, only occurrent desires prior or contemporaneous with pleasure will be considered relevant.

In contrast with my phenomenological method, I do not address Heathwood's Motivational Theory's prima facie phenomenological dubiousness. In fact, in this theory of pleasure, no feeling of pleasure is involved: pleasure ends up being a mere belief about desire-satisfaction. This issue with the theory will be indirectly addressed in Ch. 3 when advancing the "killjoy problem".

### **Sidgwick's Claim: Pleasure as Desired Feeling**

Given the variety of desire-based intentionalist theories, I refine two claims that seem to be typical for this group of theories. What I call "Sidgwick's claim" holds pleasure to be a desired feeling. What I call "Butler's claim" holds desire-satisfaction to be a necessary condition for pleasure. In this section, I present two issues with the former. Let's remember that, according to Sidgwick, a feeling is a pleasure because the subject "apprehends it as desirable".<sup>182</sup>

- (1) Desired feelings might not be pleasures. Unless Psychological Hedonism is true, it is possible to intrinsically desire a feeling that is not a pleasure. Feldman elaborates on the feeling of dizziness. A researcher experiments on himself to understand this unpleasant feeling. When he is dizzy he desires to feel like that. His desire is real: if you offer him a drug to stop the feeling he would refuse it.<sup>183</sup> The researcher is intrinsically desiring a non-pleasure. Thus, not all desired feelings are pleasures.
- (2) A pleasant feeling might not be viewed as desirable. Feldman, for example, asks us to imagine a subject who has never heard of champagne. If the subject sips an unexpected glass of champagne, he might have pleasure.<sup>184</sup> The subject might enjoy the experience without ever forming a desire for it. Moreover, I hold that "guilty pleasures" are a familiar experience for many of us. Sometimes the phenomenology of pleasure comes mixed with the phenomenology of aversion. In milder cases, the phenomenology of pleasure is experienced without any desire for the experience to continue. This claim will be developed below with point (a3).

To reiterate, pleasure cannot be equated to a desired feeling because there are counter-examples of desired feelings that are not pleasures and pleasant feelings that are not desired. Sometimes we desire experiences different from pleasure and sometimes we do not desire pleasant experiences. Sidgwick's claim seems to be disproved.

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<sup>182</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *Methods of Ethics*. University of Chicago Press, p. 131.

<sup>183</sup> Feldman. "Two Questions."

<sup>184</sup> Feldman. "Pleasure and the Good Life", p. 70.

### **Butler's Claim: Desire-satisfaction as Necessary for Pleasure**

Historically, Butler considered pleasure as inextricably linked to desire-satisfaction.<sup>185</sup> On this premise Butler built his version of what we nowadays call the Paradox of Hedonism. For him, we cannot experience pleasure unless we desire something other than our own pleasure.<sup>186</sup> If pleasure consists of desire-satisfaction, to feel pleasure we must want something other than pleasure itself. Butler's Paradox of Hedonism will be analyzed in Part 3. Still, this insight is incorporated in the examples below: the desire for pleasure is not included in the possible replies because Butler's claim excludes that pleasure can arise from the satisfaction of the desire for pleasure itself.

This section is dedicated to Butler's claim, the second of the claims that I hold as representative of desire-based intentionalist theories in general. I claim that there is also not an introspective justification for holding a necessary relation between pleasure and desire-satisfaction. Contra Butler, I argue that desire-satisfaction is not a necessary condition for pleasure. It seems that we can have pleasure when no desire is satisfied. Moreover, it seems that we can have pleasure while a desire is unsatisfied.

Plato already noticed that we often take delight in experiences, like sights, sounds, and fragrances, that surprise us without having desired them in advance.<sup>187</sup> These pleasant surprises were identified by Sidgwick as well: "many pleasures—especially those of sight, hearing and smell, together with many emotional pleasures—occur to me without any perceptible relation to previous desires."<sup>188</sup> In all these cases we experience pleasure without any prior desire for that sight, sound, fragrance, or emotion (pleasure without desire-satisfaction). These occurrences seem to show that pleasure cannot simply be equated to the satisfaction of our prior desires.

As mentioned above, to reply at these counterexamples, Heathwood claims that desires can arise during experiences.<sup>189</sup> This modification is supposed to accommodate the aforementioned cases in which pleasure is not preceded by desire. Responding to Plato's claim, the arising desire is supposed to accommodate the unexpected pleasures we experience without any prior desire for them. Remember that, coherently with an Action-based Theory of Desire, Heathwood's reply to Plato's claim is interpreted as involving a desire for the continuation of the experience.

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<sup>185</sup> Butler, Joseph. "Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel." *British Moralists, 1650–1800*, edited by DD. Raphael, Hackett, 1991, pp. 325-77.

<sup>186</sup> Dietz. "Explaining."

<sup>187</sup> Plato. "Philebus." Translated with notes and commentary by JCB. Gosling, Oxford University Press, 1975, 51A–52C.

<sup>188</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *Methods of Ethics*. Hackett Publishing, 1981, p. 45.

<sup>189</sup> Heathwood. "Desire Satisfactionism"; Heathwood. "The Reduction."

Below, I present an example to show that there can be pleasures with no desire-satisfaction involved (a1, a2), pleasures with desire-frustration involved (a1, a2), and pleasures whose continuation is not desired (a3).

- (a1) You are in a romantic relationship and you receive an unexpected loving message from an ex-partner of yours. You are positive that, since the end of the previous relationship, you have never desired to communicate with your former partner again. Indeed, you strongly desired to avoid communicating with this person again. Considering your dispositions to act, your desire to not speak with your ex-partner was real. In fact, you deleted their number from your phone. Also, you have never desired a broader thing like being loved by every human being or being remembered by every ex-partner of yours. Altogether, you had no prior desire for this experience. Actually, you had an aversion for this experience.
- (a2) Given that, unless speculating about the unconscious mind, you cannot say you have a standing desire for this experience. Still, when you read the message, you might have a tender feeling and enjoy it. According to the phenomenologies of pleasure and desire, when you receive this unexpected loving message, you might feel pleasure without having ever felt the *anticipation* of the desire for this experience.
- (a3) Moreover, any appeal to a desire concerning the continuation of the experience is unconvincing too. At the opposite, you might enjoy the experience while simultaneously desiring it to end or not happen again. In other words, you might have a tender feeling in reading your ex-partner's message while desiring, in order to respect your current partner, the end of this pleasure. According to your dispositions to action, your desire A for the end of the pleasure is real, your desire B for its continuation is not. In fact, you act upon A rather than upon B: you delete the message and block their number, rather than doing anything to encourage more communication in the future.

In this example you have a pleasure without any prior desire for the experience or arising desire for its continuation. Rather, you might have an arising desire for its end. As noticed in (a1), someone might reply by pointing to broader desires, e.g. to be loved, that you held in advance. According to this reply, the pleasure you have from your ex's message still corresponds to the satisfaction of a desire. However, as Schroeder claims, to point to general prior desires is a suspect intellectual operation that bears some burden of proof.<sup>190</sup>

In addition, desire-satisfaction as necessary to pleasure seems contradicted by pleasant recollection, pleasant anticipation, and daydreaming. It happens that the recollection of an

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<sup>190</sup> Schroeder. "Three Faces of Desire", ch. 3.

experience can be a pleasure.<sup>191</sup> When Sarah remembers the time she met Nelson Mandela, she feels a profound sense of joy. Still, unless again speculating about a dubious desire to experience remembering the experience of meeting Mandela, no actual desire-satisfaction is involved in this pleasure.

The same can be said about pleasant anticipation. This pleasant experience might involve a desire, but still an unsatisfied one. When Mary imagines the day she will be on holiday she feels good, although her desire to be on holiday is still unsatisfied. Consider also daydreaming. Fantasizing about an unrealistic scenario can be a pleasure.<sup>192</sup> Jonathan gets pleasure from fantasizing about being rich. Jonathan finds this experience pleasant although, unless hypothesizing a dubious desire for daydreaming about being rich, no actual desire-satisfaction is involved.

To summarize, in terms of lived-experience, desire-satisfaction is not a necessary condition for pleasure. Butler's claim seems false: introspection tells us that we can experience pleasure without any prior desire. Since Sidgwick's claim seems false too, we can also experience pleasure without any contemporary desire. Even if a desire for the pleasure's continuation can sometimes arise (Heathwood's reply to Plato), it does not *always* happen (as pleasure's reduction to desire would require). In mild cases, we do not desire the pleasure to end but we also do not desire it to continue. In strong cases, we have an occurrent desire for the pleasure to end. Desire-satisfaction (Butler's claim) and desire for the experience (Sidgwick's claim) are not necessary for pleasure.

## Neuroscientific Evidence

This section argues that neuroscience confirms what introspective evidence suggests: pleasure and desire are not two faces of the same coin.<sup>193</sup> In the past, neuroscientists observing a state of motivation have identified it with pleasure.<sup>194</sup> As a result, pop-psychology is still diffused with the myth that dopamine is the pleasure-chemical.<sup>195</sup> However, the problems incurred by interpreting dopaminergic activity as pleasure have caused several neuroscientists, including previous advocates, to abandon this understanding.<sup>196</sup> Berridge has successfully demonstrated that the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Katz, Leonard D. Review of *Three Faces of Desire* by Timothy Schroeder. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, vol. 2005, no. 9, 2005; Schroeder. "Three Faces of Desire", ch. 3; Smuts. "The Feels Good"; de Lazari-Radek & Singer. "The Point of View", p. 246.

<sup>194</sup> de Lazari-Radek & Singer. "The Point of View", p. 246; Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>195</sup> As an example: "Dopamine." [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com), accessed 16 Jun. 2020.

<sup>196</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

mesolimbic dopamine system does not correspond to the “pleasure system”. Instead, pleasure is related to other brain activities, involving opioid receptors and sometimes cannabinoid receptors.<sup>197</sup>

What Berridge calls “liking” and “wanting”, the reward and the motivation for its pursuit (respectively), constitute independent affective states that we tend to mistakenly merge because they often occur mixed or temporally intermeshed.<sup>198</sup> According to Berridge himself, “liking” corresponds to pleasure and “wanting” to desire.<sup>199</sup> Neuroscientists were able to experimentally tease apart these brain mechanisms.<sup>200</sup> These states and their attendant behaviors were experimentally dissociated such that one can be elicited and observed completely independently of the other.

For example, electrodes implanted in rats’ limbic sites were able to generate the desire to eat more food independently from the pleasure usually produced by eating.<sup>201</sup> During this experiment, rats were implanted with electrodes that stimulated the lateral hypothalamus to induce feeding. Rats’ displays of positive hedonic reactions include tongue protrusions and paw-licking. Displays of aversive hedonic reactions include gapes, chin rubbing, bringing the chin to the floor, face washing, and headshaking. Thus, hedonic reactions were measured during electrical stimulation of the lateral hypothalamus (ESLH). The results showed that ESLH, while inducing a four-times increase in feeding-actions, left unchanged positive hedonic reactions and overall enhanced aversive hedonic reactions. Thus, it was concluded that the electrical stimulation affected the behavior by increasing the motivational wanting but not the hedonic value of the reward.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to increasing desire while observing pleasure slightly reduced, neuroscientists, were also able to reduce desire while keeping pleasure constant.<sup>203</sup> For example, rats depleted of dopamine were studied: these rats did not eat enough food to prevent starvation.<sup>204</sup> They had a deficit in goal-oriented behavior independently from the reward. In fact, the depletion of dopamine did not diminish the facial expressions of pleasure.<sup>205</sup> In other words, these rats could still take

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<sup>197</sup> Berridge, Kent C. “Food Reward: Brain Substrates of Wanting and Liking.” *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1996, pp. 1-25.

<sup>198</sup> Berridge, Kent C. “The Debate over Dopamine’s Role in Reward: The Case for Incentive Salience.” *Psychopharmacology*, vol. 191, no. 3, 2007, pp. 391-431; Berridge, Kent C. “Pleasures of the Brain.” *Brain and cognition* vol. 52, no. 1, 2003, pp. 106-28.

<sup>199</sup> Berridge, Kent C. “Incentive Motivation and Incentive Salience.” *Reference Module in Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Psychology*, 2017; Berridge. “Pleasures.”

<sup>200</sup> Berridge, Kent C. “‘Liking’ and ‘Wanting’ Food Rewards: Brain Substrates and Roles in Eating Disorders.” *Physiology & Behavior*, vol. 97, no. 5, 2009, pp. 537-50.

<sup>201</sup> Berridge & Valenstein. “What Psychological.”

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Treit, Dallas, and Kent C. Berridge. “A Comparison of Benzodiazepine, Serotonin, and Dopamine Agents in the Taste-reactivity Paradigm.” *Pharmacology, Biochemistry, and Behavior*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1990, pp. 451-56.

<sup>204</sup> Cannon, Claire Matson, and Richard D. Palmiter. “Reward without Dopamine.” *The Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 23, no. 34, 2003, pp. 10827-31.

<sup>205</sup> Berridge, Kent C., and Terry E. Robinson. “What is the Role of Dopamine in Reward: Hedonic Impact, Reward Learning, or Incentive Salience?” *Brain Research Reviews*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1998, pp. 309-69; Berridge, Kent C., et al.

pleasure from the stimuli but did not have the desire to pursue them. In general, a large body of neuroscientific evidence similarly contradicts the unification of pleasure and desire.<sup>206</sup> From a neuroscientific perspective, this unification is simply inaccurate.<sup>207</sup>

All things together, it seems that desire is a separable feature, only contingently related to pleasure. Natural selection could explain the existing relationship between pleasure and motivation, without desire ending up being sufficient, necessary, or identical to pleasure. In other words, it seems plausible that evolution privileged subjects that pursue pleasure and avoid pain rather than the opposite, without pleasure being reducible to desire.

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“Taste Reactivity Analysis of 6-hydroxydopamine-induced Aphagia: Implications for Arousal and Anhedonia Hypotheses of Dopamine Function.” *Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 103, no. 1, 1989, pp. 36-45.

<sup>206</sup> This incomplete list gives a hint on how vast the amount of evidence is: Smith, Kyle, et al. “Hedonic Hotspots: Generating Sensory Pleasure in the Brain.” *Pleasures of the Brain*, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 27-49; Berridge, Kent C., and Morten L. Kringelbach. “Affective Neuroscience of Pleasure: Reward in Humans and Animals.” *Psychopharmacology*, vol. 199, no. 3, 2008, pp. 457-80; Berridge. “The Debate”; Brauer, Lisa H., and Harriet De Wit. “High Dose Pimozide does not Block Amphetamine-Induced Euphoria in Normal Volunteers.” *Pharmacology Biochemistry and Behavior*, vol. 56, no. 2, 1997, pp. 265-72; Cannon, Claire Matson, and Richard D. Palmiter. “Reward without Dopamine.” *The Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 23, no. 34, 2003, pp. 10827-31; Evans, Andrew, et al. “Compulsive Drug Use Linked to Sensitized Ventral Striatal Dopamine Transmission.” *Annals of Neurology*, vol. 59, no. 5, 2006, pp. 852-58; Leyton, Marco. “The Neurobiology of Desire: Dopamine and the Regulation of Mood and Motivational States in Humans.” *Pleasures of the Brain*, edited by Kringelbach and Berridge, Oxford University Press, 2008; Leyton, Marco, et al. “Amphetamine-Induced Increases in Extracellular Dopamine, Drug Wanting, and Novelty Seeking: a PET/[11C]raclopride Study in Healthy Men.” *Neuropsychopharmacology*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2002, pp. 1027-35; Leyton, Marco, et al. “Cocaine Craving, Euphoria, and Self-administration: A Preliminary Study of the Effect of Catecholamine Precursor Depletion.” *Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 119, no. 6, 2005, pp. 1619-27; Peciña, Susana, et al. “Hyperdopaminergic Mutant Mice have Higher ‘Wanting’ but not ‘Liking’ for Sweet Rewards.” *Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 23, no. 28, 2003, pp. 9395-9402; Robinson, Siobhan, et al. “Distinguishing Whether Dopamine Regulates Liking, Wanting, and/or Learning about Rewards.” *Behavioral Neuroscience*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2005, pp. 5-15; Tindell, Amy, et al. “Ventral Pallidal Neurons Code Incentive Motivation: Amplification by Mesolimbic Sensitization and Amphetamine.” *European Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 22, no. 10, 2005, pp. 2617-34; Volkow, Nora et al. “Nonhedonic’ Food Motivation in Humans Involves Dopamine in the Dorsal Striatum and Methylphenidate Amplifies This Effect.” *Synapse*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2002, pp. 175-80; Volkow, Nora, et al. “Cocaine Cues and Dopamine in Dorsal Striatum: Mechanism of Craving in Cocaine Addiction.” *Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 26, no. 24, 2006, pp. 6583-88; Carelli, Regina. “Nucleus Accumbens Cell Firing and Rapid Dopamine Signaling During Goal-Directed Behaviors in Rats.” *Neuropharmacology*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2004, pp. 180-09; Cheer, Joseph F., et al. “Coordinated Accumbal Dopamine Release and Neural Activity Drive Goal-Directed Behavior.” *Neuron*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2007, pp. 237-44; Redgrave, Peter, and Kevin Gurney. “The Short-Latency Dopamine Signal: A Role in Discovering Novel Actions?” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, vol. 7, no. 12, 2006, pp. 967-75; Salamone, John D., et al. “Effort-Related Functions of Nucleus Accumbens Dopamine and Associated Forebrain Circuits.” *Psychopharmacology*, vol. 191, no. 3, 2007, pp. 461-83; Schultz, Wolfram. “Dopamine Neurons and Their Role in Reward Mechanisms.” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1997, pp. 191-97; Ferrari, Pier, et al. “Accumbal Dopamine and Serotonin in Anticipation of the Next Aggressive Episode in Rats.” *European Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 371-78; Horvitz, Jon. “Mesolimbocortical and Nigrostriatal Dopamine Responses to Salient Non-Reward Events.” *Neuroscience*, vol. 96, no. 4, 2000, pp. 651-56; Salamone John D. “The Involvement of Nucleus Accumbens Dopamine in Appetitive and Aversive Motivation.” *Behavioral Brain Research*, vol. 61, no. 2, 1994, pp. 117-33; Scott, Daniel, et al. “Variations in the Human Pain Stress Experience Mediated by Ventral and Dorsal Basal Ganglia Dopamine Activity.” *Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 26, no. 42, 2006, pp. 10789-95.

<sup>207</sup> As claimed by Katz, social-scientific research also challenges desire-based theories of pleasure. Studies based on self-ratings of happiness show a hedonic component independent from beliefs about the satisfaction of desires. Also, a large amount of research has demonstrated that desire-frustration and depression are not reducible to each other. Again, pleasure and desire-satisfaction do not seem two faces of the same coin. Katz. “Pleasure.”

In addition, it seems that desire cannot be reduced to pleasure either. Sometimes we do not enjoy things that satisfy our desires (desire-satisfaction without pleasure).<sup>208</sup> These episodes were already identified by Sidgwick: “what is desired [...] may turn out a ‘Dead Sea apple’, mere dust and ashes in the eating.”<sup>209</sup> Remember last time that you desired a particular food and, once you got it, you did not enjoy it. Desire-satisfaction is not necessarily pleasant. Even when desire-satisfaction and pleasure co-occur, the intensity of the desire fails to predict the intensity of the pleasure.<sup>210</sup> The process of addiction, for example, generates craving (increasingly intense desire) while the subject progressively experiences increased tolerance (decreasing pleasure).<sup>211</sup>

To sum up, it does not seem that there is a conceptual or empirical necessary relation between pleasure and desire. Their relation seems a matter of contingency, a tendency identifiable both in the laboratory and from the armchair.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I dealt with desire-based intentionalist theories of pleasure. In general, considering Sidgwick’s and Butler’s claims representative of the entire class of theories, desire-based intentionalist theories are not convincing theories of pleasure. Sidgwick’s claim consists in uniting feelings of pleasure through the desire for them. Butler’s claim holds desire-satisfaction as a necessary condition for pleasure. Sidgwick’s claim seems false because pleasure is not necessarily desired and there are desired feelings that are not pleasures. Butler’s claim seems false because we sometimes experience pleasure without any desire-satisfaction involved.

Furthermore, I dealt specifically with a theory: Heathwood’s Motivational Theory of pleasure. Concerning this theory, I have only mentioned its phenomenological dubiousness. In fact, no feeling of pleasure is present in this theory of pleasure. Rather, I showed as Butler’s claim, on which the theory relies, seems false. Also, I claimed that it is logically impossible to have an arising desire toward the present experience. So, Heathwood’s arising-desire modification seems a logical fallacy. Furthermore, even if we interpret the arising-desire modification as directed toward the continuation of the experience, the feeling of pleasure’s perpetuation is not always desired, so pleasure cannot be reduced to desire as Heathwood claims.

The relation between pleasure and desire appears more complex and contingent than the necessary relation postulated by desire-based intentionalist theories of pleasure. This conclusion is

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *Methods of Ethics*. Hackett Publishing, 1981, p. 110.

<sup>210</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>211</sup> Kosten, Thomas R., and Tony P. George. “The Neurobiology of Opioid Dependence: Implications for Treatment.” *Science & Practice Perspectives*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, pp. 13-20.

also supported by empirical evidence. In fact, neuroscientific evidence shows that pleasure and desire correspond to distinct neural processes with different cerebral mechanisms underlying them. Pleasure and desire can be separately measured and manipulated by neuroscientists. In conclusion, pleasure and desire should be kept conceptually apart. Desire cannot help in solving the heterogeneity problem: desire does not seem to be a constant attitude that can unify all episodes of pleasure.

# Chapter 3—Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory: The Killjoy Problem

In this chapter, I claim that the feeling of pleasure is necessary for an adequate descriptive theory of pleasure. Certain terms related to pleasure are used differently by different scholars, so part of my task in this chapter is to argue that certain uses of these terms are more or less appropriate than others. Thus, I argue that pleasantness is appropriately described as a feeling. More specifically, I criticize Feldman’s descriptive theory of pleasure. I advance what I call the “killjoy problem”, the claim that Feldman’s theory of pleasure, a prominent one in the intentionalist camp, makes pleasure indistinguishable from a hedonically neutral attitude like a belief. In other words, Feldman’s Theory makes pleasure too homogeneous with a feeling-less judgment of goodness. Therefore, in the view I present, attitudinal pleasure is seen as a mental state distinct from a hedonically neutral attitude that lacks the pleasantness characteristic qualitative feeling. Given that, I argue for the resuscitation of attitudinal pleasure’s “feels good” phenomenology. By doing so, I claim that Non-separatist Phenomenalism—a theory according to which a pleasant experience, attitudinal or not, is characterized by its felt character—seems the most plausible theory of pleasure.

## Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory: Role for Belief

Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory of pleasure is a prominent intentionalist theory in contemporary debate.<sup>212</sup> This section starts the presentation of the Attitudinal Theory by focusing on Feldman’s conceptualization of pleasure as necessarily involving a belief. Differently to Phenomenalism and common sense that see pleasure as a relatively unmediated feeling, Feldman’s view of pleasure necessarily involves a cognitive process in the brain of the subject that I call a “judgment of goodness”.<sup>213</sup> For Feldman’s view, the nature of pleasure is better captured by the concept of judgement rather than the concept of feeling.

A description of “cognitive pleasure” is already present in Plato.<sup>214</sup> Philosophers like J.S. Mill have regarded thinking as a “higher pleasure”.<sup>215</sup> Perhaps, it is not surprising that philosophers like Feldman are challenging common-sense and neuroscience about the role of intentionality and

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<sup>212</sup> Haybron, Daniel M. *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*. Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 62-63.

<sup>213</sup> Feldman claims that there are some “subtle differences” between an attitudinal pleasure and a judgment of goodness. Feldman. “Two Questions.”

<sup>214</sup> Goldstein, Irwin. “Cognitive Pleasure and Distress.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1981, pp. 15-23.

<sup>215</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Edited by Roger Crisp, Oxford University Press, 1998.

cognition in the phenomenon of pleasure. Let's remember that, according to Intentionalism—the theory according to which pleasure consists in a distinct attitude—pleasure is a cognitive state.<sup>216</sup>

In *Pleasure and The Good Life*, Feldman claims that competent language-users understand attitudinal pleasure as showing up in sentences like “S is pleased/glad that p”.<sup>217</sup> In different writings Feldman attempts to describe the attitude involved in his Attitudinal Theory of pleasure. For example, in *Two Questions About Pleasure*, Feldman claims that attitudinal pleasure is a conceptual primitive and that it “is quite like belief plus desire”.<sup>218</sup> In *Pleasure and the Good Life*, attitudinal pleasure is again drawn near belief;<sup>219</sup> Feldman claims that he has no doubt that attitudinal pleasure implies belief.<sup>220</sup> In *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, Feldman once again draws attitudinal pleasure near belief: “Attitudinal pleasure and displeasure are propositional attitudes, in this respect like belief or fear”.<sup>221</sup>

In addition, Feldman reports that scholars agree that attitudinal pleasure requires a belief.<sup>222</sup> Heathwood, for example, claims that “in order for someone to take pleasure in some proposition, she must believe that the proposition is true.”<sup>223</sup> Thus, since Feldman and commentators on his theory agree that the Attitudinal Theory requires a belief, below, attitudinal pleasure is taken to involve belief. Notice that the other mental state that is considered, together with belief, a paradigmatic example of an attitude, desire, has already been excluded from the plausible candidates for an intentionalist theory in Ch. 2.

Given the role of belief in the Attitudinal Theory, it indeed seems that cognition can elicit or inhibit pleasure.<sup>224</sup> Similarly to what Ockham historically held, an object presented by thought might be judged good and pleasure be experienced.<sup>225</sup> Let's consider Aydede's example of what an attitudinal pleasure is. Imagine the sensory pleasure of tasting a sweet strawberry. This pleasure is related to the sensory qualities of the experience and not to a belief about it. Conversely,

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<sup>216</sup> Castelli. “Mind, Theories of”; Mason, Elinor. “The Nature of Pleasure: A Critique of Feldman.” *Utilitas*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 379-87.

<sup>217</sup> Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”, p. 56; Blackson, Thomas A. “Extrinsic Attitudinal Pleasure.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 159, no. 2, 2012, pp. 277-91.

<sup>218</sup> Feldman. “Two Questions.”

<sup>219</sup> Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”, p. 56.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59.

<sup>221</sup> Feldman, Fred. *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 143.

<sup>222</sup> Feldman. “Two Questions”; Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”, ch. 4; Some even claim that it entails knowledge but Feldman denies this claim. Davis, Wayne. “Pleasure and Happiness.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1981, pp. 305-17; Gordon, Robert M. “The Aboutness of Emotions.” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1974, pp. 27-36; Feldman. “Two Questions.”

<sup>223</sup> Heathwood. “Desire Satisfactionism.”

<sup>224</sup> Berridge & Kringelbach. “Affective neuroscience.”

<sup>225</sup> William of Ockham. “Using and Enjoying.” *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts*, translated by Stephen Arthur McGrade, edited by Arthur Stephen McGrade, John Kilcullen, and Matthew Kempshall, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 349-417.

imagine being a strawberry farmer tired of eating strawberries. You taste a sweet strawberry and you have pleasure because the sweetness (of which you are tired) indicates that your strawberries can now generate profit.<sup>226</sup> This pleasure consists in finding these sensory qualities pleasant not in themselves, but for what they indicate when combined with background beliefs.<sup>227</sup> In attitudinal pleasure, the pleasant experience is about something, it shows intentionality.<sup>228</sup> A judgment of goodness, in the mode of belief, is involved in the pleasant experience.

### **Feldman's Attitudinal Theory: Feeling-less Pleasure**

This section continues the presentation of Feldman's theory by focusing on another salient feature of it: the absence of any feeling of pleasure. In fact, and contrary to Feldman, when we interpret the Attitudinal Theory, we should avoid the linguistic understandings of "being pleased" and "being glad" because they are affectively toned. Feldman thinks that attitudinal pleasures (and displeasures) do not involve any feeling,<sup>229</sup> so using being pleased about something as an example of attitudinal pleasure runs the risk of unfairly smuggling affect into the view.

For example, Feldman asks to imagine an injured motorcyclist under the influence of (fictional) anesthetics that inhibit all feelings. The subject of this thought experiment can still have attitudinal pleasure.<sup>230</sup> In Feldman's theory, there is no pleasure in the usual "feeling good" sense: pleasure is a judgment of goodness that does not have any particular feel.<sup>231</sup> As Feldman claims: "Attitudinal pleasure and displeasure are propositional attitudes [...] They are not 'feelings'; a person can take pleasure in things without feeling any pleasurable sensations".<sup>232</sup>

The Latin etymology of the word "pleasure" seems the reason for the non-affective use of pleasure-expressions in English, the use that Feldman adopts. In Roman law, "placita" were expressions of consent, rather than pleasure ("voluptas").<sup>233</sup> Already William of Ockham, while reflecting on the related Latin word "complacens", noted that someone might be pleased without having pleasure.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Aydede. "How to Unify."

<sup>227</sup> Aydede. "A Contemporary Account", pp. 239-266.

<sup>228</sup> Duncker. "On Pleasure."

<sup>229</sup> Feldman. "Pleasure and the Good Life", p. 56; Feldman. "Two Questions"; Feldman, Fred. "Reply to Elinor Mason and Alastair Norcross." *Utilitas*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 398-406; Feldman, Fred. "Hedonism." *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by LC. Becker and CB. Becker, Routledge, 2001, pp. 1011-17.

<sup>230</sup> Feldman. "What is", p. 144; Feldman. "Reply."

<sup>231</sup> Tanyi. "Sobel"; Schroeder. "Desire"; Aydede. "A Contemporary Account"; Lazari-Radek & Singer. "The Point of View", p. 248; Zimmerman, Michael J. "Feldman on the Nature and Value of Pleasure." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 136, no. 3, 2007, pp. 425-37.

<sup>232</sup> Feldman. "What is", p. 143.

<sup>233</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>234</sup> William of Ockham. "Using and Enjoying."

Consider this sentence: “I am afraid I will be late”. This expression mentions fear although usually we would not think that the interlocutor is having a panic-like emotion. Similarly, sometimes we say that we are pleased in the feeling-less sense adopted by Feldman, but, if questioned, we would not claim that the experience is pleasant.<sup>235</sup> For example, during a boring work meeting we might say “pleased to meet you” to the interlocutor although we would not think of the meeting as a pleasure. It seems that words that are usually affectively charged are also sometimes used in a feeling-less sense.

### **The Killjoy Problem of the Attitudinal Theory**

Given Feldman’s feeling-less understanding of pleasure, in this section, I advance an objection to Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory that I call the “killjoy problem”. This objection has, in different ways, been put forward by Crisp, Norcross, Mason, and Zimmerman.<sup>236</sup> The objection consists in the claim that Feldman’s theory, by ignoring the “feels good” phenomenology of pleasure, ends up making pleasure indistinguishable from a hedonically-neutral attitude, a belief with no “feels good” phenomenology.

Let’s consider an example of a (presumably) hedonically-neutral belief: (1) judging speed-limits good. Now, let’s consider an example of (presumably) an attitudinal pleasure: (2) judging good that your first child after several miscarriages is finally born. Both (1) and (2) involve the attitude of judging good but do not feel the same. Because (2) is also a pleasure, it is an attitude intertwined with a pleasant phenomenology. This attitude is experienced together with a pleasant *quale*.

A judgment of goodness such as (1) lacks the valence dimension that characterizes an attitudinal pleasure like (2). However, since in Ch. 1 I assumed an expansive view of phenomenology, the difference between an attitudinal pleasure and a hedonically “neutral” judgement of goodness might be a matter of degrees rather than qualitative in nature. Still, unless you have a passion for administrative law, we do not judge traffic rules good (1) to feel better. De Marneffe puts it well when distinguishing attitudinal pleasure from a judgment of goodness. He claims, in the fashion of a *reductio ad absurdum*, that if judging speed-limits good is a form of

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<sup>235</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>236</sup> Crisp, Roger. Review of *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties and Plausibility of Hedonism* by Fred Feldman, *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 222, 2006, pp. 152-54; Norcross, Alastair. “Varieties of Hedonism in Feldman’s Pleasure and the Good Life.” *Utilitas*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 388-97; Mason. “The Nature”; Zimmerman. “Feldman.”

attitudinal pleasure, then we should think about them for curative reasons when we are feeling bad.<sup>237</sup>

Instead, imagine you are experiencing (2) and a friend asks “how do you feel?”, “very good” you might reply.<sup>238</sup> We can agree that in this case “feel good” is not a different way to express “I judge it good”. You do not just cognitively judge this new birth good, you are truly euphoric because of it. Thus, to describe attitudinal pleasure, the concept of judgment is not sufficient, we need a good feeling. As Lazari-Radek and Singer claim, we cannot see how a feeling-less attitude such as a belief should be regarded as contributing to net-pleasure.<sup>239</sup>

That said, the concept of attitudinal pleasure seems useful to describe at least some pleasant experiences. In cases like (2), pleasant experiences involve attitudes like beliefs. From a phenomenological perspective, we might consider pleasantness as a “tone” of a more complex experience. This idea is developed in Ch. 4 when dealing with the Hedonic Tone Theory. Thus, attitudinal pleasure can be used to describe these pleasant experiences that involve intentionality. In fact, beliefs are thought to be intentional. In attitudinal pleasures, pleasant experiences seem to show intentionality. The pleasantness “feels good”, the hedonic feeling with no intentionality, is instantiated by intentional mental states with which it forms complex experiences.

To sum up, when formulating his theory of attitudinal pleasure, Feldman describes a mental state like (1) rather than (2). For Feldman, “you can take pleasure in something at a time when you don't feel any pleasure”.<sup>240</sup> However, it is the pleasant phenomenology of (2) that makes this mental state a pleasure. I call this argument the killjoy problem because Feldman pictures attitudinal pleasure as a hedonically neutral (joy-less) attitude. This is inconsistent with the phenomenology of pleasure: Feldman’s theory seems incapable of giving an adequate portrayal of what pleasure is.

### **Feldman’s Reply: Sensory Pleasure**

In this section, I present Feldman’s attempt to deny that his theory, in Haybron’s words, “takes the fun out of pleasure”.<sup>241</sup> In fact, In *Reply To Elinor Mason And Alastair Norcross*, Feldman claims that his theory has “not left out the pleasurable bit”.<sup>242</sup> In *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, he again stresses that he does not “take the fun out of pleasure”, while repeating that “the fun” is not a

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<sup>237</sup> de Marneffe, Peter. “An Objection to Attitudinal Hedonism.” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 115, no. 2, 2003, pp. 197-200.

<sup>238</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>239</sup> de Lazari-Radek & Singer. “The Point of View”, p. 249.

<sup>240</sup> Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”, p. 56.

<sup>241</sup> Haybron. “The Pursuit”, p. 64.

<sup>242</sup> Feldman. “Reply.”

feeling.<sup>243</sup> By presenting Feldman's reply to the killjoy problem, I claim that he dubiously adopts an outdated conflation between sensations and feelings that can be traced back to Ryle.

According to Aydede, this conflation is a result of the influence that the Sense-datum Theory had at Ryle's time. Given this theory, sensations were the model with which to interpret feeling episodes in general.<sup>244</sup> Whether or not Aydede's reconstruction is true, we should avoid this assimilation. Although there is not a shared definition of "feeling" neither within nor among different disciplines, in the literature, the word "feeling" is mainly connected with emotions. According to Barile, in philosophy, the words "feeling" and "emotion" are even sometimes used as synonyms. Nevertheless, this unification should be avoided too because not every feeling is related to an emotion.<sup>245</sup> Differently, a "sensation" is a specific feeling episode caused by the stimulation of sensory organs.<sup>246</sup>

That said, by supposedly replying to the killjoy problem, Feldman, instead of showing how the apparently "cold" pleasure of his theory "feels good", explains why he thinks pleasure cannot be a feeling. In doing so, he seems to use the term "feeling" as meaning "sensation". Paradigmatic cases of "feelings" (in reality, sensations) are taken by him to include: warmth or cold, pressure, itches, tickles, burning sensations, pins and needles.<sup>247</sup>

Also the aforementioned example of the injured motorcyclist shows Feldman's conflation of feelings and sensations. This patient is administered with an anesthetic that impairs his capacity to have "feelings".<sup>248</sup> However, Feldman claims that the patient can still experience (attitudinal) pleasure for the fact that he is alive. Therefore, in Feldman's reasoning, pleasure is not a feeling. The confusion lies in saying that the anesthetic does not allow the patient to have feelings. When we are given an anesthetic, we might not be able to sense things (e.g. taste something) but we still have feelings such as anxiety (or indeed cheerfulness).<sup>249</sup>

In general, Phenomenalism has been objected to on the grounds that pleasure does not fit into the paradigm of sensations.<sup>250</sup> Gosling noted that paradigmatic sensations have a typical cause

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<sup>243</sup> Feldman. "What is", p. 143.

<sup>244</sup> Aydede. "An Analysis."

<sup>245</sup> Barile, Emilia. "Are Background Feelings Intentional Feelings?" *Open Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 4, 2014, pp. 560-74.

<sup>246</sup> Zahidi, Karim, and Erik Myin. "Sensations." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, edited by Tim Crane, www.rep.routledge.com, accessed 31 Aug. 2020.

<sup>247</sup> Feldman. "What is", p. 144.

<sup>248</sup> Feldman. "Pleasure and the Good Life", p. 57.

<sup>249</sup> Schwender, Dirk, et al. "Conscious Awareness During General Anaesthesia: Patients' Perceptions, Emotions, Cognition and Reactions." *British Journal of Anaesthesia*, vol. 80, no. 2, 1998, pp. 133-39; It is indeed because they make you feel good that anesthetics can become drugs of abuse. Franklin, Keith BJ. "Analgesia and Abuse Potential: An Accidental Association or a Common Substrate?" *Pharmacology, Biochemistry, and Behaviour*, vol. 59, no. 4, 1998, pp. 993-1002.

<sup>250</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

and/or reaction to them. Pleasure, he claimed, does not present any of these features.<sup>251</sup> Different people get pleasure from different things and some pleasures, for example, are soothing while others are arousing.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, Ryle noted that, while sensations tend to monopolize our attention, increasing intensity of pleasure tends to boost attention on the object of pleasure.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, Alston pointed out that pleasure cannot be separated from the experience it comes with.<sup>254</sup> Ryle and Alston's claims will be developed in Ch. 4 when dealing with the Hedonic Tone Theory.

Besides these authors' remarks, in my opinion, there are more simple and effective ways to show that pleasure is not a sensation. For example, pleasure may be more or less in different episodes, while the sensory qualities of the experiences are constant.<sup>255</sup> If you eat two pieces of banana at different times of the day, say one before breakfast and one after a huge dinner, the sensory qualities of the experience might be the same but your hedonic reaction might not be. In addition, the sensory understanding of pleasure has problems in accounting for mental or emotional pleasures.<sup>256</sup> These pleasures are not experienced wholly through sense organs, certainly the sensory qualities present in the experience need not be central to it.<sup>257</sup> For example, the pleasure of the unbridled fun of playing as a child might be elicited by the sight of a kite but the visual qualities of the kite might not be central to the pleasure. Furthermore, quite differently from a sensation, pleasure lacks a localization.<sup>258</sup> We cannot locate, for example, the pleasure of a hard-won achievement, but we can locate some sensations, such as a warm touch. To sum up, all these points seem able to show that pleasure is not a sensation.

## **Affective Pleasure**

The objections against the sensory understanding of pleasure succeed in proving that pleasure is not a sensation, but do not prove that it is not a feeling. In this section, I claim that the affective understanding of pleasantness is able to avoid the problems of the sensory understanding while not collapsing into a "cold" attitude.<sup>259</sup> Historically, the resulting understanding of pleasure seems in

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<sup>251</sup> Gosling, Justin. *Pleasure and Desire—the Case for Hedonism Reviewed*. Clarendon Press, 1969.

<sup>252</sup> Schroeder. "Three Faces of Desire", ch. 3.

<sup>253</sup> Ryle, Gilbert. *Dilemmas*. Cambridge University Press, 1969; Ryle. "The Concept."

<sup>254</sup> Alston. "Pleasure."

<sup>255</sup> Ryle. "The Concept", p. 109.

<sup>256</sup> Weijers. "Hedonism."

<sup>257</sup> Usher. "Felt-quality."

<sup>258</sup> Momeyer, Richard W. "Is Pleasure a Sensation?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1975, pp. 113-21; Alston. "Pleasure."

<sup>259</sup> Norcross. "Varieties."

line with Locke's view of pleasure and pain as "simple ideas" learned from "what we feel in ourselves" and distinct from any "sensation barely in itself".<sup>260</sup>

Some phenomenologists have tried to accommodate the issues with pleasure's sensory understanding by pointing to an independent pleasure-sense and by defining sensation as something that we feel without being necessarily mediated by sense organs.<sup>261</sup> However, phenomenologists usually keep mere sensation separate from the hedonic reaction.<sup>262</sup> Rather than stretching the definition of sensation, it seems more appropriate to understand pleasantness as an affective occurrence independent from sensation. When speaking of a feeling of pleasure, we should use "feeling" in the sense we use this word when speaking of the feeling of an emotion.<sup>263</sup> In this sense, pleasure is a "feeling" because it is a felt quality of consciousness.<sup>264</sup>

In my view, pleasure has an affective phenomenology rather than a sensory one.<sup>265</sup> Following Gosling, I believe that the cases of positive emotions and moods, neglected by the Ryle-inspired literature, demonstrate that pleasure is a feeling.<sup>266</sup> Moreover, I do not think that the arguments provided by Ryle against the affective understanding of pleasure are convincing. According to him: (1) a person can be overcome by emotions but not by pleasure; (2) emotions can distract one from thinking straight but not pleasure; (3) emotions, differently from pleasure, can be resisted.<sup>267</sup> Points (1) and (2) seem *prima facie* false. I doubt that if you have to perform a demanding cognitive task you would like in the meanwhile to be informed that you have won the lottery. In fact, the pleasure of this news might overcome you and/or distract you. Point (3), by holding that pleasure cannot be resisted, is too bold a claim even for Psychological Hedonism: people often delay gratification—they consciously resist pleasure. So, all of Ryle's arguments against the affective understanding of pleasure seem false.

Therefore, according to the affective understanding, pleasure is a phenomenological class: in this sense it is a feeling. When Feldman claims that the pleasure of his theory is not a feeling, he confusingly uses the word "feeling" as a synonym of "sensation". Although it seems that pleasure is not a sensation, affects are feelings too. Unless "taking the fun out of pleasure", we need to conclude that the "fun", although not a sensation, is a feeling. Feldman's denial of pleasure's

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<sup>260</sup> Locke. "An Essay", II, xx, 1.

<sup>261</sup> Weijers. "Hedonism"; Katz, "Pleasure."

<sup>262</sup> Aydede. "An Analysis."

<sup>263</sup> Norcross. "Varieties"; Whiting, Demian. "The Feeling Theory of Emotion and the Object-Directed Emotions." *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2009, pp. 281-303; Zimmerman. "Feldman"; Goldstein, Irwin. "Are Emotions Feelings? A Further Look at Hedonic Theories of Emotions." *Consciousness and Emotion*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21-33.

<sup>264</sup> Wolfsdorf, David. "Ancient."

<sup>265</sup> Aydede. "An Analysis"; Aydede. "How to Unify."

<sup>266</sup> Gosling, Justin. *Pleasure and Desire—the Case for Hedonism Reviewed*. Clarendon Press, 1969, chs. 9-10.

<sup>267</sup> Ryle, Gilbert, and Walter B. Gallie. "Symposium: Pleasure." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 28, 1954, p. 137.

feeling, taken together with his claim of wanting to account for the “feels good” of pleasure, might be determined by an inadequate terminological choice. Nevertheless, this is only a hypothesis because Feldman does not actually give us any explanation of how his theory might save the pleasure’s “feels good”. In fact, a “cold fun” or a “feelingless fun”, some expressions that might derive from Feldman’s reply to the killjoy problem, seem more oxymorons than plausible accounts of pleasure’s “fun”.

### Neuroscientific View

In this section, I show that neuroscience also seems to support the affective non-sensory understanding of pleasure. In fact, neuroscientists do not conceptualize pleasure as a sensation, they hold that pleasure requires the activity of the hedonic systems that attach a hedonic gloss to the sensation, thereby making it pleasant.<sup>268</sup>

Neuroimaging experiments have shown that the affective reaction seems to be coded independently from the sensation, the sensory stimulus of the pleasure.<sup>269</sup> For example, taste was shown to be coded by the anterior insula cortex while the related hedonic gloss was shown to be coded by the medial orbitofrontal cortex, mid-insular cortex, and in the anterior cingulate cortex.<sup>270</sup>

These results emerged, for example, from research on food synergism, namely when the combination of food elements determines experiences that are not simply the sum of their sensory qualities. The combination of strawberry scent and sugar taste is, for many subjects, more pleasant than just the sum of each experience taken by its self. Neuroimaging experiments seem to show that the hedonic surplus is correlated with the activity in a lateral region of the mid-anterior orbitofrontal cortex.<sup>271</sup> Similar results also emerged from the manipulation of umami taste.<sup>272</sup>

To sum up, the pleasantness affect seems processed by a different region of the brain than the sensation to which the hedonic gloss is attached. Thus, considering brain mechanisms, it seems that pleasure should be conceptualized as an affect rather than a sensation.

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<sup>268</sup> Frijda, Nico. *The Laws of Emotion*. L. Erlbaum, 2007; Kringelbach, Morten, and Kent Berridge. *Pleasures of the Brain*. Oxford University Press, 2010; Berridge & Kringelbach. “Affective Neuroscience.”

<sup>269</sup> Anderson, Adam, and Noam Sobel. “Dissociating Intensity from Valence as Sensory Inputs to Emotion.” *Neuron*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2003, pp. 581-83; Gottfried, Jay, et al. “Appetitive and Aversive Olfactory Learning in Humans Studied Using Event-related Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging.” *Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 22, no. 24, 2002, pp. 10829-37; Rolls, Edmund, et al. “Different Representations of Pleasant and Unpleasant Odours in the Human Brain.” *European Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2003, pp. 695-703; Small, Dana, et al. “Dissociation of Neural Representation of Intensity and Affective Valuation in Human Gustation.” *Neuron*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2003, pp. 701-11.

<sup>270</sup> de Araujo, Ivan, et al. “Taste-olfactory Convergence, and the Representation of the Pleasantness of Flavour, in the Human brain.” *European Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 18, no. 7, 2003, pp. 2059-68.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> de Araujo, Ivan, et al. “Representation of Umami Taste in the Human Brain.” *Journal of Neurophysiology*, vol. 90, no. 1, 2003, pp. 313-19.

## Affective Pleasure and the Linkage Question

In this section, I argue that the affective account of pleasure I have presented answers the “linkage question”—what is the linkage, if any, between sensory and attitudinal pleasures?

In Feldman’s theory, even sensory pleasure ultimately consists in an attitude.<sup>273</sup> For him, a sensory pleasure corresponds to taking attitudinal pleasure in a sensation. So, for Feldman, all sensory pleasures involve attitudinal pleasure (but not the other way around).<sup>274</sup> To have sensory pleasure is a result of judging a sensation good. Contrariwise, Brentano held that the attitude involved in attitudinal pleasure causes the subject to experience sensory pleasure.<sup>275</sup> Unlike Feldman, for whom sensory pleasure has a cognitive nature, Brentano moves the other way around.<sup>276</sup> This thesis is defended by Chisholm.<sup>277</sup>

Differently from both Feldman’s and Brentano-Chisholm’s views, the account I defend claims that both sensory and attitudinal pleasure involves a non-sensory non-cognitive hedonic affect. According to this view, S takes sensory pleasure in the sensation *p*, if *p* is experienced together with a (non-sensory) pleasantness affect. In the case of sensory pleasures, pleasantness seems to be a hedonic gloss to the sensation, rather than a sensation itself.<sup>278</sup> Concerning attitudinal pleasure, S takes attitudinal pleasure in the state-of-affairs *r*, if S’s judgement of goodness toward *r*, is experienced by S together with a (non-cognitive) pleasantness affect. In attitudinal pleasures, pleasantness seems to be a hedonic gloss to the judgment of goodness, rather than a judgment of goodness itself.

## Attitudinal Pleasure as Emotional Experience

In this section, I clarify the role of affect and intentionality in attitudinal pleasure. Consequently, I claim that attitudinal pleasure can be understood similarly to an emotional experience. In fact, recent scholarship in Theory of Emotion has questioned the traditional divorce of phenomenology and intentionality.

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<sup>273</sup> Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”, pp. 79–80; Feldman. “Two Questions”; Feldman. “On the Intrinsic”; Feldman. “The Good Life.”

<sup>274</sup> Zimmerman. “Feldman.”

<sup>275</sup> Brentano, Franz. “Loving and Hating.” *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right*, edited by Roderick M. Chisholm and Elizabeth H. Schneewind, Humanities Press, 1969, p. 155.

<sup>276</sup> Feldman. “Two Questions.”

<sup>277</sup> Chisholm. “Brentano”, pp. 15-22; Chisholm, Roderick M. “Brentano's Theory of Pleasure and Pain.” *Topoi*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1987, pp. 59-64; Also Parfit allows the hedonic attitude to have a feel. Parfit. “Reasons and Persons”, p. 493.

<sup>278</sup> Aydede. “A Contemporary Account.”

Neuroscientists accept that emotions typically involve cognition.<sup>279</sup> However, they also hold that an emotion must involve an affect.<sup>280</sup> Differently, in philosophy of mind, intentionality has been traditionally seen in opposition to phenomenal consciousness.<sup>281</sup> The scholarship on intentionality has not usually address phenomenological challenges such as qualia.<sup>282</sup> This line of thought, that Horgan and Tienson call “Separatism”, sees phenomenal character and intentionality as not over-lapping.<sup>283</sup>

Thus, emotions are sometimes considered counterexamples to Intentionalism in philosophy of mind—the theory according to which a mental state consists of its representational features.<sup>284</sup> In fact, according to cognitivist (intentionalist) theories, emotions are judgments of value, they are intentional states.<sup>285</sup> However, cognitivist theories cannot account for emotions’ affectivity.<sup>286</sup> The “feels like” of emotions does not seem adequately accounted by the mere contents of the emotions. Solomon, for example, while defending Cognitivism, admits that information is not enough to constitute an emotion: otherwise there would not be any difference between emotions and beliefs.<sup>287</sup> The phenomenology of emotions does not seem solely sensory, conative or cognitive. Following Jonathan Mitchell, affective consciousness cannot be left out from an adequate Theory of Emotion.<sup>288</sup>

In fact, the ontological separation between phenomenology and intentionality has recently been questioned.<sup>289</sup> There is a way pride feels to the proud, a way hope feels to the hopeful, in

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<sup>279</sup> Clore, Gerard, and Andrew Ortony. “Cognition in Emotion: Always, Sometimes, or Never?” *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion*, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 24-61; Ellsworth, Phoebe C., and Klaus R. Scherer. “Appraisal Processes in Emotion.” *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, edited by R.J. Davidson, H.H. Goldsmith, and K.R. Scherer, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 572-95; Erickson, Kristine, and Jay Schulkin. “Facial Expressions of Emotion: A Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective.” *Brain and Cognition*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2003, pp. 52-60; Parrott, Gerrod W. “Beyond Hedonism: Motives for Inhibiting Good Moods and for Maintaining Bad Moods.” *Century Psychology Series. Handbook of Mental Control*, edited by D.M. Wegner and J.W. Pennebaker, Prentice-Hall, 1993, pp. 278-305.

<sup>280</sup> Frijda, Nico H. “Emotions and Hedonic Experience.” *Well-being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, edited by D. Kahneman, E. Diener, and N. Schwarz, Russell Sage Foundation, 1999; Panksepp, Jaak. *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*. Oxford University Press, 1998; Zajonc, R. Bob. “Emotions.” *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, edited by D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske, and G. Lindzey, McGraw-Hill, 1998, pp. 591-632; Kringelbach & Berridge. “Pleasures of the Brain.”

<sup>281</sup> Horgan, Terence. “Original Intentionality Is Phenomenal Intentionality.” *The Monist*, vol. 96, no. 2, 2013, pp. 232-51; Seager, William, and David Bourget. “Representationalism about Consciousness.” *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, edited by S. Schneider and M. Velmans, 2017, pp. 261-76.

<sup>282</sup> Turner, Charles K. “A Principle of Intentionality.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 8, 2017, p. 137.

<sup>283</sup> Horgan. “The Intentionality.”

<sup>284</sup> Mendelovici, Angela. “Pure Intentionalism.”

<sup>285</sup> Millán. “Nussbaum.”

<sup>286</sup> Helm. “Felt Evaluations”; Mendelovici. “Pure Intentionalism.”

<sup>287</sup> Solomon, Robert M. “Emotions, Thoughts and Feelings: What is a ‘Cognitive Theory’ of Emotions and Does it Neglect Affectivity?” *Philosophy and the Emotions*, edited by Anthony Hatzimousis, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 1-18.

<sup>288</sup> Mitchell, Jonathan. “The Irreducibility of Emotional Phenomenology.” *Erkenn*, vol. 85, no. 5, 2018, pp. 1241-68; Scarantino, Andrea, and Ronald de Sousa. “Emotion.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 25 Mar. 2020.

<sup>289</sup> Kriegel, Uriah. “Phenomenal Intentionality and the Perception/Cognition Divide.” *Sensations, Thoughts, Language: Essays in Honor of Brian Loar*, edited by Arthur Sullivan, Routledge, 2019, pp. 167-83.

addition to the representational features of pride and hope. Emotional experience has a “two-sided” structure.<sup>290</sup> The opposition between the feeling of an emotion and its intentionality is misplaced. Contra Separatism, in establishing the difference between cognitive attitudes (e.g. belief) and emotional attitudes (e.g. enjoyment), Norcross advances that emotional attitudes “share some kind of emotional feel”, they “may well have particular qualia as essential elements”.<sup>291</sup> Therefore, despite the on-going debate, we can hold that an emotion also presents an affect.

Feldman himself seems to reject Separatism. In *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, he points out that attitudes can involve feelings and calls them “attitudinal feelings”.<sup>292</sup> Consider the example of pride that Feldman mentions. He claims that “to be proud” is an attitude and that the associated feeling is an attitudinal feeling.<sup>293</sup> Indeed, pride is usually understood as an emotion.<sup>294</sup> So what he calls “attitudinal feeling” might be more commonly referred to as the feeling of an emotion. Thus, Feldman himself denies Separatism and appears to get surprisingly close to an emotion-like understanding of attitudinal pleasure. Although Feldman seems surprisingly to disagree in the case of pleasure, intentionality and affect can coexist in the experience of attitudinal pleasure as they do in pride.

In fact, in addition to its representational features, there is a way attitudinal pleasure feels to someone experiencing it.<sup>295</sup> As claimed by A. Moore, there is no reason to reject the idea that phenomenal and intentional characters can coexist in attitudinal pleasure.<sup>296</sup> Katz claims that the idea that we have to choose between attitudinal pleasure being intentional or having a phenomenology does not seem justified.<sup>297</sup> Also Helm advances that pleasure can be characterized by both phenomenology and intentionality.<sup>298</sup> Affective phenomenology and intentionality can coexist in attitudinal pleasure as they do in emotional experiences. Contra Feldman,

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<sup>290</sup> Slaby, Jan, and Achim Stephan. “Affective Intentionality and Self-Consciousness.” *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2008, pp. 506-13; Ratcliffe, Matthew James. “Emotional Intentionality.” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, vol. 85, 2019, pp. 251-69; Slaby, Jan. “Affective Intentionality and the Feeling Body.” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 7, 2008, pp. 429-44; Goldie, Peter. “Emotions, Feelings and Intentionality.” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2002, pp. 235-54; Ratcliffe, Matthew. “The Feeling of Being.” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 12, no. 8-10, 2005, pp. 43-60; Ratcliffe, Matthew. “Grief and the Unity of Emotion.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2017, pp. 154-74.

<sup>291</sup> Norcross. “Varieties.”

<sup>292</sup> Feldman. “What is”, pp. 143-144.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* p. 144.

<sup>294</sup> Van Osch, Yvette, et al. “The Self and Others in the Experience of Pride.” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2018, pp. 404-13.

<sup>295</sup> Aydede. “How to Unify”; Skidelsky, Edward B.H. “Happiness, Pleasure, and Belief.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 95, no. 3, 2016, pp. 435-46; Tanyi, “Sobel”; Zimmerman. “Feldman.”

<sup>296</sup> Moore. “Hedonism.”

<sup>297</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>298</sup> Helm, Bennett W. “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings.” *Emotion Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2009, pp. 248-55; Helm. “Felt Evaluations”; Examples of contemporary philosophers that have endorsed a hybrid approach include Madell and Schroeder. Madell, Geoffrey. *Philosophy, Music and Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2002, chs. 5-6; Schroeder. “Pleasure.”

representational features are not sufficient for attitudinal pleasure. The “feeling good” of the experience is a necessary condition to call the experience a pleasure.

### **Intentionality as Necessary Condition for Pleasure**

Above, by advancing the killjoy problem, I claimed that an intentional judgement of goodness cannot be sufficient for pleasure. In the previous section I claimed that phenomenology and intentionality can coexist in attitudinal pleasure as they do in emotions. In this section I present some problems with holding intentionality as a necessary condition for pleasure.

First of all, contrary to Intentionalism, representationally content-less pleasures seem to exist.<sup>299</sup> Objectless cheerfulness appears indeed to be characterized by being unintentional.<sup>300</sup> No belief seems to be involved in objectless cheerfulness. Also psychologists and neuroscientists hold that pleasures with no intentionality exist.<sup>301</sup> Psychology of mood takes for granted that positive affects are often objectless.<sup>302</sup> For example, Matthias Siemer claims that experimental subjects reported their moods as also objectless in his study of moods’ object-directness.<sup>303</sup> In general, empirical evidence seems to show that affect is processed in the brain separately from representations of any objects to which the affect is later attributed.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Aydede. “An Analysis”; Brentano himself was aware of that: “with respect to some kinds of sensory pleasure and pain feelings, someone may really be of the opinion that there are no presentations involved, even in our sense. At least we cannot deny that there is a certain temptation to do this. This is true, for example, with regard to the feelings present when one is cut or burned. When someone is cut he has no perception of touch, and someone who is burned has no feeling of warmth, but in both cases there is only the feeling of pain.” Brentano. “Psychology”, p. 82.

<sup>300</sup> Mendelovici. “Pure Intentionalism.”

<sup>301</sup> Zimmerman. “Feldman”; Katz, Leonard D. “Hedonic Reasons as Ultimately Justifying and the Relevance of Neuroscience.” *Moral Psychology, Volume 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*, edited by Sinnott-Armstrong W., MIT Press, 2008, pp. 409-17; Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>302</sup> Watson, David. *Mood and Temperament*. The Guilford Press, 2000; Thayer. “The Biopsychology”; Thayer. “The Origin.”

<sup>303</sup> Siemer also distinguishes between the cause and the object of a mood. This distinction is important because, as he claims, a mood can be caused by a drug without the drug being the object of the mood. Siemer, Matthias. “Moods as Multiple-Object Directed and as Objectless Affective States: An Examination of the Dispositional Theory of Moods.” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 19, no. 6, 2005, pp. 815-845.

<sup>304</sup> Katz. “Pleasure”; Berridge, Kent C., and Piotr Winkielman. “‘What is an Unconscious Emotion?’ (The Case for Unconscious ‘Liking’).” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 181-211; Murphy, Sheila T., and Robert B. Zajonc. “Affect, Cognition, and Awareness: Affective Priming with Optimal and Suboptimal Stimulus Exposures.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 64, no. 5, 1993, pp. 723-39; Murphy, Sheila T., et al. “Additivity of Nonconscious Affect: Combined Effects of Priming and Exposure.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 69, no. 4, 1995, pp. 589-602; Zajonc, Robert B. “Feeling and Thinking: Closing the Debate Over the Independence of Affect.” *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition*, edited by Joseph P. Forgas, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 31-58; Zajonc, Robert B. “Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 35, 1980, pp. 151-75; Zajonc, Robert B. “On the Primacy of Affect.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 39, 1984, pp. 117-24; Clore, Gerald L., and Stanley Colcombe. “The Parallel Worlds of Affective Concepts and Feelings.” *The Psychology of Motivation: Affective Processes in Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Musch and Klauer, 2003, pp. 335-69; Clore, Gerald L., et al. “Affect as Information.” *Handbook of Affect and Social Cognition*, edited by Forgas, 2001, Psychology Press, pp. 121-44; Shizgal, Peter. “Neural Basis of Utility Estimation.” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1997, pp. 198-208; Shizgal, Peter. “On the Neural Computation of Utility: Implications from Studies of Brain Stimulation Reward.” *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, edited by Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, 1999, pp. 500-24.

Yet, defenders of Intentionalism claim that apparently objectless moods have indeterminate objects such as “things in general” or “one’s life in general”.<sup>305</sup> Nevertheless, this reply seems dubious: it seems that you can be in a cheerful mood while having a negative stance toward your life or general circumstances. A desperate person might get an immediate hit from a psychoactive substance without immediately changing his attitude toward his life or things in general.

Consider also this problem with holding belief as necessary for pleasure. To have a belief concerning a state of affairs, the subject must be able to conceive of that state of affairs.<sup>306</sup> How can we reconcile this necessary cognitive sophistication with the fact that infants, non-human animals, and individuals with severe cognitive impairments seem to experience this biological phenomenon that pleasure ultimately is? Feldman replies by claiming that infants and non-human animals can have attitudes like beliefs.<sup>307</sup> Understandably, Labukt and Aydede are not convinced by this claim.<sup>308</sup> In fact, it is far from clear that infants, non-human animals, and individuals with severe cognitive impairments have such representational powers. In addition, it seems doubtful that a newborn that tastes for the first time her mother’s milk, getting pleasure from it, already has a belief about it. At the opposite, it seems more plausible that the hedonic experience comes before a judgement of goodness toward the experience. Accordingly, we might experience first the qualitative experience, and only later form a belief about it.<sup>309</sup>

More generally, following Katz, if contrasted with belief and other non-affective attitudes, pleasure seems more locally biological and less broadly functional.<sup>310</sup> It can “jump” from one object to another while belief logically cannot. It might be dampened by depression whereas a belief is not. It is affected by psychopharmacological therapies while a belief is not. So, differently from pleasure, belief and analogous attitudes seems more broadly functional states that cannot be localized in any single neural system and cannot be physiologically manipulated.<sup>311</sup> Considering these differences, it seems even more dubious that there is a necessary relation between pleasure and belief.

Given both phenomenological and neuroscientific issues, considering intentionality as necessary for pleasure seems unconvincing. It seems that pleasure might be experienced even without intentional reference to anything in the world. Thus, I hold that pleasantness’s “feels good”

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<sup>305</sup> Moore. “Hedonism.”

<sup>306</sup> Feldman. “The Good Life.”

<sup>307</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>308</sup> Aydede. “A Contemporary Account”; Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>309</sup> Goldstein, “Why People”; Goldstein, Irwin. “Pleasure and Pain: Unconditional Intrinsic Values.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1989, pp. 255-76; Goldstein, Irwin. “The Good’s Magnetism and Ethical Realism.” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 108, no. 1-2, 2002, pp. 1-14.

<sup>310</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

phenomenology is necessary for a descriptive theory of pleasure whereas intentionality is not. A “pleasure” without a pleasant feeling is not actually a pleasure, whereas a pleasure without an object is still a pleasure (as long as it has the pleasant feeling, such as waking up in a good mood for no obvious reason).

### **Non-separatist Phenomenalism about Pleasure**

In this section, I reiterate that to avoid the killjoy problem of Feldman’s theory, it is sufficient to admit the feeling of pleasantness into the picture. Therefore, I argue for a non-separatist phenomenalist theory of pleasure: the account I develop, while holding a phenomenalist view, admits that some pleasant experiences, attitudinal pleasures, also present intentionality.

Thus, I understand attitudinal pleasure as involving both cognitive and non-cognitive elements.<sup>312</sup> This understanding makes attitudinal pleasure a phenomenological class that necessarily involves an attitude like belief.<sup>313</sup> Although attitudinal pleasure involves a judgment of goodness, it is different from a feeling-less belief.<sup>314</sup> Attitudinal pleasure constitutes a kind of *pleasure* as long as this experience “feels good”.

As said above, Feldman, although mentioning the issue, does not precisely describe what distinguishes attitudinal pleasure from other attitudes.<sup>315</sup> However, he makes clear that he does not see any connection between this attitude and the feeling of pleasure.<sup>316</sup> Unlike Feldman, my view holds that the pleasantness affective “raw feel” cannot be omitted by an adequate descriptive theory of attitudinal pleasure or pleasure more generally.<sup>317</sup> Rather, intentionality, which concerns the cognitively representational powers of mind, is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for pleasure.

To reiterate, in this chapter, I defended Non-separatist Phenomenalism—a theory that admits attitudinal pleasure but considers the characteristic “feels good” of pleasure necessary and sufficient for a descriptive theory.<sup>318</sup> Non-separatist Phenomenalism has the strength that it can accommodate both the commonsense and neuroscientific views that pleasure feels good and many philosophers’ view that we can judge things good and that this seems closely related to pleasure.

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<sup>312</sup> Mason. “The Nature”; Sumner. “Welfare”. pp. 81-112.

<sup>313</sup> Bengtsson. “Pleasure.”

<sup>314</sup> Lin, Eden. “Attitudinal and Phenomenological Theories of Pleasure.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. c, no. 3, 2018, pp. 510-24.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Feldman. “The Good Life.”

<sup>317</sup> Mason. “The Nature”; Holberg, Erica. “An Anscombian Approach to Pleasure.” *Klēsis Revue Philosophique*, vol. 35, 2016, pp. 164-79; Bramble. “A new Defense.”

<sup>318</sup> Crisp. “Hedonism Reconsidered”; Lin. “Attitudinal.”

Thus, even if an attitudinal pleasure involves a cognitive judgement about the experience, it needs a pleasant phenomenology to be a pleasure. Notice that, as developed in Ch. 4, to admit a “feels good” phenomenology into the picture, implies the denial of the heterogeneity problem: all pleasures share a “feels like”, there is such a thing as a feeling of pleasure that unifies the disparate pleasures thought to power the heterogeneity problem.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I firstly introduced the concept of attitudinal pleasure, a pleasant experience showing intentionality. Attitudinal pleasures involve, in addition to an affectively valenced quality, attitudes like beliefs. Secondly, I advanced that Feldman’s Attitudinal Theory, by excluding the pleasantness “raw” feel, is phenomenologically unconvincing because it describes pleasure leaving out what indeed makes pleasure pleasure. A hedonically neutral attitude has a different “feels like” than an attitudinal pleasure (someone might say a “feels nothing” in contraposition to a “feels like”). The killjoy problem of Feldman’s theory obliges us to include a pleasant phenomenal character into the picture of attitudinal pleasure. Attitudinal pleasure, like pleasure in general, needs to feel good. This move implies a non-separatist phenomenalist theory of pleasure, a theory that, while recognizing the intentional character of some pleasant mental states, considers their affective character both necessary and sufficient for pleasure. Contra the heterogeneity problem, pleasure seems to have a characteristic “feels like” that allows us to distinguish it from other events in consciousness.

# Chapter 4—Phenomenalism and Pleasure’s Unity: Defending the Simple Picture

In the previous chapter, I claimed that the pleasantness “feels good” phenomenology is irreducible. In this chapter, I firstly present a phenomenalist descriptive theory of pleasure, the Distinctive Feeling View. Second, I show how neuroscientific evidence casts doubt on the central claim of the heterogeneity problem. Third, I defend the Distinctive Feeling View from the heterogeneity objection through the Hedonic Tone Theory. Therefore, I conclude that a phenomenalist descriptive theory of pleasure is philosophically plausible, in line with our current neuroscientific knowledge, and does not unjustifiably contradict common sense.

## Distinctive Feeling View

The belief that phenomenalist theories of pleasure have been knocked down by the heterogeneity objection has led several philosophers to favor intentionalist theories of pleasure.<sup>319</sup> According to them, pleasures’ unity is accommodated by pleasure being a distinctive attitude. Pleasures’ heterogeneity is thought to depend on the varying attitude’s intentional contents. However, other scholars consider the heterogeneity problem not to be troublesome.<sup>320</sup> The Distinctive Feeling View denies that the heterogeneity problem is a genuine issue. Indeed, in this section, I claim that the Distinctive Feeling View seems able to accommodate the unity of pleasure.

As I argued in the previous chapter, unless we describe pleasure similarly to a hedonically neutral attitude, we need to admit pleasantness’s “feels good” phenomenology into its picture. If we admit a shared phenomenology in accordance to the Distinctive Feeling View, we ultimately deny the troublesomeness of the heterogeneity problem. In fact, according to the Distinctive Feeling View, there is a discrete feeling of pleasure identifiable among all pleasures.<sup>321</sup> This theory claims what the heterogeneity objection denies.

Below, I aim at evoking the good feeling of pleasure through *The New Yorker Magazine*’s report of London’s jubilation for the end of WWII in Europe (italics mine).

When the day finally came, it was like no other day that anyone can remember. It had a *flavor of its own*, an *extemporaneousness* which gave it something of the

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<sup>319</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>320</sup> Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3; Smuts. “The Feels Good”; Lin. “Attitudinal.”

<sup>321</sup> Moore, George E. *Principia Ethica*. Edited by T. Baldwin, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 12; Bramble. “The Distinctive Feeling”; Alston. “Pleasure”; Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

*quality* of a vast, *happy village fete* as people wandered about, sat, sang, and slept against a slimmer background of *trees, grass, flowers, and water* [...] The *bells* had begun to peal and, after the night's storm, London was having that *perfect, hot, English summer's day* which, one sometimes feels, is to be found only in the imaginations of the *lyric poets* [...] By lunchtime, in the Circus, the buses had to slow to a crawl in order to get through the tightly packed, *laughing* people [...] *ecstatic cheers* from the whole Circus [...] They sat jammed together in an *affectionate mass*, swinging their legs over the sides, wearing each other's uniform caps, and calling down *wisecracks* to the crowd. [...] All day long, the deadly past was for most people only just under the surface of the *beautiful, safe present*, so much so that the Government decided against sounding the sirens in a *triumphant 'all clear'* for fear that the noise would revive too many painful memories [...] It was a day and night of no fixed plan and no organized *merriment*. Each group *danced* its own dance, *sang* its own song, and went its own way as the *spirit* moved it. The most tolerant, self-effacing people in London on V-E Day were the police, who simply stood by, *smiling benignly*, while soldiers swung by one arm from lamp standards and laughing groups tore down hoardings to build the *evening's bonfires* [...] The young service men and women who swung arm in arm down the middle of every street, singing and swarming over the few cars rash enough to come out, were simply happy with an *immense holiday happiness*. They were the *liberated* people who, like their counterparts in every *celebrating* capital that night, were *young* enough to *outlive the past and to look forward to an unspoilt future*. *Their gaiety was very moving*.<sup>322</sup>

It seems that we can relate to the joy described in this article. Perhaps, we have never experienced the end of such a historical tragedy, but we probably have been feeling good at least once. More commonly, we might have experienced this good feeling scattered between less salient episodes, such as aesthetic experiences (e.g. gazing upon a beautiful landscape) or gustatory experiences (e.g. eating a delicious ice-cream).

Notice that besides this previous attempt to evoke the feeling of pleasure, accordingly with Empiricism, it can be grasped only from its direct experience.<sup>323</sup> Ultimately, we can understand the feel of pleasure solely by experiencing it directly. Following Locke, “[Pain and pleasure] like other

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<sup>322</sup> Panter-Downes, Mollie. “Letter from London.” *The New Yorker Magazine*, no. 19 May 1945, www.newyorker.com, accessed 6 Sep. 2020.

<sup>323</sup> Katz. “Pleasure.”

simple ideas cannot be described, nor their names defined; the way of knowing them is...only by experience”.<sup>324</sup>

Given that we experientially know the feeling of pleasure what is its quale? As Smuts claims, pleasantness “feels good”.<sup>325</sup> Intuitively we might find this description of the common phenomenological element in all pleasures unsatisfying.<sup>326</sup> Smuts’ account may be accused of insufficiently clarifying the feeling of pleasure that is supposed to describe.<sup>327</sup> However, if we consider pleasantness an experiential primitive, this simple description might be the closest we can get to a description of its quale.<sup>328</sup> This “feels good” simple description of pleasure’s quale might not represent a scandal as long as pleasure is seen as an experience for which no detailed definition is to be expected.<sup>329</sup> In fact, it seems that we cannot give a reductive or non-metaphorical analysis of the “feels good” of pleasure.<sup>330</sup>

Qualia, we should not forget, are thought to be “absolutely indefinable”.<sup>331</sup> Their description, performed by comparison or analogy, cannot ultimately capture their essence. In line with Hedonic Primitivism, pleasantness cannot be defined in non-hedonic terms.<sup>332</sup> However, describing pleasure as good feeling differs from judging the feeling good as advanced by the Attitudinal Theory.<sup>333</sup> Rather, the Distinctive Feeling View is a phenomenalist theory: pleasantness is seen as a pre-intentional feeling that does not need to be object-bound.<sup>334</sup> Goodness may also elicit the idea of a normative stance on pleasure such a judgement of value. Instead, the Distinctive Feeling View is a descriptive theory of pleasure: it is silent about the value of pleasure.

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<sup>324</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by P. Nidditch, Clarendon Press, 1975, 2, 20, 1.

<sup>325</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>326</sup> Aydede. “A Contemporary Account.”

<sup>327</sup> Wolfsdorf, David. “Ancient.”

<sup>328</sup> Smuts. “The Feels Good.”

<sup>329</sup> Notice that linguistic inarticulateness about feelings is not peculiar to pleasantness. Try to describe what it is like to taste, its phenomenology. With the rationale of the heterogeneity problem in mind we should oddly conclude that there is not such a thing as taste. Tasting a soft, cold, sweet cake and tasting crunchy, hot, salty fries are too heterogeneous to be identified as one thing like taste if we are looking for a detailed description of the commonalities between these experiences. Yet, we would be perfectly understood if we said they are both tasty. Similarly, in Crisp’s view, pleasures are alike as much as all experiences of color are alike. In one sense, the experience of blue does not feel like the experience of red. Yet, in another sense, the experience of blue shares some phenomenology with the experience of red: there is a phenomenology of color, and, *mutatis mutandis*, pleasure. Crisp. “Reasons”, p. 109.

<sup>330</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>331</sup> Moore. “Principia Ethica.”

<sup>332</sup> For Hedonic Primitivism see: Massin, Olivier. “The Nature of Pleasantness.” *Swiss Philosophical Preprint Series*, no. 12, 2008, pp. 1-27; Examples of hedonic primitivist claims include: “Pain and pleasure are simple ideas incapable of definitions.” Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. J. Dodsley, 1767, p. I, sect. II; “Pleasure, in itself, is of course indefinable”. Bain, Alexander. “Pleasure and Pain.” *Mind*, vol. 1, 1892, pp. 161-87; “The state of pleasure is an ultimate, indefinable, experience of the mind. The fact itself is known to each person’s consciousness.” Bain, Alexander. *The Emotions and the Will*. Longman, 1875, p. 13; “Pleasure and Pain being original mental states are, strictly speaking, undefinable; but, as is the case with all such original states, they may be explained and described by making clear their relations to other mental states”. Marshall, Henry. *Pain, Pleasure and Aesthetics*. Macmillan, 1894, p. 2; “Pleasure is absolutely indefinable”. Moore. “Principia Ethica”, 12.

<sup>333</sup> Tanyi. “Sobel.”

<sup>334</sup> Katz. “Hedonic Reasons.”

Moreover, metaphorical language is a phenomenological strategy that might be used to partly compensate the Hedonic Primitivism's refraining attitude toward the description of pleasantness.<sup>335</sup> Analyzing the "feels good" in metaphorical terms, Smuts writes: "we feel a warm feeling; the good feeling hums like the vibration of a tuning fork".<sup>336</sup> Yet, these metaphors cannot be ultimate descriptions. Consider the "warmth of pleasure" and imagine the pleasure of drinking a cold beer: you would not describe it as warm. Perhaps, Haybron's synecdoche (a figure of speech where a part stands for the whole or vice versa) "*fun of pleasure*" has higher descriptive power.<sup>337</sup> Fun seems apt to figuratively describe the feeling of pleasure. Still, literally, fun is only one kind of pleasant experience.

Therefore, rather than from a phenomenological inadequateness, this "feels good" account seems to suffer of our linguistic inarticulateness in regard to phenomenal descriptions.<sup>338</sup> However, as showed by the joy for the end of the war, we know this feeling that we struggle to describe eloquently. Accordingly, we might conclude following Broad, that the shared phenomenal character of all pleasures is something "we cannot define but are perfectly acquainted with".<sup>339</sup> In other words, we can admit that our linguistic skills in describing the feeling of pleasure are limited, without counter-intuitively concluding that there is not such a thing as a feeling of pleasure. All we can say about what is common to all pleasures is that they feel good.<sup>340</sup> Saving the core of the simple picture, we might hold pleasure as a relatively unmediated experience.<sup>341</sup> Pleasure can ultimately be picked out only by how it feels in the moment.

To capture the feeling at stake, let's reconnect with the report of London's jubilation for the end of WWII in Europe. Imagine for a moment to have been in this city in the years 1939-1945: you have been through hardship and experienced the panic of air-raids. Perhaps you are mourning and worrying for your loved-ones. And then you finally hear that Nazi Germany has surrendered. The pleasant quality of this joyful experience is a feeling that we struggle to describe but that we know well. It seems that the same quality of experience (although different in felt-intensity) can be isolated in more mundane experiences like having your favorite meal. Although different in intensity, both the aforementioned joy of a war ending and the pleasure of a meal "feel good", they share the phenomenal quality of feeling good.

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<sup>335</sup> Theodorou, Stephanie. "Metaphor and Phenomenology." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 28 Feb. 2020.

<sup>336</sup> Smuts. "The Feels Good."

<sup>337</sup> Haybron. "The Pursuit", p. 64.

<sup>338</sup> Schwitzgebel. "The Unreliability", p. 250.

<sup>339</sup> Broad. "Five Types", p. 229.

<sup>340</sup> Crisp. "Hedonism Reconsidered"; Rachels. "Is Unpleasantness"; Duncker. "On Pleasure"; Bengtsson. "Pleasure"; Tanyi. "Sobel."

<sup>341</sup> Katz. "Pleasure."

To summarize, on the Distinctive Feeling View, pleasantness is a fact about some experiences. Pleasantness is the property in virtue of which a mental episode is a pleasure. Pleasantness and pleasure are in a determinable-determinate relationship: being a pleasure is a determinate of being pleasant. Pleasantness has a qualitative nature that is revealed by introspection: it feels good. Pleasantness is a bona fide property of all pleasures: they all have something in common independently of what we say or think. Therefore, with the limitations imposed by holding pleasantness as an experiential primitive, the Distinctive Feeling View seems able to accommodate the unity of pleasure. The shared phenomenal character of all pleasures might be something we struggle to verbally articulate but that we are experientially familiar with.

### Unity of Pleasures: Neuroscientific Evidence

In the previous section, I presented a phenomenalist theory that seems to accommodate the unity of pleasure. Since, as claimed by Labukt, the debate on the heterogeneity problem is often based on mere assertions—some philosophers claim that they cannot point out a shared phenomenology and some claim they can<sup>342</sup>—it seems useful to look for a “hard” answer in the empirical evidence we possess.

In 1999, Damasio claimed that evolutionary-based pleasures, bodily and social pleasures, do not share anatomical structures and neural substrates with more complex pleasures, such as aesthetic and cognitive pleasures.<sup>343</sup> However, in 2004, Timothy Schroeder analyzed the neuroscientific evidence and concluded that pleasure (and displeasure) seems a unified phenomenon. He thought that a discreet region of the brain was possibly our pleasure (and displeasure) center.<sup>344</sup>

Concerning current research, the Bolt-on View, the theory according to which there might be a circuit or some circuits activated by all pleasures, seems to be the leading view.<sup>345</sup> A brain-system composed by the nucleus accumbens shell (opioid system) and its projections to the ventral pallidum, is the most plausible seat of all pleasures.<sup>346</sup> These parts of the brain seem to form a discrete structure whose activation is sufficient and necessary for pleasure. Different studies have investigated perceived heterogeneous pleasures such as food, sex, addictive drugs, friends and loved ones, music, art, and even sustained states of happiness, and found that they generate strikingly

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<sup>342</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>343</sup> Damasio, Antonio R. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. Harcourt Brace, 1999.

<sup>344</sup> Schroeder. “Three Faces of Desire”, ch. 3.

<sup>345</sup> Crisp, Roger, and Morten Kringelbach. “Higher and Lower Pleasures Revisited: Evidence from Neuroscience.” *Neuroethics*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2018, pp. 211-15.

<sup>346</sup> Berridge. “Pleasures.”

similar brain activity.<sup>347</sup> According to Berridge and Kringelbach, “a growing set of results from neuro-imaging studies have suggested that many diverse rewards activate a shared or over-lapping brain system: a ‘common currency’ reward network of interacting brain regions”.<sup>348</sup> Our present scientific evidence indicates there is an identifiable, localized system of the brain that is the biological realization of our hedonic experience.<sup>349</sup>

So, current empirical evidence suggests that there is a shared neural substrate of different pleasures: neurosciences seem to ultimately deny the heterogeneity problem. The best empirical evidence we possess suggests that there is a neural seat of pleasure shared by supposedly heterogenous pleasures.

### **Explaining Perceived Heterogeneity: Hedonic Tone Theory**

If we experientially know a discrete feeling of pleasantness and pleasure’s unity is supported by neurosciences, why do many scholars think that the heterogeneity problem is a serious issue? Below, I show a philosophical theory, the Hedonic Tone Theory, that seems able to explain the perceived disunity of pleasures.

The Hedonic Tone Theory can be seen as a clarification rather than an alternative to the Distinctive Feeling View because it similarly holds that there is a monistic felt-quality “pleasantness”. However, this clarification is able to explain the heterogeneity problem, a phenomenological issue that the philosophical debate on pleasure requires us to address.

According to the Hedonic Tone Theory, we often cannot isolate the good feeling from the experience because pleasantness is commonly not distinct from the experience.<sup>350</sup> Phenomenal

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<sup>347</sup> Cacioppo, Stephanie, et al. “The Common Neural Bases between Sexual Desire and Love: A Multilevel Kernel Density fMRI Analysis.” *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2012, pp. 1048-54; Georgiadis, Janniko R., and Morten L. Kringelbach. “The Human Sexual Response Cycle: Brain Imaging Evidence Linking Sex to Other Pleasures.” *Progress in Neurobiology*, vol. 98, no. 1, 2012, pp. 49-81; Kringelbach, Morten L., et al. “The Functional Human Neuroanatomy of Food Pleasure Cycles.” *Physiology & Behavior*, vol. 106, no. 3, 2012, pp. 307-16; Parsons, Christine E., et al. “The Functional Neuroanatomy of the Evolving Parent-infant Relationship.” *Progress in Neurobiology*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2010, pp. 220-41; Salimpoor, Valorie N., et al. “Anatomically Distinct Dopamine Release During Anticipation and Experience of Peak Emotion to Music.” *Nature Neuroscience*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2011, pp. 257-262; Vartanian, Oshin, and Martin Skov. “Neural Correlates of Viewing Paintings: Evidence from a Quantitative Meta-analysis of Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Data.” *Brain and Cognition*, vol. 87, 2014, pp. 52-6; Veldhuizen, Maria G., et al. “The Pleasure of Taste Flavor and Food.” *Pleasures of the Brain*, edited by Kringelbach ML, Berridge KC. Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 146–168; Vuust, Peter, and Morten L. Kringelbach. “The Pleasure of Music.” *Pleasures of the Brain*, edited by Kringelbach ML, Berridge KC, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 255-269; Xu, Xiaomeng, et al. “Reward and Motivation Systems: A Brain Mapping Study of Early-stage Intense Romantic Love in Chinese Participants.” *Human Brain Mapping*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2011, pp. 249-57; Zeki, Semir, and John Paul Romaya. “The Brain Reaction to Viewing Faces of Opposite- and Same-Sex Romantic Partners.” *Plos One*, vol. 5, no. 12, 2011, p. e15802.

<sup>348</sup> Berridge & Kringelbach. “Pleasure systems.”

<sup>349</sup> Berridge, Kent C., and Morten Kringelbach. “Neuroscience of Affect: Brain Mechanisms of Pleasure and Displeasure.” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2013, pp. 294-303.

<sup>350</sup> Duncker. “On Pleasure”; Smuts. “The Feels Good”; Bengtsson. “Pleasure”; Crisp. “Reasons”, p. 109; Kagan. “The Limits”; Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

experiences are complex events: the heterogeneity of pleasures is determined by the varying qualitative features, different from pleasantness itself, that show up in each pleasant experience. The fact that attending a beautiful concert, reading your favorite philosopher, and drinking good wine feel differently does not imply that they do not share a dimension of pleasantness. In other words, pleasantness is an aspect of all of these experiences, as much as redness is an aspect that different experiences, such as gazing at a rose and watching a gory film, share.<sup>351</sup>

To reiterate, according to the Hedonic Tone Theory, pleasantness is usually not an experience in itself. It frequently arises as an “aspect” or “property” of a more complex experience. It consists of a tone affecting an experience: it is a feeling-tone that can envelop every experience.<sup>352</sup> Thus, the diversity of pleasant experiences becomes unproblematic if pleasantness is taken to be just one aspect of a qualitatively complex experience.<sup>353</sup> Different intensities of pleasantness might also have contributed to the rise of the heterogeneity problem: it is obvious that a mildly pleasant experience and an intense one do not feel identical. According to the Hedonic Tone Theory, intensity of pleasure can be understood as the degree of saturation of the experience with pleasantness.<sup>354</sup>

Still, in line with the Distinctive Feeling View, pleasure seems a phenomenal quality that can exist by itself.<sup>355</sup> In some cases, it seems possible to experience “pure” pleasure. Notice that this issue is not about intentionality, i.e. whether there is something the pleasure is directed at. The doubt is whether we can experience the phenomenology of pleasure free from the disturbances caused by other occurrent phenomenologies. Yet, most of us, can only imagine such a state where pleasantness saturates our phenomenal consciousness. Below, I aim at evoking this kind of state through the words of a Christian mystic. In this passage, Boehme describes the bliss that he experienced through God.<sup>356</sup> Incidentally, notice the difference between his account of pleasure and Feldman’s example of the ascetic sage Stoicus.<sup>357</sup> For Feldman, Stoicus has a happy life by withdrawal from any feeling of pleasure. Stoicus only has feelingless attitudinal pleasures: he

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<sup>351</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>352</sup> Note that, in other contexts, the expression “hedonic tone” is used with a different meaning: “hedonic tone, also referred to as hedonic capacity or hedonic responsiveness, is the trait or genetic predisposition underlying one’s baseline range and lifelong characteristic ability to feel pleasure.” Sternat, Tia, and Martin A. Katzman. “Neurobiology of Hedonic Tone: The Relationship between Treatment-Resistant Depression, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Substance Abuse.” *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, vol. 12, 2016, pp. 2149-64.

<sup>353</sup> Duncker. “On Pleasure.”

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>356</sup> Someone might consider this to be an example of “false pleasure”. A false pleasure is a pleasure caused by a delusion, like when you falsely believe you have won the lottery. That said, if this pleasure is caused by a false belief, it does not concern the understanding of its phenomenology. For the definition of false pleasure: Blackburn, Simon. “False Pleasure.” *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 173-74.

<sup>357</sup> Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”, p. 68.

judges good the fact that he is in peace, that he is not experiencing bodily pains, that he is practicing meditation. Not so, Boehme:

Oftentimes when his soul eateth of the divine love-essence, it bringeth to him an exulting triumph, and a divine taste into the temperament itself. So that the whole body is affected and even trembleth for joy, being lifted up to such a degree of divine sensation, as if it was on the very borders of paradise.<sup>358</sup>

These states correspond to ecstasy, something that does not resemble more familiar experiences of pleasure. These salient states can be accommodated by referring to pleasantness, rather than as a “tone”, as a “unit of experience”.<sup>359</sup> By doing so, we do not exclude that pleasantness might show up, perhaps rarely, as a “pure” feeling.

Nevertheless, pleasantness comes ordinarily intertwined with other phenomenal qualities. Still keeping a restricted view on phenomenology, pleasant experiences are usually the sum of one or more affective phenomenologies with one or more sensory phenomenologies, each with a varying saturation. Given this phenomenal complexity, it is challenging, although not impossible, to isolate a monistic hedonic tone that is shared by perceived heterogeneous pleasures.

As an example of introspective challenges, we tend to distinguish pleasures according to their perceived causes or contexts.<sup>360</sup> At first sight, the pleasantness of ice-cream is thought to correspond to its sweet, cold, and fatty qualities.<sup>361</sup> Instead, a careful phenomenological examination reveals that, in this case, pleasantness has been confused with the sensory qualities of the experience that may cause the brain to experience pleasure. The pleasantness of eating ice-cream is not its sweetness, its temperature, or its nutritional properties. We should distinguish the mere sensations of eating ice-cream from its pleasantness: the hedonic tone is an affective phenomenology distinct from the sensory qualities of the experience. With a more accurate introspection, the “feels good” phenomenology can be isolated from the rest of the experience.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Boehme, Jacob. *The Confessions of Jacob Boehme*. Edited by W. Scott Palmer, Methuen, 1920, p. 142.

<sup>359</sup> Labukt. “Hedonic Tone.”

<sup>360</sup> Problems with introspection might have contributed to the rise of the heterogeneity problem. In fact, according to empirical studies, affective introspection is particularly fallible, as opposed, for example, to sensory introspection. Focus on specific information content and the experience of affect are shown to compete. Thus, there are limits to hedonic introspection. Pleasure might be easier to introspect sideways than directly. Katz. “Pleasure”; Haybron. “The Pursuit”, p. 199.; Schwitzgebel. “The Unreliability”, p. 250.; For skepticism about introspection, see: Kind, Amy. “Introspection.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu), accessed 28 Feb. 2020; For skepticism about hedonic introspection, see: Haybron, Daniel M. “Do We Know How Happy We Are?” *Nous*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2007, pp. 394-428; For empirical evidence on the failures of introspection, see: Schwitzgebel, Eric. “Introspection.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 1 Mar. 2020.

<sup>361</sup> Glucklich. “Pain.”

<sup>362</sup> Lobel. “Philosophies”; Usher. “Felt-quality.”

Thus, the supposed lack of a single pleasant felt-quality can also be attributed to erroneous introspection.<sup>363</sup> Under the spotlight of the Hedonic Tone Theory, the difficulty experienced by Sidgwick and others (the heterogeneity problem) in introspecting a shared felt-quality of pleasure seems a lesser daunting objection to pleasure feeling like something.<sup>364</sup> To reiterate, epistemological considerations about introspection should make us re-consider as less daunting the difficulty of isolating the feels good dimension of all pleasures. The supposed introspective evidence, that defenders of the heterogeneity problem claim to be on their side, is insufficient for falsification.<sup>365</sup> Scholars sympathetic to the heterogeneity objection seem to mistakenly direct their introspection at whole experiences rather than just the hedonically valenced dimension of them.

Therefore, it seems that the Hedonic Tone Theory can explain the perceived qualitative differences of pleasures while maintaining the unity of pleasure. The fact that pleasant experiences feel globally different one from the other does not imply that they do not share a single felt-quality. Different pleasures might show variable non-hedonic qualities but they all include more or less of the experience pleasantness.

### **Saving the Simple Picture**

In this section, I defend the *simple picture* of pleasure. In fact, the Distinctive Feeling View and the Hedonic Tone Theory, in addition to being neuro-scientifically supported and philosophically convincing, align very closely with the laypersons' conception of pleasure. Also, I claim that the alternative to the simple picture, the Attitudinal Theory, does not seem to fare better in regard to linguistic accuracy in the description of pleasure.

Common sense holds that different pleasant experiences share a felt-quality and that, at the same time, can be distinguished according to varying phenomenological qualities. In people's mind, as showed by Dubè and Le Bel, the category of pleasure has a multi-layered representation: there is a unitary representation of pleasure and subgroups of pleasures sharing some phenomenological qualities (e.g. intellectual, emotional, social, physical).<sup>366</sup> As claimed by the authors: "laypeople's representations of unitary and differentiated pleasures shared a set of common positive affective qualities but also that they can be distinguished on the basis of unique affective qualities".<sup>367</sup> Despite the introspective difficulties that led to the heterogeneity problem, it seems unlikely that pleasure corresponds to a class of mental states that Phenomenalism and common sense have put

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<sup>363</sup> Glucklich. "Pain."

<sup>364</sup> Labukt. "Hedonic Tone"; Katz. "Pleasure."

<sup>365</sup> Labukt. "Hedonic Tone"; Aydede. "How to Unify."

<sup>366</sup> Dubé, Laurette, and Jordan Le Bel. "The Content and Structure of Laypeople's Concept of Pleasure." *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 263-95.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid. p. 290.

together by accident. The appeal to a monistic hedonic tone often scattered between complex experiences is able to explain why pleasures might appear disunified from one another while sharing a felt-quality.<sup>368</sup>

At last, the heterogeneity problem appears less daunting than the killjoy problem identified in Ch. 3. In other words, getting rid of pleasure's "feels good" phenomenology, as Feldman does, creates a more troubling issue for a descriptive theory of pleasure than admitting the linguistic difficulties we face in describing the shared feeling of pleasantness. Concerning language, as showed in Ch. 3, Feldman also describes his pleasure-attitude as an experiential primitive. Feldman's account by no means seems more clearly articulated than the "feels good" account in the verbal description of pleasure. Feldman's theory does not fare better in linguistically uniting pleasures. Rather, by calling unfelt judgments of goodness "pleasures", it might seem to deepen the heterogeneity of pleasures: obviously we cannot identify a common feeling of pleasure between pleasant and hedonically neutral attitudes.<sup>369</sup> If we incorporate Feldman's non-affective meaning of pleasure into the concept of pleasure, we create a deeper linguistic "heterogeneity problem".

Considering the Attitudinal Theory's linguistic inarticulateness in describing pleasure alongside its killjoy problem, the *simple picture*—to which the Attitudinal Theory is the main available alternative—does not seem to be knocked down. The combined claims of the Distinctive Feeling View and the Hedonic Tone Theory are philosophically convincing and do not contradict neuroscience or laypersons' intuitions. Although philosophers often legitimately reject common sense, they should not do so when the rejection conflicts both with philosophical strength and empirical evidence. The folk's simple picture of pleasure turns out to be in line with our best descriptive theory of pleasure.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I firstly introduced the Distinctive Feeling View of pleasure. By doing so, I endorsed Hedonic Primitivism, a view that denies the possibility of a reductive or non-metaphorical description of pleasantness. However, the Distinctive Feeling View accommodates the unity of pleasure through a primitive property pleasantness with which we are experientially familiar. Secondly, I presented the current empirical evidence that seems to confirm the unity of pleasure.

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<sup>368</sup> Also the advanced heterogeneity of pleasure and displeasure seems ultimately unproblematic. In accordance with common sense, pleasure and displeasure seem to be opposite feelings. They seem to be experienced on a continuum that develops from torture-like displeasure, through neutrality, to sublime pleasure. Likewise, warmth and cold, pleasure and displeasure, by being on a continuum, form one unified experience. Although in a complex way, we can trade-off pleasure and displeasure against each other. Pleasure and displeasure seem ultimately comparable experiences. Schroeder. "Three Faces of Desire", ch. 3.

<sup>369</sup> Smuts. "The Feels Good."

Thirdly, I presented an explanation of the supposed heterogeneity problem, the Hedonic Tone Theory. This theory seems able to accommodate the differences we might perceive among pleasant experiences. The intentionalists' claim that introspective evidence is on their side is questionable. Thus, I concluded that the phenomenalist account of pleasure that descends from these theories, in addition to being philosophically and neuro-scientifically plausible, does not unjustly reject laypersons' intuitions. The *simple picture* does not seem falsified.

## Part 1—Conclusion

In this Part, I dealt with the description of pleasure. First of all, I introduced the debate on pleasure's nature with reference to the philosophy of mind's controversies it emerges from. Then, I rejected desire-based intentionalist theories in general and Heathwood's Motivational Theory in particular. These theories seem to have phenomenological issues too daunting to be convincing. Furthermore, these theories seem refuted by strong neuroscientific evidence. Next, I addressed Feldman's Attitudinal Theory of pleasure and argued that its rejection of pleasure's phenomenology is unconvincing. Thus, I defended a phenomenalist theory of pleasure, the Distinctive Feeling View, by dismissing the heterogeneity problem through the Hedonic Tone Theory. Pleasure's simple picture seems philosophically alive, especially considering that it seems confirmed by neuroscience. Given that, Intentionalism's rejection of pleasure's common-sense understanding seems unjustified. My account of pleasure can be labelled as non-separatist phenomenalist. In fact, I claimed that the conceptual tool of attitudinal pleasure might be saved to describe a specific class of pleasures, pleasant experiences that show, in addition to a necessary phenomenology, an intentionality. Notice that this class of pleasures might be particularly interesting for the practical philosophy of Prudential Hedonism, as opposed to folk hedonism, for the long-term maximization of a life's net-pleasure (e.g. delayed gratification). In conclusion, Phenomenalist Quantitative Prudential Hedonism seems able to keep its axiological monism through a unified account of its prudential good. Remember, that in the past, hedonistic claims have been objected to on the grounds of the supposed lack of a pleasure's convincing descriptive theory. Moreover, differently from Feldman's Attitudinal Hedonism, Phenomenalist Quantitative Prudential Hedonism seems able to intuitively justify the goodness of its intrinsic value. In other words, a phenomenalist descriptive theory of pleasure guarantees direct phenomenological access to pleasure's value—the intuitive prudential goodness of pleasure is saved.

## **Part 2—Prudential Hedonism and Experience Machine Thought Experiments**

Part 2 concerns the objection based on the experience machine thought experiments to Mental State theories of well-being. In the past, these thought experiments were considered a knock-down argument against Prudential Hedonism. Ch. 5 reviews the literature to show how the traditional confidence in the experience machine thought experiments to prove Prudential Hedonism wrong has been challenged by experimental revisionist literature. The Expertise Objection is identified as the main threat to the revisionist trend and dismissed. Ch. 6 introduces the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument, which attempts to sidestep the revisionist literature and its experiments by redesigning the thought experiment. But it is argued that the new design of this argument suffers from the Freebie Problem—a structural problem that makes the thought experiment generate unhelpful responses.

# Chapter 5—The Experience Machine Thought Experiments

In this chapter, I first introduce: the original formulations of the Experience Machine Thought Experiments (EMTEs), the question that they are meant to isolate, their target theories, how to best understand the argument based on them, and the implications that have historically been attributed to them. Second, I present a recent revisionist trend in the scholarship that undermines traditional confidence in the EMTEs. Third, I discuss and reject some objections to this current revisionist trend, giving special attention to the Expertise Objection. Its rejection is based on the current empirical evidence, which I argue puts the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of any would be proponents of the Expertise Objection.

## Nozick's Thought Experiments

This section presents two excerpts from Robert Nozick's original formulations of the thought experiments. These quotes are chosen for their effectiveness in capturing the narrative of the thought experiments. Yet, notice that these excerpts are selected from longer texts, thus they do not exhaust Nozick's discussion of the EMTEs. After this presentation, I summarize the structure of the thought experiments and the implications that traditionally they have been thought to have.

In 1974, Nozick presented his famous thought experiment in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*:

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life's experiences? If you are worried about missing out on desirable experiences, we can suppose that business enterprises have researched thoroughly the lives of many others. You can pick and choose from their large library or smorgasbord of such experiences, selecting your life's experiences for, say, the next two years. After two years have passed, you will have ten minutes or ten hours out of the tank, to select the experiences of your next two years. Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening. Others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so

there's no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in.) Would you plug in? What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside? Nor should you refrain because of the few moments of distress between the moment you've decided and the moment you're plugged. What's a few moments of distress compared to a lifetime of bliss (if that's what you choose), and why feel any distress at all if your decision is the best one?<sup>370</sup>

In 1989, in *The Examined Life*, Nozick presented the EMTE as follow:

Imagine a machine that could give you any experience (or sequence of experiences) you might desire. When connected to this experience machine, you can have the experience of writing a great poem or bringing about world peace or loving someone and being loved in return. You can experience the felt pleasures of these things, how they feel “from the inside.” You can program your experiences for tomorrow, or this week, or this year, or even for the rest of your life. If your imagination is impoverished, you can use the library of suggestions extracted from biographies and enhanced by novelists and psychologists. You can live your fondest dreams “from the inside.” Would you choose to do this for the rest of your life? If not, why not? (Other people also have the same option of using these machines which, let us suppose, are provided by friendly and trustworthy beings from another galaxy, so you need not refuse connecting in order to help others.) The question is not whether to try the machine temporarily, but whether to enter it for the rest of your life. Upon entering, you will not remember having done this; so no pleasures will get ruined by realizing they are machineproduced. Uncertainty too might be programmed by using the machine’s optional random device (upon which various preselected alternatives can depend).<sup>371</sup>

In my view, the most relevant difference between the two thought experiments lies in the temporal description of plugging in. In the 1974’s EMTE the plugging in is for two years, in the 1989’s EMTE the plugging in is for life. In his testing of the 1974’s EMTE, Dan Weijers reports that 9% of the participants adverse to plugging in justified it by saying something like: “getting out every two

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<sup>370</sup> Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Blackwell, 1974, pp. 42-43.

<sup>371</sup> Nozick, Robert. *The Examined Life*. Simon & Schuster, 1989, pp. 104-105.

years would be depressing”.<sup>372</sup> On one side, this kind of reply is legitimate: well-being concerns lives and to maximize a life’s net-pleasure it is fully legitimate to consider the eventual displeasure felt every two years when unplugging. Yet, on the other side, this kind of reply seems to elude the prudential question that the thought experiment is designed to isolate. Thus, the 1989’s EMTE is more effective in tracking the choice between two lives, one spent in touch with reality and one spent inside an Experience Machine (EM), that the thought experiments aim at isolating.<sup>373</sup>

That said, the majority of readers of the EMTEs report a judgement against plugging in. In later studies, Weijers found that this judgement was shared by 84% of the participants asked to respond to Nozick’s 1974’s EMTE.<sup>374</sup> Similarly, Frank Hindriks and Igor Douven presented this succinct vignette:

Imagine that you are presented with a choice to plug into an experience machine. Due to the machine, the experiences you will have for the rest of your life are almost exclusively pleasurable. If you accept this option, you will be permanently

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<sup>372</sup> Weijers, Dan. “Nozick’s Experience Machine Is Dead, Long Live the Experience Machine!” *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2014, pp. 513-35.

<sup>373</sup> By Nozick’s stipulation, this involves disregarding metaphysical and epistemological concerns that the thought-experiment might equally elicit: “The question of whether to plug in to this experience machine is a question of value. It differs from two related questions: an epistemological one—Can you know you are not already plugged in?—and a metaphysical one—Don’t the machine experiences themselves constitute a real world?” Nozick. “The Examined”, p. 105; The EMTE also implies this specific controversial assumption: Virtual Irrealism. With the term “Virtual Irrealism”, Chalmers refers to this set of claims: (1) Virtual objects do not really exist. (2) Events in virtual reality do not really take place. (3) Experiences in virtual reality are illusory. (4) Virtual experiences are less valuable than non-virtual experiences. Let’s focus on (4): Nozick assumes that a “man-made reality, a world no deeper or more important than that which people can construct” is less valuable. He thinks that there is no contact with any “deeper reality”, therefore it is a less valuable environment. However, it might be, following Chalmers, that Virtual Reality is not a second-class reality but a second-level reality created by processes in the physical world. Surely, at present, Virtual Reality is often a low-quality imitation of physical reality but, in principle, it is far from clear why a life inside an EM should be less valuable than a life in touch with the physical world. Chalmers, David J. “The Virtual and the Real.” *Disputatio*, vol. 9, no. 46, 2017, pp. 309-52; Nozick. “Anarchy”, p. 43; Nozick also asks readers to ignore contextual factors. For example, he claims, we should not evaluate whether a life inside an EM is worse than a life of torture (“The question is not whether plugging in is preferable to extremely dire alternatives”). In fact, as claimed by Chad Stevenson, it seems reasonable to prefer a life plugged into an EM to a life of torture, but this preference does not respect the thought-experiment’s stipulation. To isolate the relevant prudential question, we should think about a hedonically average life. Given that, we might doubt that our trade-off between pleasure and reality can be insensitive to contextual factors, e.g. someone being afflicted by chronic depression. If we are among the hedonically less privileged people, as claimed by Daniel Pietrucha, we might have powerful intuitive reasons for plugging in. This phenomenon seems shown by a preliminary study by Weijers: unhappy people seem more prone to plug in and happy people seem more adverse. Nozick. “The Examined”, p. 105; Stevenson, Chad. “Experience Machines, Conflicting Intuitions and the Bipartite Characterization of Well-being.” *Utilitas*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2018, pp. 383-98; Pietrucha, Daniel. “Intuition and Imaginative Failure.” *Experience Machines: The Philosophy of Virtual Worlds*, edited by Mark Silcox, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017, p. 40; Weijers, Dan. Experience Machine Experiments: Testing the Importance of Relationships and Individual Differences, paper presented at the 3rd Australasian Experimental Philosophy Conference, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand. 2018.

<sup>374</sup> Weijers. “Nozick’s.”

floating in a tank with electrodes attached to your brain (without being aware of this).<sup>375</sup>

Facing this choice, 71% of the experimental subjects shared the pro-reality judgement, a percentage different from Weijers but still a considerable majority.<sup>376</sup> Notice that the different results may be attributed to the different vignettes presented by these authors or to the different experimental groups investigated.

Since a life inside the EM seems the best life for Mental State theories of well-being in general and (Mental Statist) Prudential Hedonism in particular, these majority's preferences are taken as evidence against Mental State theories of well-being and Prudential Hedonism. In fact, people's judgements in favor of living in touch with reality are taken to mean that reality must be intrinsically prudentially valuable.<sup>377</sup> As claimed by Willem van der Deijl, "The experience machine objection maintains that a life lived in an artificial experience machine lacks something valuable, even though it may be perfectly good in terms of experiences".<sup>378</sup> If reality is intrinsically prudentially valuable, theories of well-being that hold that only how experiences feel "from the inside" directly contributes to wellbeing are false.<sup>379</sup>

Given the argument based on the EMTEs, this thought experiment has been widely considered a knock-down argument against Mental State theories of well-being and Prudential Hedonism. In other words, these theories have been traditionally quickly dismissed through appeals

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<sup>375</sup> Hindriks, Frank, and Igor Douven. "Nozick's Experience Machine: An Empirical Study." *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2018, p. 288.

<sup>376</sup> Hindriks & Douven. "Nozick's."

<sup>377</sup> Weijers, Dan, and Vanessa Schouten. "An Assessment of Recent Responses to the Experience Machine Objection to Hedonism." *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2013, pp. 461-82.

<sup>378</sup> van der Deijl, Willem. "Is Pleasure All That is Good About Experience?" *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 176, no. 7, 2019, p. 1771.

<sup>379</sup> Philosophers of perception have explored our "sense of presence". According to Jérôme Dokic and Jean-Rémy Martin, one way to understand this feeling is like a "sense of reality"—the feeling that the object of perception belongs to the actual world rather than to a possible or impossible world. Phenomenologically, the world is thought to appear "present", we are immersed in this integrated ontology where things exist. Presence is the phenomenological experience of reality. The feeling of reality comes in a continuum from mind-dependence to realness. Extreme cases of low perceived-reality are determined by mental health disorders like Dissociative Disorder. Dissociative Disorder is here restricted to derealization, the disruption of the perceptive function. In derealization, the subject has a feeling of unreality accompanying his perceptions. In common cases like dreams, if we take ordinary waking states to have a level of realness 1, we experience a <1 feeling of reality. At the opposite, it is thought that there are some >1 "hyperreal" phenomenologies, such as some drug-induced states, ecstatic epileptic seizures, or religious experiences. Thus, by manipulating our phenomenology of reality, an ideal Virtual Reality could provide a degree of immersion, a presence, higher than reality. Therefore, if we consider reality not as mind-independent objective relations but as a mental state, life inside an ideal EM could be more real than physical reality. An ideal EM will create a synthetic reality's phenomenology that could be overall more intense than in ordinary physical reality. Dokic, Jérôme, and Jean-Rémy Martin. "Felt Reality and the Opacity of Perception." *Topoi*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2017, pp. 299-309; Metzinger, Thomas. "Précis of 'Being No One'." *Psyche—An Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Consciousness*, vol. 11, no. 5, 2005, pp. 1-35; Metzinger, Thomas K. "Why Is Virtual Reality Interesting for Philosophers?" *Frontiers in Robotics and AI*, vol. 5, no. 101, 2018; For Dissociative Disorder: Sar, Vedat. "Epidemiology of Dissociative Disorders: An Overview." *Epidemiology Research International*, vol. 2011, 2011, p. 1; Černis, Emma, et al. "Describing the Indescribable: A Qualitative Study of Dissociative Experiences in Psychosis." *Plos One*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2020.

to the EMTEs.<sup>380</sup> Weijers, for example, compiled a non-exhaustive list of twenty-eight scholars that agree with Nozick in believing that the EMTEs constitute a successful refutation of Prudential Hedonism and Mental State theories of well-being.<sup>381</sup>

### Target Theory: Mental Statism

In this section, I point out the target theories of the thought experiment. By doing so, I stipulate that Part 2 will refer to Mental Statist Prudential Hedonism as the target theory, although the points being made equally apply to non-hedonistic mental statist theories of well-being.

Mental State theories of well-being value subjective mental states—how our experiences feel to us from the inside—and nothing else.<sup>382</sup> Put simply, what does not affect our consciousness, cannot be good or bad for us. As L.W. Sumner claims for Prudential Hedonism: “nothing can make our lives go better or worse unless it somehow affects the quality of our experience”.<sup>383</sup>

Accordingly, for Mental State theories, well-being is necessarily experiential.

Notice that these theories do not dispute that states-of-affairs contribute to well-being. For example, they do not dispute that winning a Nobel Prize makes one’s life go better. Mental State theories dispute that states-of-affairs *intrinsically* affect well-being.<sup>384</sup> According to these theories, winning a Nobel Prize makes one’s life go better instrumentally because, for example, it causes pleasure.<sup>385</sup> Henry Sidgwick explored the value of conscious life and consciousness’s objective relations to reality, concluding that these objective relations are just instrumentally valuable.

According to him, objective relations to reality are not valuable in themselves because any material

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<sup>380</sup> Kawall, Jason. “The Experience Machine and Mental State Theories of Well-Being.” *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1999, pp. 381-87.

<sup>381</sup> Weijers. “Nozick’s.”

<sup>382</sup> Kolber, Adam Jason. “Mental Statism and the Experience Machine.” *Bard Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 3, 1994, pp. 10-17.

<sup>383</sup> Sumner, Leonard W. *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*. Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 112.

<sup>384</sup> Weijers. “Nozick’s.”

<sup>385</sup> Here, I devise an example to illustrate the implications of a Mental State theory of well-being: The astronomer Ptolemy (ca. 85-165 AD) devoted much of his life to the Geocentric Theory. In Alexandria of Egypt, he conducted years of studies of the previous research and astronomical observations. The work of Ptolemy is still regarded by some scholars as a masterpiece. According to them, the planetary theory which he developed, through its sophisticated mathematical model to fit observational data, describes the motions of the planets fairly well. Let’s imagine that Ptolemy’s life went very well in terms of the mental states he had. He saw himself as a great scholar, feeling that he had finally captured the reality of the universe, and this feeling was for him a huge source of joy. Ptolemy’s theory of the universe was unanimously regarded as true until, almost 1400 years later, Copernicus presented his Heliocentric Theory in 1543. In other words, more than 1400 years after Ptolemy’s death his theory was proven false. According to Mental State theories of well-being, Ptolemy’s life was prudentially good. Ptolemy never knew that his theory was later falsified because it happened centuries after his death. Remember that we are evaluating how his life went for him, not for us, and that we know things that he did not. Ptolemy’s life was subjectively good; he felt and believed that he had a good life. Accordingly, life can be experienced only “from the inside”, so only events in consciousness can make a life good or bad. For a Mental State theory of well-being, the fact that Ptolemy’s mental states were the results of an unfortunate mistake does not affect his well-being.

object is not valuable in itself. Rather, the intrinsic value lies in the consciousness that results from them.<sup>386</sup>

Different theories can point to different mental states as the ultimate prudential goods. Chris Heathwood, for example, advances a theory that he calls “Subjective Desire-satisfactionism”. According to it, well-being is increased by believing that one is getting what one wants, rather than by states of affairs aligning with what one wants as in standard versions of Desire-satisfactionism.<sup>387</sup>

Concerning standard Desire-satisfactionism, it is usually thought to be immune from objections based on the EMTEs. As said by Dan Lowe and Joseph Stenberg, “it is widely accepted that desire-satisfactionist theories of welfare can readily avoid the objection”.<sup>388</sup> According to many, since most of us want to live in touch with reality, plugging into the EM would frustrate this desire and make our lives go worse.<sup>389</sup> Thus, Desire-satisfactionism is often thought to not be affected by the EMTEs.

However, as claimed by Ben Bramble, the supposed insusceptibility of Desire-satisfactionism to the EMTEs is questionable. In fact, given that a minority of people want to plug into the EM, these peoples’ lives, according to Desire-satisfactionism, would be better inside the EM. This implication conflicts with the majority’s judgement that a life inside the EM is not a good life.<sup>390</sup> In general, as noted by Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, if a person’s desires concern only mental states, Desire-satisfactionism becomes undistinguishable from a Mental State Theory of well-being.<sup>391</sup>

That said, Weijers and Vanessa Schouten suggest that the EMTEs have traditionally been used against Prudential Hedonism probably because this is the most famous Mental State theory of well-being.<sup>392</sup> As also claimed by van der Deijl, “Generally, experiential [mental statist] theories of wellbeing are hedonistic”.<sup>393</sup> Thus, Part 2 will refer to Prudential Hedonism as the target theory of the EMTEs although the argument based on it is equally applicable to any other Mental State theory of well-being.

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<sup>386</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. Macmillan, 1907, pp. 400-401.

<sup>387</sup> Heathwood, Chris. “Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism.” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 128, no. 3, 2006, pp. 539-63.

<sup>388</sup> Lowe, Dan, and Joseph Stenberg. “The Experience Machine Objection to Desire Satisfactionism.” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-17.

<sup>389</sup> Lukas, Mark. “Desire Satisfactionism and the Problem of Irrelevant Desires.” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2009, pp. 1-25.

<sup>390</sup> Bramble, Ben. “The Experience Machine.” *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2016, pp. 136-45.

<sup>391</sup> de Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna, and Peter Singer. *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 255.

<sup>392</sup> Weijers & Schouten. “An Assessment

<sup>393</sup> van der Deijl. “Is Pleasure”, p. 1770; van der Deijl argues in favor of Mental Statism while denying that Prudential Hedonism is the most convincing version of it. van der Deijl. “Is Pleasure.”

It should also be noted that Prudential Hedonism is not necessarily a Mental State theory of well-being. Fred Feldman, for example, has advanced a hybrid mental state/externalist prudential hedonistic theory called “Truth-Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism”.<sup>394</sup> Thus, below, Prudential Hedonism should be interpreted as Mental Statist Prudential Hedonism.

### **Deductive Argument**

According to Weijers and Schouten, there are two ways to understand the argument based on the EMTEs. This section presents the so-called deductive argument. Having introduced this version of the argument, I argue that this version of the EMTEs’ argument is unconvincing and, thus, should be disregarded.

This is how Weijers and Schouten formalize the deductive version of the argument:

DP1. In terms of the internal aspects of our experiences, an experience machine life would be much better than a life in reality. (Stipulated in thought experiment)

DP2. When instructed to ignore their responsibilities to others, the vast majority of reasonable people report preferring reality over a life in an experience machine. (Empirical claim)

DP3. If when instructed to ignore their responsibilities to others, the vast majority of reasonable people report preferring reality over a life in an experience machine, then reality matters intrinsically to the vast majority of reasonable people

DC1. Therefore, reality matters intrinsically to the vast majority of reasonable people. (Modus ponens DP2, DP3)

DP4. If something matters intrinsically to the vast majority of reasonable people, then that thing has intrinsic prudential value

DC2. Therefore, reality has intrinsic prudential value. (Modus ponens DC1, DP4)

DP5. If Mental Statist Prudential Hedonism is true, then the internal aspects of pleasure and pain are the only things of intrinsic prudential value (or disvalue) in a life. (Stipulated definition)

DC3. Therefore, Mental Statist Prudential Hedonism is false. (Modus tollens, DC2, DP5).<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism*. Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 112-114.

<sup>395</sup> Weijers & Schouten. “An Assessment.”

The main problem with the deductive version of the argument lies in DP4. Remember the is-ought dichotomy: knowing “what is” does not by itself entail knowing “what ought to be”. DP4 jumps too boldly from a descriptive claim, the majority of people prefer reality, to a normative claim, reality is intrinsically valuable. As noted by both Feldman and Sharon Hewitt, DP4 is false because the fact that reality matters intrinsically to many of us does not necessarily imply that it should be valued intrinsically by all of us.<sup>396</sup> For example, the majority of us, perhaps instrumentally, value wealth but it does not necessarily follow that it is wrong to not value wealth.

### **Abductive Argument**

This section presents the other interpretation by Weijers and Schouten of the argument based on the EMTEs, the abductive argument. Afterward, given the implausibility of the deductive version, I stipulate that Part 2 will concern the abductive version.

Let’s consider how Weijers and Schouten formalize this version:

AP1. In terms of the internal aspects of our experiences, an experience machine life would be much better than a life in reality. (Stipulated in thought experiment)

AP2. When instructed to ignore their responsibilities to others, the vast majority of reasonable people report preferring reality over a life in an experience machine. (Empirical claim)

AP3. The best explanation for AP2 is that reality matters intrinsically to the vast majority of reasonable people

AP4. Inference to the best explanation: If a hypothesis is the best explanation of an observation, then it is rational to believe that hypothesis is true. (Standard methodological premise)

AC1. Therefore, it is rational to believe that reality matters intrinsically to the vast majority of reasonable people. (Modus ponens AP3, AP4)

AP5. The best explanation for reality mattering intrinsically to the vast majority of reasonable people is that reality has intrinsic prudential value

AP6. Inference to the best explanation. (Standard methodological premise)

AC2. Therefore, it is rational to believe that reality has intrinsic prudential value. (Modus ponens AP5, AP6)

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<sup>396</sup> Feldman, Fred. “What We Learn from the Experience Machine.” *The Cambridge Companion to Nozick's Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, edited by R. Bader and J. Meadowcroft. Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 59-86; Hewitt, Sharon. “What Do Our Intuitions about the Experience Machine Really Tell Us about Hedonism?” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 151, no. 3, 2009, pp. 331-49.

AP7. If Mental Statist Prudential Hedonism is true, then the internal aspects of pleasure and pain are the only things of intrinsic prudential value (or disvalue) in a life. (Stipulated definition)

AC3. Therefore, it is rational to believe that Mental Statist Prudential Hedonism is false. (Modus tollens, AC2, AP7).<sup>397</sup>

More plausibly, in the abductive version, the passage from the descriptive level to the normative level, from “reality intrinsically matters to the majority of people” to “reality is intrinsically valuable”, is understood, in point AP5, as an inference to the best explanation. According to this argument, the best explanation for something intrinsically mattering to many people is something being intrinsically valuable. Therefore, since the deductive version of the EMTEs’ argument seems severely unconvincing and, instead, the abductive version seems more plausible, Part 2 will address the abductive version.

### **EMTEs as Intuition Pumps**

In the following part of the chapter, I present the most recent developments in the debate on the EMTEs. A recent trend in the scholarship has undermined the supposedly devastating implications of the EMTEs for Mental State theories. These studies do not show that Prudential Hedonism is true, but they do indicate that we should not rely on judgements elicited by the EMTEs to conclude that Prudential Hedonism is false.

Thought experiments are a well-established investigative method in philosophy.<sup>398</sup>

However, philosophers like Daniel Dennet have expressed the worry that these introspective tools might be misleading. By doing so, Dennet coined the expression “intuition pump” to describe a thought experiment that, intentionally or not, elicits responses that are largely driven by intuition.<sup>399</sup> Since, following Weijers, intuitive cognition, as opposed to deliberative cognition, is particularly prone to be misled, thought experiments that elicit a strong intuitive response are particularly prone to being affected by structural biases.<sup>400</sup>

As shown above, according to the abductive argument based on the EMTEs, reality being intrinsically prudentially valuable is the best explanation for reality intrinsically mattering to the majority of people. But is it really the best explanation? A recent trend in the scholarship on the

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<sup>397</sup> Weijers & Schouten. “An Assessment.”

<sup>398</sup> Weijers, Dan. “Intuitive Biases in Judgements About Thought Experiments: The Experience Machine Revisited.” *Philosophical Writings*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2013, pp. 17-31.

<sup>399</sup> Dennett, Daniel. “The Milk of Human Intentionality.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1980, pp. 428-30.

<sup>400</sup> Weijers. “Intuitive Biases.”

EMTEs has questioned this abduction by pointing to several biases that might determine people's apparent preference for reality. I'll call this literature the revisionist scholarship. Below, I present some phenomena advanced by the revisionist scholarship that seem to partially or significantly bias judgments about the EMTEs. These distorting factors are grouped under Hedonistic Bias, Imaginative Failures, and Status Quo Bias.

## **Hedonistic Bias**

I label "Hedonistic Bias" the most speculative of the proposed biases that, according to the recent literature, may affect our responses to the EMTEs. According to Matthew Silverstein, the desire for pleasure is at the heart of our motivational system. Pleasure determines the formation of all desires. Thus, the preference (desire) for not plugging in is itself motivated by a pleasure-maximizing concern.<sup>401</sup> For Silverstein, the preferences apparently conflicting with Prudential Hedonism are in themselves hedonistically motivated.

Notice that in Silverstein's *strong version*—pleasure-maximization alone explains the anti-hedonistic preferences—the advanced bias is not very convincing. Unless Psychological Hedonism—the claim that our motivational system is exclusively directed at pleasure<sup>402</sup>—is true, the Hedonistic Bias cannot be the full picture. As discussed in Part 1 Ch. 2, although having important empirical connections, pleasure and desire cannot be reduced to each other. Phenomenological considerations and strong neuroscientific evidence seem to deny a complete conjunction of pleasure and desire.

More plausibly, the EMTEs constitute further counter-examples against Psychological Hedonism. In fact, the majority of us, when facing the choice of plugging into an EM, have a preference for the pleasure-minimizing option. What the EMTEs tell us is that the majority of people have preferences conflicting with Psychological Hedonism. The majority of people do not seem to have an exclusively pleasure-maximizing motivational system. The descriptive claim of Psychological Hedonism seems once again to struggle with a convincing counter-example. Psychological hedonists are thus forced to appeal to unproven unconscious desires—conscious

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<sup>401</sup> Silverstein, Matthew. "In Defense of Happiness." *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 279-300; In different ways, the existence of a similar phenomenon affecting the formation of preferences has also been put forward by Crisp and Hewitt. Following Hewitt, reported judgements cannot be directly taken as evidence regarding intrinsic value. In fact, we usually devise thought experiments to investigate our pre-reflective preferences. Because the resulting judgements are pre-reflective, their genesis is not transparent to us and reflection on them does not guarantee their sources becoming transparent. Thus, our judgements elicited by the EMTEs do not necessarily track intrinsic value. It seems difficult to believe that we can simply infer intrinsic value from our judgements without having very carefully tested them. Crisp, Roger. *Reasons and the Good*. Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 120-122; Hewitt. "What."

<sup>402</sup> Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw. "Psychological Hedonism." *Synthese*, vol. 8, no. 8-9, 1950, p. 409.

pleasure-minimizing preferences as result of an unconscious desire for pleasure—to defend their theory.

Nevertheless, I advance that, in its *weak version*—pleasure-maximization partly explains the anti-hedonistic judgements—the Hedonistic Bias seems plausible. In fact, empirical research has shown a partial role of immediate pleasure-maximization in decision-making. This line of research demonstrates that, when different motivations conflict, pleasure seems to be the common currency through which subjects make trade-offs between different choices.<sup>403</sup> From studies like these, Michel Cabanac theorizes that pleasure is the common currency through which animals and humans solve a conflict of motivations. In other words, it seems that pleasure is the scale on which animals and humans rank options in choice situations.<sup>404</sup>

More importantly, the hypothesis that immediate pleasure-maximization plays a role in decision-making has also been confirmed by studies investigating choices in mathematics and, notably, in ethics. Consider this study by Cabanac and colleagues: in Experiment 1, subjects were presented with items that described a decision-making situation and a solution to it. The subjects were asked about their hedonic reaction to these items and the results were compared with the decisions taken by subjects in previous studies. The researchers found a significant correlation between the pleasure/displeasure rating of the experimental group and the choices taken by a previous one. In Experiment 2, subjects were presented with everyday ethical choices and their self-ratings of their hedonic reaction to these choices were recorded. Then, the subjects were asked which choice they would take in that situation and their choice correlated with their hedonic reaction. In Experiment 3, the hedonic experience of subjects reading some mathematical problems and their solutions was recorded. Then, the subjects were asked which was the correct answer to the mathematical problem and the subjects' answers were found to correlate with their hedonic reaction.<sup>405</sup>

Therefore, according to Cabanac, these studies show that pleasure-maximization plays a role in our ethical decisions. He thus concludes that, while our ethical judgements can be rational, our intuitions are, at least partially, hedonistically motivated.<sup>406</sup> This conclusion points in the direction

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<sup>403</sup> Johnson, Kristine G., and Michel Cabanac. "Human Thermoregulatory Behavior During a Conflict Between Cold Discomfort and Money." *Physiology & Behavior*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1983, pp. 145-50; Cabanac, Michel. "Money Versus Pain: Experimental Study of a Conflict in Humans." *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1986, pp. 37-44; Cabanac, Michel. "La Maximisation du Plaisir, Reponse a un Conflit de Motivations." *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences*, vol. 309, no. 3, 1989, pp. 397-402.

<sup>404</sup> Cabanac, Michel. "Pleasure: The Common Currency." *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, vol. 155, no. 2, 1992, pp. 173-200.

<sup>405</sup> Cabanac, Michel, et al. "Pleasure in Decision-Making Situations." *BMC Psychiatry*, vol. 2, no. 7, 2002.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

of the weak Hedonistic Bias, the fact that apparently non-hedonistic judgements might be partly motivated by pleasure-maximization.

However, at the present moment, there is no specific evidence supporting the claim that pleasure-maximization plays a remarkable role in our anti-hedonistic responses to the EMTEs. Considering our current evidence, the Hedonistic Bias seems to be a real phenomenon but it would be speculative to claim that it crucially affects our judgements about the EMTEs.

That said, below, I present a case where the weak Hedonistic Bias could be operating: Nozick asks to disregard the distress that choosing to plug in might cause in the short-term (“Nor should you refrain because of the few moments of distress between the moment you've decided and the moment you're plugged”<sup>407</sup>). Josh Taylor, for example, claims that “on the matter of memory alteration, Nozick is being a little unfair”. According to him, the idea of being parted from our memory elicits an unpleasant feeling in most of us. Thus, he continues, we might say no hedonistically.<sup>408</sup> Nevertheless, according to Nozick, we should eventually be rational and accept an immediate suffering for the sake of long-term pleasure. Unfortunately, as everyday experience shows us, we do not always have such a rational attitude toward immediate suffering for a long-term gain. Some people do not go to the dentist although it would benefit them or do not overcome their fear of flying although they would love to visit a different continent. Again, it seems doubtful that the factor “distress about plugging in” is actually disregarded just because Nozick asks to do so. As claimed by Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, there is likely a displeasure arising from the deliberation process about plugging into an EMTE.<sup>409</sup> Our adverse judgement to plugging in might be hedonistically motivated by the avoidance of this displeasure, regardless of Nozick asking us to disregard it.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Nozick. “Anarchy”, p. 43.

<sup>408</sup> Taylor, Josh. “Why Robert Nozick Should Have Played More Video Games.” *Comparative Humanities Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 70-76.

<sup>409</sup> Sober, Elliott, and David Sloan Wilson. *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*. Harvard University Press, 1998.

<sup>410</sup> Concerning the displeasure of leaving reality, contemporary psychological-neuroscientific models support the idea that knowing (reality) can be a source of pleasure and a way to avoid displeasure. According to the interest-deprivation model of curiosity the reward associated with knowledge is related to the kind of curiosity that is experienced. Curiosity can manifest itself as a feeling of tension caused by uncertainty or as a desire to enjoy a new information. In both cases, either as an avoidance of displeasure or as a pursuit of pleasure, this model supports the idea that knowledge might be a hedonistically motivated enterprise. Leonid Perlovsky and colleagues studied empirically the curiosity for acquiring new knowledge and its consequent pleasure. From their studies, they conclude that: “curiosity, may be added as a correlate with pleasure...satisfying curiosity is rewarding”. According to them, epistemic curiosity activates reward circuitry and this mechanism seems to be universal in humans. They conclude that that the need for knowledge is a fundamental and ancient motivation similar to basic needs for sex or food. To realize that, just think how much time humans spend in internally motivated information-seeking. Information such as news, movies, music, social media, etc., have mostly no direct survival value; still, their acquisition occupies an important part of our time. Litman, Jordan, and Tiffany Jimerson. “The Measurement of Curiosity as a Feeling-of-deprivation.” *Journal of Personality Assessment*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2004, pp. 147-57; Litman, Jordan. “Curiosity and the Pleasures of Learning: Wanting and Liking New Information.” *Cognition & Emotion*, vol. 19, no. 6, 2005, pp. 793-814; Perlovsky, Leonid, et al. “Curiosity and Pleasure.” *WebmedCentral Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 12, 2010; Kidd, Celeste, and Benjamin Y. Hayden. “The Psychology

## Imaginative Failures

Thought experiments are devices of the imagination.<sup>411</sup> In this section, I discuss two confounding factors involving imagination. Differently from the Hedonistic Bias, “Imaginative Resistance” and “Overactive Imagination” are phenomena that are shown to significantly distort our judgements about the EMTEs.

Weijers defines Imaginative Resistance as occurring when subjects reject some important stipulation of a thought experiment.<sup>412</sup> Examples include worrying about an EM’s malfunctioning or its inability to provide the promised bliss when the scenario’s text is explicit that the EM works perfectly and provides blissful feelings. According to Weijers’ study, Imaginative Resistance affected 34% of the subjects that did not want to plug in to 1974’s EMTE.<sup>413</sup> In other words, a third of participants that chose reality appeared to disregard some of the thought experiment’s stipulations. This is important because it shows, in general, that imagined scenarios are not fully reliable tools of investigation and, in particular, that a large portion of the pro-reality judgements are potentially unreliable because they do not comply with the EMTEs’ stipulations.

Notice that philosophers can suffer from Imaginative Resistance too. Bramble, while arguing that Prudential Hedonism might not entail the choice of plugging in, claims that the EM “could not give one the full range of the pleasures of love and friendship”. According to him, Artificial Intelligence is so primitive in regards to language, facial expressions, bodily gestures, and actions, that it cannot deliver us the full extent of social pleasures.<sup>414</sup> While his claim seems true of

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and Neuroscience of Curiosity.” *Neuron*, vol. 88, no. 3, 2015, pp. 449-60; Furthermore, let’s remember that the EMTEs depict a single-player virtual reality with an other-minds illusion. The EM is a single-player virtual reality because it is experienced by the one user who is plugged into it and it is not shared with other EM users. However, the EM provides an other-minds illusion—the experience of interacting with conscious beings when they really are not. In my view, the valuing of sociality might be another specific case of Hedonistic Bias—when our apparently anti-hedonistic judgements are unconsciously directed at pleasure-maximization. It seems plausible that our judgement against plugging in is motivated by social concerns. It is also plausible that this judgement reflects, at least partially, instrumental prudential value. Sociality, empirical evidence suggests, is a prominent hedonistic instrumental value. Social relations are considered one of the strongest predictors of happiness. In a review of the literature, Shimon Saphire-Bernstein and Shelley Taylor, assert that “empirical evidence that relationships are tied to happiness is plentiful”. According to them, the quality of social relationships, especially intimate relationships, have considerable effects on happiness. As said by Taylor, the EM somehow forbids us to have one of our favorite pleasures: socializing. Thus, given the high pleasure-producing instrumental value of sociality, we might hedonistically refuse the antisocial option and consequently be tricked into believing that our choice contradicts Prudential Hedonism. To reiterate, sociality might correspond to a particular occurrence of Hedonistic Bias. As mentioned, there are epistemological problems concerning the formation of our pre-reflective judgements so that we cannot assume that perceiving things as valuable means that these goods are intrinsically valuable. Our apparently anti-hedonistic judgements might be unconsciously motivated by the pursuit of social pleasure too and, thus, be hedonistic in their nature. Saphire-Bernstein, Shimon, and Shelley E. Taylor. “Close Relationships and Happiness.” *Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, edited by Ilona Boniwell, Susan A. David, and Amanda Conley Ayers, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 821; Taylor. “Why.”

<sup>411</sup> Brown, James Robert, and Yiftach Fehige. “Thought Experiments.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 18 Aug. 2020.

<sup>412</sup> Weijers. “Nozick’s.”

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Bramble. “The Experience.”

current technology, it clearly violates the thought experiments' stipulations. In addition of being implied by the 1974's EMTE, Nozick says explicitly in his 1989's EMTE that the machine has to be imagined as perfectly simulating the pleasure of loving and being loved.<sup>415</sup>

Overactive Imagination is another distorting phenomenon related to imagination. According to Weijers, this phenomenon consists in subjects imagining non-intended features of the EMTEs.<sup>416</sup> In his test of Nozick's 1974's scenario, Weijers found that 10% of the pro-reality responses displayed signs of overactive imagination. In other words, it seems that a non-negligible proportion of participants unnecessarily exaggerated aspects of the thought experiment's narrative. For example, Weijers claims that some subjects reported that they did not want to plug in in Nozick's 1974's EMTE because "the machine seems scary or unnatural".<sup>417</sup>

Relatedly, as advanced by Adam Kolber, the EMTEs might plausibly elicit judgements biased by technophobic concerns.<sup>418</sup> According to de Lazari-Radek and Singer, this possibility has been made more likely by the popularity of the film "The Matrix", in which a similar choice between reality and comfort is presented.<sup>419</sup> James Pryor compellingly argues that this movie elicits a new set of intuitions that the EMTEs are not supposed to elicit. For example, political freedom is severely hampered in The Matrix. The machines, after having defeated us in a war, enslaved us.<sup>420</sup> Notice the difference with the 1989's EMTE where "friendly and trustworthy beings from another galaxy" serve us.<sup>421</sup> Thus, the narrative of The Matrix should not be used to understand the EMTEs because it elicits a further layer of intuitions, e.g. against being exploited.

Considering overall Imaginative Failures (Imaginative Resistance and Overactive Imagination together), in Guido Löhr's study of his versions of the EMTE, it affected 46% of the pro-reality philosophers and 39% of the pro-reality laypeople.<sup>422</sup> Thus, given the Imaginative Failures that affect the EMTEs, it seems that these thought experiments may legitimately be accused of being far-fetched both in the narrative, at least when the first was published, and in their stipulations.<sup>423</sup> In fact, according to Jakob Elster, we lack the capacity to properly form judgements in outlandish cases.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Nozick. "The Examined", p. 104.

<sup>416</sup> Weijers. "Nozick's."

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Kolber. "Mental Statism."

<sup>419</sup> De Lazari-Radek & Singer. "The Point", p. 259.

<sup>420</sup> Pryor. "What's."

<sup>421</sup> Nozick. "The Examined", p. 105.

<sup>422</sup> Löhr, Guido. "The Experience Machine and the Expertise Defense." *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2018, pp. 257-73.

<sup>423</sup> Taylor. "Why."

<sup>424</sup> Elster, Jakob. "How Outlandish Can Imaginary Cases Be?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2011, pp. 241-58.

On the other hand, Weijers argues, confronted agents—subjects in real decision-making situations—are likely less rational than “cold” deliberators.<sup>425</sup> Real life factors might increase biases through making the subjects closer to confronted agents. Thus, it might be that a properly devised thought experiment should avoid the confounding factors related to fantasy and thus Imaginative Failures, on one side, and the confounding factors related to the experimental subjects being closer to confronted agents in familiar situations, on the other. How to find a proper balance between these opposing exigencies requires further research. Perhaps, a golden mean might be a concrete scenario that is unfamiliar, in order to still allow the subjects to be detached deliberators.

Nevertheless, concerning the roles of technophobia and fantasy in Imaginative Failures, consider that contemporary technological innovations render virtual reality progressively less fantastic.<sup>426</sup> The increasing concreteness of virtual reality technology, compared to the 70s when the first thought experiment was devised, might lead to a progressive reduction of the influence of these factors on responses to the EMTEs. Indeed, a preliminary study by Weijers seems to point in this direction: people highly interested in virtual reality seem slightly less averse to the idea of plugging in.<sup>427</sup> Even more, it is not implausible that one day the pro-reality judgement will not anymore be shared by the majority of people. Remember that, as said by James McAllister, thought experiments have “evidential significance only historically and locally, i.e., when and where premises that attribute evidential significance to it [...] are endorsed”.<sup>428</sup> In fact, we cannot exclude that changes in technology and culture will determine different judgements in subjects presented with the EMTEs in the future.

### **Imaginative Failure: Memory’s Erasure**

Remember that the EMTEs’ target theory is Prudential Hedonism, not Hedonistic Utilitarianism. The offer of plugging in does not concern maximizing pleasure in general, but *your* pleasure. Well-being concerns what is ultimately good for *a person*.<sup>429</sup> Thus, in deliberating what is in your best interest, you need to be certain about the persistence of the *you* in question.<sup>430</sup> Given that, the

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<sup>425</sup> Weijers, Dan. “We Can Test the Experience Machine.” *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2012, pp. 261-68.

<sup>426</sup> Cogburn, Jon, and Mark Silcox. “Against Brain-in-a-Vatism: On the Value of Virtual Reality.” *Philosophy & Technology*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2014, pp. 561-79.

<sup>427</sup> P-value = 0.05. Weijers. “Experience Machine Experiments.”

<sup>428</sup> McAllister, James. “The Evidential Significance of Thought Experiments in Science.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1996, pp. 233-50, p. 248.

<sup>429</sup> Crisp, Roger. “Well-Being.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>430</sup> Shoemaker, David. “Personal Identity and Ethics.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 18 Aug. 2020.

thought experiment would be disrupted if the continuation of your personal identity is not guaranteed by the EM.

This is the worry that Bramble expresses. Remember that the EM provides a virtual reality that is experientially real, thus the users need to be oblivious of the experiences and choices that led to them plugging in.<sup>431</sup> That said, Bramble holds, following Nozick's infelicitous mentioning of plugging in as a "kind of suicide",<sup>432</sup> that the EM might *kill* you in the sense that your consciousness will be replaced with a numerically distinct one.<sup>433</sup> For Bramble, following Psychological-Continuity Views, personal identity might be threatened by the EM. In fact, the EM operates a memory erasure ("Upon entering, you will not remember having done this"<sup>434</sup>) and memory is at the heart of Psychological-Continuity Views of personal identity.<sup>435</sup> Since we are trying to understand what is a good life for the person living it, it seems easy to see why ending the life would not be good for the person living it. Following Bramble, it seems we have a strong reason for not plugging in: it's bad for us to die.

Similarly, Christopher Belshaw has expressed concerns about the EMTEs and personal identity. In particular, Belshaw claims that, to preserve a sense of reality inside an EM, the memory erasure operated by the machine should be invasive. Belshaw's point seems stronger than Bramble's because it does not concern a small memory-dampening. Belshaw points to a tension between two requirements of the EM, preserving personal identity and providing exceptional experiences that feel real ("You are, as you know, nothing special. So seeming to rush up mountains, rival Proust as a novelist, become the love-interest of scores of youngsters, will all strike you as odd"<sup>436</sup>). For him, if some alterations of psychology do not threaten personal identity, this is not the case for the EM where invasive alterations are required to provide realistic exceptional experiences.<sup>437</sup>

Nevertheless, both Bramble's and Belshaw's points can be seen as cases of Imaginative Resistance. In fact, although the thought experiments do not explicitly stipulate that the EM's memory erasure can occur while guaranteeing the persistence of someone's identity, this can be considered implied by them. It should be imagined that the amnesic re-embodiment—the re-

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<sup>431</sup> Gualeni, Stefano. "The Experience Machine: Existential Reflections on Virtual Worlds." *Journal for Virtual Worlds Research*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2016, pp. 1-10.

<sup>432</sup> Nozick. "Anarchy", p. 43.

<sup>433</sup> Bramble. "The Experience", p. 142.

<sup>434</sup> Nozick. "The Examined", p. 105.

<sup>435</sup> Olson, Eric T. "Personal Identity." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 19 Aug. 2020; Klein, Stanley B., and Shaun Nichols. "Memory and the Sense of Personal Identity." *Mind*, vol. 121, no. 483, 2012, pp. 677-702.

<sup>436</sup> Belshaw, Christopher. "What's Wrong with the Experience Machine?" *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2014, p. 586.

<sup>437</sup> Belshaw. "What's."

embodiment of the subject of experience inside the EM without the conscious knowledge that he is presently immersed in a virtual environment and identified with a virtual body or character<sup>438</sup>—preserves someone’s identity. In other words, we should imagine the same phenomenal unit of identification—a consciousness that feels “I am”<sup>439</sup>—entering and persisting inside the EM. Concerning the implicit nature of this stipulation, consider 1989’s EMTE (italics mine):

Imagine a machine that could give *you* any experience (or sequence of experiences) you might desire. When connected to this experience machine, *you* can have the experience of writing a great poem or bringing about world peace or loving someone and being loved in return. *You* can experience the felt pleasures of these things, how they feel “from the inside.” You can program your experiences for tomorrow, or this week, or this year, or even for the rest of your life. If your imagination is impoverished, you can use the library of suggestions extracted from biographies and enhanced by novelists and psychologists. *You* can live your fondest dreams “from the inside.” Would you choose to do this for the rest of your life? If not, why not?...Upon entering, *you* will not remember having done this.<sup>440</sup>

If you pay attention to the words that I highlighted with italics, it emerges that nothing in the wording insinuates that personal identity is not preserved. The continuation of personal identity results as implicitly stipulated by the thought-experiment. Bramble’s point does not comply with this implicit stipulation and end up constituting a case of Imaginative Resistance. Although Belshaw’s claim does not seem *prima facie* wrong, it also violates the thought experiment’s implicit stipulation and ends up corresponding to a case of Imaginative Resistance. In fact, whether the identity’s preservation is technically problematic or not, does not concern the prudential question at stake.

### **Imaginative Failure: Moral Concerns**

Weijers reported answers to Nozick’s 1974’s scenario like “I can’t because I have responsibilities to others” among participants that did not want to connect.<sup>441</sup> Similarly, Löhr reports pro-reality philosophers’ answers to his You scenario (a scenario with the same structure of the original

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<sup>438</sup> Metzinger. “Why.”

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Nozick. “The Examined Life”, pp. 104-105.

<sup>441</sup> Weijers. “Nozick’s.”

EMTEs) like: “I cannot ignore my husband and son,” “I cannot ignore the dependents,” or “Gf[girlfriend] would be sad”.<sup>442</sup> These answers can be seen as examples of Imaginative Resistance.

When considering the EMTEs, we should by stipulation disregard our moral judgements.<sup>443</sup> To “play by the rules” of the thought experiment one should be able to disregard morality. In fact, Nozick stipulates that we should leave aside moral concerns elicited by the EMTEs. According to Nozick, this thought experiment is meant to isolate a question of prudential value.<sup>444</sup> In his 1974’s version Nozick claims: “others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there’s no need to stay unplugged to serve them. Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in”.<sup>445</sup> Nozick asks us to imagine a scenario where everyone could plug into an EM. Since, by stipulation, there is no need to care for others, we should disregard our preference for it. However, I claim, it is far from clear whether we are actually able to disregard our moral concerns. The consideration of moral evaluations regarding plugging into an EM constitutes a likely case of Imaginative Resistance.

In fact, we should doubt that we are able to fully isolate our prudential intuitions elicited by the EMTEs. It seems unlikely that stipulating that we should not worry about something necessarily implies that we will not worry about it. Likewise, being told to suspend our moral judgement in a sexual violence case because of the perpetrator’s mental incapacity, does not imply that, as jurors, we will be able to do so. In fact, moralization involves the adoption of relatively stable moral contents that, given their strong and universal normativity, cannot be easily inhibited.<sup>446</sup> In other words, since normativity and universality are relatively uncontroversial characteristics of morality, it follows that we cannot light-heartedly disregard a norm (otherwise it would not be a norm) on a case-by-case basis (otherwise it would not be universal).

Prudential value is not the only kind of value that we employ in evaluating life-choices. As claimed by Jason Kawall, the majority of people value more in life than their well-being. People, for example, often sacrifice prudential value for the sake of morality.<sup>447</sup> Concerning the EMTE, common-sense morality seems to deny the moral goodness of plugging in. Following Kolber, common-sense morality views plugging in as *self-indulgent* and therefore blameworthy.<sup>448</sup> For

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<sup>442</sup> Löhr. “The Experience.”

<sup>443</sup> Notice that Nozick’s thesis concerning a total separation between prudence and morality, although being the majority’s view, is not uncontroversial.

<sup>444</sup> For the 1989’s version see: Nozick. “The Examined”, p. 105.

<sup>445</sup> Nozick. “Anarchy”, p. 43.

<sup>446</sup> For the stability of morality over time, see: Luttrell, Andrew, and LaCount J. Togans. “The Stability of Moralized Attitudes Over Time.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2020.

<sup>447</sup> Kawall. “The Experience.”

<sup>448</sup> Kolber. “Mental Statism.”

example, as Hewitt claims: “living hooked up to the experience machine wastes all of the potential one has to improve the lives of others”.<sup>449</sup> Common-sense morality values making a real impact on the world, e.g. saving lives, not just having the experience of making an impact.

Specifically regarding well-being, it seems that laypeople consider morality as inextricable from it. In other words, it seems that non-philosophers do not clearly demarcate prudential value from moral value.<sup>450</sup> Sven Nyholm investigated folk intuitions concerning happiness/unhappiness. He presented 182 undergraduates with these vignettes:

*Virtuous Richard*

Richard is a doctor working in a Red Cross field hospital, overseeing and carrying out medical treatment of victims of an ongoing war. He sometimes gets pleasure from this, but equally often the deaths and human suffering get to him and upset him. However, Richard is convinced that this is an important and crucial thing he has to do. Richard therefore feels a strong sense of satisfaction and fulfillment when he thinks about what he is doing. He thinks that the people who are being killed or wounded in the war don't deserve to die, and that their well-being is of great importance. And so he wants to continue what he is doing even though he sometimes finds it very upsetting.

*Vicious Richard*

Richard is a doctor working in a Nazi death camp, overseeing and carrying out executions and nonconsensual, painful medical experiments on human beings. He sometimes gets pleasure from this, but equally often the deaths and human suffering get to him and upset him. However, Richard is convinced that this is an important and crucial thing he has to do. Richard therefore feels a strong sense of satisfaction and fulfillment when he thinks about what he is doing. He thinks that the people who are being killed or experimented on don't deserve to live, and that their well-being is of no importance. And so he wants to continue what he is doing even though he sometimes finds it very upsetting.

After, the subjects were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the claim “Richard is happy”. Notice that Nyholm describes the same experienced mental states in both vignettes. Students judged Virtuous Richard as happier than Vicious Richard (scale: 1 to 7; mean agreement:

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<sup>449</sup> Hewitt. “What.”

<sup>450</sup> Alfano, Mark, et al. “Experimental Moral Philosophy.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 18 Aug. 2020.

4.63 and 3.54). From this, Nyholm concludes that these patterns of happiness attribution might show that the folk conception of happiness/unhappiness considers virtue as a non-instrumental component of it.<sup>451</sup>

Likewise, Jonathan Philips and colleagues have investigated empirically the folk conception of happiness. Participants were assigned to one of four vignettes describing respectively: a life with happiness/morally good life, a life with happiness/morally bad life, a life with unhappiness/morally good life, and a life with unhappiness/morally bad life. Then, subjects had to agree/disagree with the claim that the character of the vignette was happy/unhappy. In people's judgments of happiness, a highly significant difference was identified between the morally good life and the morally bad one; at the opposite, in judgments of unhappiness, there was not a noticeable difference.<sup>452</sup> In another study, Philips and colleagues replicated the previous results concerning the influence of moral evaluation in judgments of happiness. This study seems even more promising because all the participants were asked to evaluate the happiness/unhappiness of the same character toward which they had conflicting ethical stances (homosexuality), therefore ruling out that other factors in the different narratives of the vignettes determined the varying results. Again, participants' judgments of happiness/unhappiness (scale: 1 to 7) were importantly influenced by their moral judgment of the character's life. Those who believed that the character was having an immoral life judged him less happy (mean agreement: 3.83) than those who did not consider his life immoral (mean agreement: 5.02).<sup>453</sup>

To reiterate, moral considerations should be expected to come into play when making life-choices and it is doubtful that we can easily disregard them. Indeed, several empirical findings point in the direction of moral factors influencing judgments in many contexts where we would not expect them to be relevant, e.g. concepts of causation and knowledge.<sup>454</sup> This phenomenon makes it even more unlikely that moral concerns do not influence decision-making in situations, such as deciding what to do when presented with an EM, where we would expect them to be relevant.<sup>455</sup> Indeed, this is probably why Nozick felt the need to rule them out by stipulation.

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<sup>451</sup> Knobe, Joshua, and Erica Roedder. "The Ordinary Concept of Valuing." *Philosophical Issues*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2009, pp. 131-47.

<sup>452</sup> Phillips, Jonathan, et al. "The Ordinary Concept of Happiness (and Others like it)." *Emotion Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2011, pp. 320-22.

<sup>453</sup> Phillips, Jonathan, et al. "The Good in Happiness." *Oxford Studies in Experimental Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 253-59.

<sup>454</sup> Knobe, Joshua. "Intentional Action and Side Effects in Ordinary Language." *Analysis*, vol. 63, no. 279, 2003, pp. 190-94; Beebe, James, and Wesley Buckwalter. "The Epistemic Side-Effect Effect." *Mind and Language*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, pp. 474-98.

<sup>455</sup> Incidentally, psychological evidence seems to show that we attribute moral value to objects. This might negatively impact our judgement of the EM because it seems that positive moral judgement tends to increase with the familiarity toward the object. Jarudi, Izzat, et al. "Is a Refrigerator Good or Evil? The Moral Evaluation of Everyday Objects." *Social Justice Research*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2008, pp. 457-469.

To sum up, drawing a clear-cut distinction between moral and prudential concerns should help refine the relevant judgements in the EMTEs. These are the judgements that by Nozick's stipulation are at stake in these thought experiments. However, Imaginative Resistance is a plausible phenomenon supported by empirical evidence. According to it, subjects do not fully comply with the stipulations of thought experiments. The possibility that judgements elicited by the EMTEs are distorted by moral concerns seems likely. In fact, according to experimental evidence, the absence of a clear-cut distinction between morality and well-being, such as demonstrated by laypeople's evaluative conception of happiness in Phillip's studies, seems to be the default framework outside academic scholarship.<sup>456</sup>

### **Argument from Worthless Pleasures**

It seems that to draw a clear-cut distinction between moral and prudential concerns is a convincing strategy to defend Prudential Hedonism from a classical objection to it called the "argument from worthless pleasures".<sup>457</sup> This argument seems to show that philosophers do not always comply with the definition of well-being as self-interest. Under the spotlight of the Expertise Objection, it seems that laypeople are not the only ones that struggle with delineating between prudential and moral value. In other words, having argued that it is implausible that laypeople's judgements elicited by the EMTEs track prudential value and not overall value, I now argue that the same phenomenon may distort philosophers' judgements as well.

According to the argument from worthless pleasures, some pleasures do not contribute to well-being: worthless pleasures do not enhance the value of a life.<sup>458</sup> This argument against Prudential Hedonism can be traced back to Aristotle, who in the *Nicomachean Ethics* deals with "disgraceful" and "base" pleasures.<sup>459</sup> Later, Brentano claimed that pleasure in the bad is something ultimately disvaluable.<sup>460</sup> Among many others, this objection has been put forward by George Moore, Charlie Broad, and Richard Brandt. G. Moore imagines a case of "perpetual indulgence in bestiality".<sup>461</sup> Broad mentions the case of sadistic pleasure—taking pleasure in someone's

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<sup>456</sup> Huta, Veronika, and Alan S. Waterman. "Eudaimonia and Its Distinction from Hedonia: Developing a Classification and Terminology for Understanding Conceptual and Operational Definitions." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 15, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1425-56.

<sup>457</sup> Feldman. "Pleasure", p. 38.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Bobbs-Merrill, 1962, X. 3.

<sup>460</sup> Brentano, Franz. *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*. Edited by Oskar Kraus, English edn. edited by Roderick M. Chisholm, translated by Roderick Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 90.

<sup>461</sup> Moore, George E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge University Press, 1962, ch. 3, sect. 56.

suffering.<sup>462</sup> Brand focuses on the case of some women happily attending beheadings.<sup>463</sup> Likewise, Feldman draws the example of a terrorist that enjoys children's suffering. In psychology, Paul Wong similarly discusses the example of a happy murderer.<sup>464</sup> These examples are meant to elicit the intuitive judgement that these pleasures cannot be intrinsically good because they seem to make someone's life worse rather than better *for them*.

However, when considering our intuitive repulsion toward these pleasures, prudential and moral goodness are unlikely to have been adequately distinguished. Obviously, the terrorist's life, to use Feldman's example, seems to be morally bad. However, as underlined by Feldman himself, this misses the point. When speaking of well-being we are evaluating whether the terrorist's life was good *for him*. Although morally despicable, the life of the terrorist might not be bad for him.<sup>465</sup> The intuitive judgements elicited by these cases reflect to a large extent their moral value, not just their prudential value.<sup>466</sup> To sum up, the Imaginative Resistance deriving from considering moral concerns in prudential judgments seems to be a pervasive phenomenon that, in addition to laypeople, seems to affect philosophers as well. In other words, considering the literature, it does not seem that philosophical expertise eliminates the influence of this distorting factor in prudential judgements.

Concerning the EMTEs, the main philosophical ethical systems seem to deny the moral goodness of plugging in. In addition to Kantianism, Virtue Ethics, and Preference-Utilitarianism, it seems, as also underlined by Kolber, that even Hedonistic Utilitarianism, the only ethical system *prima facie* sympathetic to plugging in, would not consider this choice morally good.<sup>467</sup> To morally plug in, a hedonistic utilitarian agent should believe that this would maximize net-happiness. This seems plausible only if *all* the other existing sentient beings are already inside an EM (and he has no obligations toward future generations). Otherwise, net happiness would be maximized by the agent's not plugging in, since this allows him to eventually convince only two other beings to plug in (this means that two or more blissful lives, rather than only his, contribute to the greatest happiness). Given that moral philosophical concerns seem to oppose the choice of plugging in, it seems even more plausible that philosophers' judgements elicited by the EMTEs are also distorted by morality, as they are in the framing of the argument from worthless pleasures.

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<sup>462</sup> Broad, Charlie D. "Five Types of Ethical Theory." *Value and Obligation: Systematic Readings in Ethics*, edited by Richard Brandt, Brace & World, 1961, pp. 53-54.

<sup>463</sup> Brandt, Richard. *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics*. Prentice-Hall, 1959, p. 316.

<sup>464</sup> Wong, Paul. "Positive Psychology 2.0: Towards a Balanced Interactive Model of the Good Life." *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2011, pp. 69-81.

<sup>465</sup> Feldman. "Pleasure", p. 39.

<sup>466</sup> There might also be the intuition that the terrorist's life is bad for him because we think he has or will get caught or must be unhappy to become a terrorist—all of our experience of terrorists is associated with unhappiness. However, these prudential intuitions reflect instrumental value and not intrinsic value.

<sup>467</sup> Kolber. "Mental Statism."

## Moral and Prudential Judgements: Empirical Evidence

The psychological/neuroscientific literature specifically on prudential judgements seems to be scarce. Yet, Jay Van Bavel and colleagues have studied moral evaluations in contrast with amoral evaluations.<sup>468</sup> Amoral (“non-moral” in their words) judgements are defined by these authors as “pragmatic or hedonic”. Therefore, I take their “pragmatic or hedonic” judgements to correspond to prudential judgements.

Van Bavel and colleagues conducted three experiments where subjects were instructed to judge the same stimuli, positive and negative actions, in moral or prudential terms. These authors were interested in exploring whether evaluating the same action in moral terms (“rating whether actions were morally good or bad”) or prudential terms (“rating whether actions were pragmatically or hedonically good or bad”) would lead to different judgements.<sup>469</sup>

In the first experiment, participants were asked to make moral and prudential evaluations of different actions, some typically construed in moral terms (e.g. murder) and some not (e.g. eating). Subjects also had to rate whether other people should/should not perform that action (universality judgement). Meanwhile, researchers measured the reaction time of the participants in the action’s evaluation and in the universality judgement. In the second experiments, subjects had to rate whether the action at stake was morally or prudentially significant and whether the action should be universally prohibited/required. Once again, the reaction time of the participants was measured. In the third experiment, the researchers investigated the capacity of the subjects to switch from one kind of evaluation to another. Differently from the previous experiments, each participant made both a moral and a prudential evaluation of the same action.<sup>470</sup>

The results converge in showing that moral and prudential construal of the same action leads to different evaluative outcomes. Moral judgements tend to be faster, more extreme, and more universally prescriptive. The results also converge in suggesting that subjects can rapidly shift from one mode of evaluation to the other: evaluating an issue as moral not only seems to vary across individuals, but within individuals within seconds depending on the construal the subject is employing.<sup>471</sup>

Therefore, I advance that the EMTEs might plausibly be perceived by the subjects as a construal requiring a moral evaluation—a decision-making situation in which we could be immorally self-indulgent (machine) or not (reality) constitutes the relevant framing. Indeed, in

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<sup>468</sup> Van Bavel, Jay J., et al. “The Importance of Moral Construal: Moral Versus Non-Moral Construal Elicits Faster, More Extreme, Universal Evaluations of the Same Actions.” *Plos One*, vol. 7, no. 11, 2012.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

accordance with Van Bavel and colleagues' study, the universal prescriptivity, intensity, and high speed of our judgments about the EMTEs make them resemble moral evaluations more than prudential evaluations, which are characterized by being agent-relative, less extreme, and slower.

To sum up, in the last three sections, I argued that moral concerns constitute a plausible case of Imaginative Resistance distorting philosophers and laypeople's judgements to EMTEs. Most people seem to agree that pleasant mental states are valuable. Yet, as said by Valerie Tiberius and Alicia Hall, it is unlikely that everyone will be persuaded by the claim that, all things considered, *only pleasure for ourselves is intrinsically valuable*.<sup>472</sup> Nevertheless, if we consider only the prudential good, the claim that *only pleasure is intrinsically valuable for ourselves* seems importantly more convincing. In other words, if we carefully reason to dismiss our moral concerns, plugging into an EM seems a more appealing choice.

### Status Quo Bias

In addition to the biases mentioned above, the Status Quo Bias has received special attention in the literature. Following William Samuelson and Richard Zeckhauser, the Status Quo Bias is the phenomenon according to which subjects tend to irrationally prefer the status quo.<sup>473</sup> In other words, when facing complex decision-making, subjects tend to follow the old adage "when in doubt, do nothing".<sup>474</sup> This bias is thought to show up in many decisions such as voting for an incumbent office holder or not trading in a car.

Samuelson and Zeckhauser present a taxonomy of explanations for the Status Quo Bias grouped under: (1) rational decision-making due to transition costs and/or uncertainty, (2) cognitive misperceptions, (3) psychological commitment caused by misperceived sunk costs, regret avoidance, or desire for consistency.<sup>475</sup> Below, I discuss how Samuelson and Zeckhauser's explanations of the Status Quo Bias might relate to the EMTEs.

(1) These are the cases where the Status Quo Bias seems a rational decision-making strategy. First, when we find ourselves facing identical choices, it seems rational to take identical decisions. Second, sometimes transition costs are higher than the gain associated with an alternative. However, it does not seem that these explanations are directly relevant for the EMTEs because it is implausible that someone had to face in the past the choice whether to plug into an EM

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<sup>472</sup> Tiberius, Valerie, and Alicia Hall. "Normative Theory and Psychological Research: Hedonism, Eudaimonism, and Why It Matters." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2010, p. 216.

<sup>473</sup> Samuelson, William, and Richard Zeckhauser. "Status Quo Bias in Decision making." *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, pp. 7-59.

<sup>474</sup> Fleming, Stephen M., et al. "Overcoming Status Quo Bias in the Human Brain." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 107, no. 13, 2010, 6005-09.

<sup>475</sup> Samuelson & Zeckhauser. "Status Quo."

and, rationally, the transition costs, the distress of plugging in for example, are lower than the resulting gain in terms of pleasure.

Concerning (2), in different studies, Kahneman and Amos Tversky have shown the existence of the phenomenon called “*loss aversion*”.<sup>476</sup> Notice that Richard Thaler, the first scholar that addressed loss aversion, called it “*endowment effect*”.<sup>477</sup> To explain this phenomenon consider a reference point, subjects weigh potential losses more than potential gains of the same magnitude. In other words, it seems that humans prefer avoiding losses to acquiring equivalent gains. The result is a bias toward the status quo because moving from it tends to be more risky than profitable. Given that, subjects might be more prone to avoid the well-being loss that plugging in might bring, than pursue the well-being gain that the same choice might determine.

(3) The Status Quo Bias is also elicited by the presence of *sunk costs*, a cost that cannot be recovered. In sequential decisions, subjects tend to show a desire to justify previous commitment to, perhaps faulty, courses of actions with subsequent commitments. Thaler mentions the example of paying an expensive subscription to a tennis club and, consequently, keep playing despite a painful tennis elbow.<sup>478</sup> In the EMTEs, this phenomenon might show up if the subject considers all the commitments he took in his current life. Another explanation is “*regret avoidance*”, the tendency to avoid regrettable consequences. In other words, even if a choice might be perceived as correct, the subject might avoid taking it in order to keep away from eventual regret. As a case of Imaginative Resistance, the subject might not consider that he cannot feel regret inside the EM and thus refuse the offer of plugging in.

A further explanation of the Status Quo Bias is the “*drive for consistency*”. To avoid cognitive dissonance the subject is motivated to pursue “*decision consistency*”. In the EMTEs, this drive might show up if we have chosen to pursue reality or avoid pleasure in the past, e.g. we investigated whether our partner was having an adulterous relationship. Relatedly, according to *Self-perception Theory*, individuals monitor their behaviors to infer their preferences. Thus, past decisions could be used as a guide for present and future ones; the result is a Status Quo Bias. Since in the past we decided to pursue reality or avoid pleasure, even facing the EMTEs, we deduce that this is our preference. Finally, psychological commitment seems related to the subject’s attempt to

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<sup>476</sup> Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk.” *Econometrica*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1979, pp. 263-81; Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. “Choices, Values and Frames.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1984, pp. 341-50.

<sup>477</sup> Thaler, Richard. “Toward a Positive Theory of Consumer Choice.” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1980, pp. 39-60.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

*feel in control*.<sup>479</sup> The subject might feel in control by sticking to the kind of life she currently lives outside an EM.

To sum up, the Status Quo Bias is a pervasive bias explained by a range of well-known deviations from the rational choice model. This bias might also show up in the genesis of our preferences concerning the EMTEs. Indeed, below, I show that the Status Quo Bias ends up being the best explanation for the majority of pro-reality responses in the EMTEs.

### **Status Quo Bias Interpretation of EMTEs**

Moving to the relevance of the Status Quo Bias for the EMTEs, put simply, when subjects are presented with the choice of leaving reality and plugging in, most appear adverse. However, when they are presented with the choice of leaving the EM to “move” into reality, they also appear adverse. Below, I argue that this phenomenon seems best explained by our irrational preference for the status quo, rather than by the *constant* values of pleasure and reality.

In 1994, Adam Kolber advanced the idea of the Reverse Experience Machine (REM).<sup>480</sup> Kolber was followed by Joshua Greene in suggesting to reverse Nozick’s structure of the EMTEs.<sup>481</sup> In this revised version of the thought experiment readers are asked: “would you get off of an experience machine to which you are already connected?”<sup>482</sup> Since the REM is supposed to isolate the same prudential concern of the EMTEs through a choice between pleasure and reality, with the proportions of pleasure and reality roughly held constant, the REM should get the same results as the EMTEs. The replication of the results would indicate that Nozick’s thought experiments are able to isolate this concern.<sup>483</sup>

Instead, when Felipe De Brigard tested a version of the REM (Negative Vignette), the results did not fulfill this prediction. This is the scenario presented by De Brigard:

It is Saturday morning and you are planning to stay in bed for at least another hour when all of the sudden you hear the doorbell. Grudgingly, you step out of bed to go open the door. At the other side there is a tall man, with a black jacket and sunglasses, who introduces himself as Mr. Smith. He claims to have vital information that concerns you directly. Mildly troubled but still curious, you let him in. “I am afraid I have to some disturbing news to communicate to you” says

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<sup>479</sup> Samuelson & Zeckhauser. “Status Quo.”

<sup>480</sup> Kolber. “Mental Statism.”

<sup>481</sup> Greene, Joshua. A Psychological Perspective on Nozick’s Experience Machine and Parfit’s Repugnant Conclusion, paper presented at the Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Annual Meeting, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001.

<sup>482</sup> Kolber. “Mental Statism”, p. 15.

<sup>483</sup> Kolber. “Mental Statism.”

Mr. Smith. “There has been a terrible mistake. Your brain has been plugged by error into an experience machine created by superduper neurophysiologists. All the experiences you have had so far are nothing but the product of a computer program designed to provide you with pleasurable experiences. All the unpleasantness you may have felt during your life is just an experiential preface conducive toward a greater pleasure (e.g. like when you had to wait in that long line to get tickets for that concert, remember?). Unfortunately, we just realized that we made a mistake. You were not supposed to be connected; someone else was. We apologize. That’s why we’d like to give you a choice: you can either remain connected to this machine (and we’ll remove the memories of this conversation taking place) or you can go back to your real life.

By the way, you may want to know that your real life is not at all as your simulated life. In reality you are a prisoner in a maximum security prison in West Virginia.”

What would you choose?<sup>484</sup>

De Brigard’s Negative Vignette is the experiment that can be considered the reversal of the original EMTEs (REM). Although there might be limitations due to the different scenarios employed, current evidence by Hindriks and Douven actually disproves any effect due to valence—loss rather than gain in net-pleasure. With MN, Hindriks and Douven offered their subjects the hypothetical choice to plug in to an EM to prevent a future of almost exclusively unpleasant experiences and they did not find a significant difference in subjects’ judgements.<sup>485</sup> In other words, whether the EM provides pleasure (as in Nozick’s originals) or avoids displeasure (as in de Brigard’s Negative REM and Hindriks and Douven’s MN) the results remain fairly consistent.

Here are the details of De Brigard’s study. In the REM, subjects were asked to choose between staying into the EM or moving to reality while losing a significant amount of net-pleasure. When imagining to be already connected to an EM and having to decide whether to unplug or stay, the subjects that chose reality over the machine dropped significantly (to 13%<sup>486</sup>) from the large the majority of people unwilling to plug in with the original structure of the thought experiments (84%

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<sup>484</sup> De Brigard, Felipe. “If You Like It, Does It Matter If It’s Real?” *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2010, p. 47.

<sup>485</sup> According to Hindriks and Douven’s study, 29% of the subjects would plug into the original EM and 26% in the displeasure-avoiding EM. Hindriks & Douven. “Nozick’s.”

<sup>486</sup> De Brigard. “If You.”

in Weijers's testing of 1974's EMTE and 71% in Hindriks and Douven's testing of the succinct vignette mentioned above<sup>487</sup>).

These studies and the following literature have interpreted these results as demonstrating the influence of the Status Quo Bias.<sup>488</sup> Because of the Status Quo Bias, when choosing between alternatives, subjects display an unreasonable tendency to leave things as they are. Applied to the EMTEs, the Status Quo Bias explains why the majority of subjects prefer to stay in reality when in reality and to stay in an EM when imagining being already inside one. The "Status Quo Bias interpretation" is also supported by another empirical study conducted by Weijers. Weijers tested this version of the thought experiment (Stranger NSQ):

A stranger, named Boris, has just found out that he has been regularly switched between a real life and a life of machine-generated experiences (without ever being aware of the switches); 50% of his life has been spent in an Experience Machine and 50% in reality. Nearly all of Boris' most enjoyable experiences occurred while he was in an Experience Machine and nearly all of his least enjoyable experiences occurred while he was in reality. Boris now has to decide between living the rest of his life in an Experience Machine or in reality (no more switching).

You have had a go in an Experience Machine before and know that they provide an unpredictable roller-coaster ride of remarkable experiences. When in the machine, it still felt like you made autonomous decisions and occasionally faced tough situations, such as striving for your goals and feeling grief, although you didn't really do these things. Your experiences were also vastly more enjoyable and varied in the machine. You also recall that, while you were in the Experience Machine, you had no idea that you had gotten into a machine or that your experiences were generated by a machine.

Boris' life will be the same length in an Experience Machine as it would in reality. No matter which option Boris chooses, you can be sure of two things. First, Boris' life will be very different from your current life. And second, Boris will have no memory of this choice and he will think that he is in reality.

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<sup>487</sup> Weijers. "Nozick's"; Hindriks & Douven. "Nozick's."

<sup>488</sup> Weijers. "Nozick's"; de Lazari-Radek & Singer. "The Point", pp. 254-261.

- 1) Ignoring how Boris' family, friends, any other dependents, and society in general might be affected, and assuming that Experience Machines always work perfectly, what is the best thing for Boris to do for himself in this situation?

Tick only one of these options:

Boris should choose the Experience Machine life

Boris should choose the real life

- 2) Briefly explain your choice.<sup>489</sup>

The Stranger NSQ scenario is meant to reduce the impact of Status Quo Bias—the more we are detached from the subject we are deciding for, the more rational we should be. Also, the Stranger NSQ scenario adds a 50-50 time split with the EM, which is again meant to minimize the Status Quo Bias' influence. Weijers observed that a tiny majority (55%) of the participants chose pleasure over reality.<sup>490</sup> In other words, a small majority of subjects, when primed to choose the best life for a stranger, preferred pleasure over reality. This result again contradicts the vast majority of pro-reality responses elicited by Nozick's thought experiments.

To sum up, the aforementioned studies and the scholarship on them have challenged the inference to the best explanation of the abductive argument. First of all, something can be considered good evidence in favor of a hypothesis when it is consistent only with that hypothesis. Reality being intrinsically valuable does not seem to be the *only* explanation for the majority's anti-hedonistic responses to the original EMTEs. Furthermore, reality being intrinsically prudentially valuable ends up not being the *best* explanation for the majority of people's judgement of not plugging in when facing the original EMTEs. According to this new scholarship, the fact that the large majority of people seem to value reality when presented with the original EMTEs is not best explained by reality being intrinsically valuable. In fact, modifications of the EMTEs like the REM and Stranger NSQ, while supposedly isolating the same prudential question, elicit considerably different preferences in the experimental subjects. The best explanation of this phenomenon seems to be the Status Quo Bias, a case of deviation from rational-choice that has been repeatedly observed by psychologists in many contexts.

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<sup>489</sup> Weijers. "Nozick's", pp. 27-28.

<sup>490</sup> Weijers. "Nozick's."

## Experience Pill

In a recent study, Hindriks and Douven changed the EM into an Experience Pill. Hindriks and Douven modified the EMTEs' narrative because they wanted to reduce the subjects' concerns for authenticity. However, they take "authenticity" to mean "the traits persons have, in what they do, and in how genuine their experiences as well as their relations to the outside world are".<sup>491</sup> So, in this use, it is difficult to see how the concept of authenticity could track something that is not already captured by the concept of reality.

Let's consider the Experience Pill scenario:

Imagine that you are presented with a choice to start taking an experience pill. Due to the pill, the experiences you will have for the rest of your life are almost exclusively pleasurable. If you accept this option, you will be taking the pill permanently on a daily basis (The pill will have no detrimental long-term effects on your health).<sup>492</sup>

With this tweak, an increase of pro-pleasure judgements from 29% to 53% was observed. In other words, changing the narrative of the thought experiment from a sci-fi technology to a pill seems to determine a significant shift in subjects' responses. This can be attributed to the more usual delivery mechanism and, more importantly, to the fact that the Experience Pill does not threaten in many respects the relationship with reality. The Experience Pill does not resemble psychedelic drugs such as LSD (notice that interestingly Nozick takes psychedelic drugs fans, together with traditional religious views, as examples of views valuing deeper reality<sup>493</sup>). In fact, while the Experience Pill drastically alters the hedonic experience, perhaps similarly to amphetamines or Cocaine, it does not affect the perception of the world.

Therefore, the Experience Pill does not seem a narrative that can be compared with the EMTEs. Here, the choice is not a clear-cut between reality and pleasure but between affective appropriateness—having feelings appropriate to the situation—and pleasure. With an EM-narrative, putting aside the limitation of tracking affective appropriateness in a virtual world, this prudential question would be addressed by this choice:

Given the option of choosing between two virtual lives with the same storyline, would you take a hedonically boosted life over a hedonically events-appropriate one?

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<sup>491</sup> Hindriks & Douven. "Nozick's."

<sup>492</sup> Hindriks & Douven. "Nozick's", p. 288.

<sup>493</sup> Nozick. "Anarchy", p. 43.

As you can see, the questions addressed by this thought experiment and the EMTEs are different. Thus, the Experience Pill should be seen as an interesting but *different* thought experiment incomparable with the EMTEs.

Concerning this issue, it should be noted that the EMTEs' scenarios used vary across all of the armchair and experimental philosophy literature. This is worrying because the experimental philosophy and psychology literature on intuitions seems to show that the wording of scenarios can greatly affect the responses they elicit. So we might yet find that a particular wording of the scenario will get different results, adding new layers of difficulty to answering the question at stake.<sup>494</sup> In other words, at the present moment, there are limitations to the inter-comparability of different scenarios adopted by different authors.

### **Smith's Methodological Challenges**

As shown above, the recent scholarship undermining the implications of the EMTEs has advanced mainly through the adoption of experimental philosophy's methods. Given that the results of these studies are quite effective in discrediting the EMTEs,<sup>495</sup> the main challenge for this new trend in scholarship is to defend the research methodology that led to these results. Thus, in the last part of the chapter, I present some methodological objections to the revisionist scholarship and I reject them.

Weijers' Stranger NSQ is noteworthy because it avoided the main methodological flaws of De Brigard's REM. Basil Smith argues that De Brigard's research is weakened by its small sample size and its lack of details on the conduct of the experiments.<sup>496</sup> Weijers' study, instead, investigated a larger sample of experimental subjects and showed more methodological rigor in reporting the experiments' conduct.

Still, Smith advanced other methodological objections that might also apply to Weijers' study. First of all, Smith criticizes De Brigard's studies for the lack of representativeness of the experimental subjects.<sup>497</sup> In fact, De Brigard's studies were conducted on philosophy students and Weijers' studies were conducted on marketing and philosophy students.<sup>498</sup> Obviously, these groups do not represent the whole English-speaking population, let alone the whole human population. We can presume that these subjects still share with professional philosophers significant social and cultural traits.

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<sup>494</sup> For example, Weijers notices how large the differences are in responses between the 1974's EMTE, REM, and Stranger NSQ. Weijers. "Nozick's", p. 36.

<sup>495</sup> van der Deijl. "Is Pleasure."

<sup>496</sup> Smith, Basil. "Can We Test the Experience Machine?" *Ethical Perspectives*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2011, pp. 29-51.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> De Brigard. "If You"; Weijers. "Nozick's."

Nevertheless, in my view, this objection seems severely misplaced. Although it would be interesting to know what the whole world thinks of EMTEs, or testing an indigenous population that has never had any contact with Western philosophy, that is not what is relevant for the negative experimental program concerning the EMTEs. The undergrad students, although not representative of English-speakers or humanity, from a philosophical perspective, might be considered representative of “reasonable” people. Since we want to challenge philosophers’ previous use of intuitions, assuming that philosophers are reasonable people, this is the group we are interested in. Smith seems to confuse the revisionist scholarship’s goal of challenging *philosophers’* previous use of intuitions with the sociological/anthropological goal of knowing what *humans* think.

Another methodological objection advanced by Smith concerns the fact that experimental subjects in these studies are not in the position of “confronted agents”. The participants are asked to imagine some fantastical scenarios rather than being in a real decision-making situation, with the affective responses that this would elicit.<sup>499</sup> Again Smith’s objection seems severely flawed. As mentioned above, Weijers replies that what Smith considers a methodological problem is actually a methodological strength. Unconfronted agents are very likely to be more rational in the formation of their judgements about the EMTEs.<sup>500</sup>

Once again, the experimental program on the EMTEs is interested in how to refine and properly use intuitions for the sake of *rational* deliberation, not in the psychological project of knowing what people would choose, under the grip of *affects*, in a real situation. In other words, the reported judgements expressed in questionnaires, although not indicative of what intuitions we would have in front of a real EM, seem less biased by affects and more apt to be the starting point for a rational judgement about what has intrinsic prudential value.

Therefore, to summarize, Smith’s objections to the revisionist scholarship either do not apply to Weijers’ studies, or seem based on a misunderstanding of the goal of experimental philosophy in contrast to other social scientific enterprises. Although the anthropological/sociological/psychological investigations that Smith implicitly advocates would be interesting, they do not correspond to the goal of experimental philosophy—challenging the previous use of intuitions that philosophers have done for the sake of a more rational deliberation.

### **Expertise Objection**

A major methodological challenge to much of experimental philosophy concerns the use of laypeople’s judgements as evidence. Following Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols, according to the

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<sup>499</sup> Smith. “Can We.”

<sup>500</sup> Weijers. “We Can.”

Expertise Objection, laypeople's reported judgements cannot be granted the same epistemic status that is granted to philosophers' judgements, the responses of trained professionals with years of experience thinking about philosophical issues.<sup>501</sup> Philosophers, accordingly, should have the know-how to come up with "better" judgements. Following this objection, the responses of subjects with no prior background in philosophy, that inform the aforementioned studies, lack philosophical significance.

Although the concern appears legitimate, it seems disproved by empirical evidence from both experimental philosophy in general and experiments about the EMTEs in particular. Concerning experimental philosophy in general, Eric Schwitzgebel and Fiery Cushman studied professional philosophers' and academic non-philosophers' judgements about the "trolley problem". Philosophers turned out to be as much susceptible to biases based on loss-aversion framing and order effects. Also, according to this study, these biases were not reduced by: a forced delay in the answer during which participants were encouraged to consider the problem in different variants, reporting familiarity with the trolley problem or with loss-aversion framing effects, reporting to have a stable opinion on the issue prior to the experiment, or reporting expertise on the issue.<sup>502</sup> Put simply, even a high level of academic expertise did not reduce the influence of these biases.

Kevin Tobia and colleagues found that, when expressing moral judgements on vignettes, although the responses of undergrads and professional philosophers were different, philosophers were susceptible to the same magnitude of actor-observer biases as undergrads.<sup>503</sup> Eric Schulz and colleagues found subjects with philosophical expertise on the issue and laypeople having judgements on free-will similarly affected by personality-related differences.<sup>504</sup> Thus, some studies on professional philosophers' judgements have shown them to not deserve a higher epistemic status in comparison to laypeople's judgements, in addition to academic non-philosophers. In all this research, philosophical expertise did not seem to reduce, let alone eliminate, the influence of biases.

Concerning the EMTEs in particular, Löhr tested whether philosophers are more proficient than laypeople in disregarding irrelevant factors when thinking about several EMTEs. His results demonstrated that philosophers gave inconsistent answers when presented with different EMTEs and that their degree of consistency was only slightly superior to laypeople. Also, philosophers

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<sup>501</sup> Knobe, Joshua, and Shaun Nichols. "Experimental Philosophy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 18 Aug. 2020.

<sup>502</sup> Schwitzgebel, Eric, and Fiery Cushman. "Philosophers' Biased Judgments Persist Despite Training, Expertise and Reflection." *Cognition*, vol. 141, 2015, pp. 127-37.

<sup>503</sup> Tobia, Kevin P., et al. "Moral Intuitions: Are Philosophers Experts?" *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 5, 2011, pp. 629-38.

<sup>504</sup> Schulz, Eric, et al. "Persistent Bias in Expert Judgments About Free Will and Moral Responsibility: A Test of the Expertise Defense." *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2011, pp. 1722-31.

were found to be susceptible to Imaginative Failures approximately as much as laypeople.<sup>505</sup> To repeat, philosophers did not show a higher proficiency than laypeople in complying to the stipulations of the thought experiments and their consistency between different EMTEs' scenarios was only slightly better.

To take stock, the empirical evidence we possess on philosophers' judgements in general and philosophers' judgements concerning the EMTEs in particular seems to cast much doubt on the Expertise Objection. The current empirical evidence does not support granting an inferior epistemic status to the laypeople's preferences that inform the aforementioned studies on the EMTEs. The burden of proof, it seems, lies squarely on anyone wishing revive the Expertise Objection. Moreover, given the value of equality that informs our democratic worldview, the burden of proof should always lie on the individual or group that aspires to a privileged status.

Furthermore, as advanced by both Dennett and David Chalmers, in addition to philosophical expertise not significantly reducing the influence of biases, professional philosophers might have their own environmental and training-specific set of biases.<sup>506</sup> For example, a professional philosopher assessing a thought experiment might be biased by the dominant view about the thought experiment in the previous literature or in the philosophical community. Especially under the spotlight of the social intuitionist model, humans are social animals and their moral judgments are strongly influenced by their group.<sup>507</sup> This worry seems particularly plausible in the case of the EMTEs because there is a strong consensus among professional philosophers that one should not enter the EM.<sup>508</sup> In other words, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the "textbook consensus", the philosophical mainstream position as expressed by undergraduate textbooks, adds a further layer of difficulty for philosophers trying to have an unbiased response to the EMTEs.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the salient points of the existing literature on the EMTEs. In presenting the scholarship on this thought experiment, I emphasized a historical turn. In fact, the debate on the EMTEs can be divided in two phases. In a first phase, starting with the publication of Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* in 1974 and ending almost one decade ago, we observe a huge consensus on the strength of the EMTEs in proving Prudential Hedonism and Mental State theories of well-being wrong. In a second phase, starting more or less a ten years ago and continuing to the

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<sup>505</sup> Löhr. "The Experience."

<sup>506</sup> Dennett, Daniel. "Higher-order Truths about Chmess." *Topoi*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2006, pp. 39-41; Chalmers, David J. "Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy?" *Philosophy*, vol. 90, no. 1, 2015, pp. 3-31.

<sup>507</sup> Haidt, Jonathan. "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." *Psychological Review*, vol. 108, no. 4, 2001, pp. 814-34.

<sup>508</sup> Löhr. "The Experience."

present day, we observe the emergence of a scholarship specialized on the EMTEs that significantly reduces the confidence about it as a knock-down argument against Prudential Hedonism and Mental Statism about well-being. Anecdotally, notice that the philosophical community at large, not specialized on the EMTEs, is not necessarily updated with the latest scholarship and it is common to encounter views more in line with the previous confidence.

## Chapter 6—Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument

In this chapter, I present a modification of the Experience Machine Thought Experiments (EMTEs), based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument, that constitutes a potential challenge for the revisionist scholarship because, according to it, the structure of EMTEs can be altered in order to be once again effective in discrediting Prudential Hedonism. In other words, the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument challenges the revisionist scholarship because it claims that this literature has not yet addressed the most effective version of the EMTEs. Below, I first present this advanced modification that I call Lin's EMTE. Given their similarity, this thought experiment can be seen as the Experience Machine (EM) version of Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment. Next, I present the results of Rowland's empirical testing of a version of the EMTE based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument. Then, I discuss a problem with the design of these thought experiments, the Freebie Problem. By doing so, I make explicit the understanding of intuition and reasoning that I adopt. Thus, by advocating an attitude of epistemological fallibilism in philosophy of well-being, I claim that all thought experiments that suffer from the Freebie Problem must be disregarded or all of the main theories of well-being will be beset with counter-examples. Finally, I present other exemplificatory thought experiments against Value Hedonism, G. Moore's "heap of filth" and Ross's "two words", that also seem to be affected by the Freebie Problem. Finally, I advance that the design of the EMTEs should be based on a meaningful pairwise comparison and that Lin and Rowland's EMTEs, as well as Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment, should be granted a limited epistemic value.

### Lin's EMTE

Roger Crisp restructured the EMTE in an attempt to eliminate the Status Quo Bias and the concern that the technology may malfunction (Imaginative Resistance).<sup>509</sup> Crisp asks us to compare two lives. Life P is pleasant, rich, full, autonomously chosen, involving writing a great novel, making important scientific discoveries, and virtues such as courage, wittiness, and love. Q is a life experientially identical to P but lived inside an EM. P and Q, according to Prudential Hedonism, are

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<sup>509</sup> Crisp, Roger. "Hedonism Reconsidered." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2006, pp. 619-45.

equal in value. This implication, according to Crisp, “is surely a claim from which most of us will recoil”.<sup>510</sup>

Likewise, according to Lin, to isolate the question that the EMTEs are supposed to address, we should consider the choice between two lives that are experientially identical because this “isolates” reality as the value in question.<sup>511</sup> In Nozick’s EMTEs, we are asked to choose between a life of “infinite bliss” and a life in touch with reality, averagely pleasant. Instead, Lin asks readers to consider two lives, A and B, that contain the same amount of pleasure. A is a life spent in touch with reality and B is a life plugged into the EM. In Lin’s words:

Consider two lives, A and B, that are experientially identical and thus identical with respect to the qualitative features, durations, and temporal distribution of the pleasures and pains they contain. The subject of A (call him Adam) spends his life in the real world, whereas the subject of B (call him Bill) is plugged into an experience machine for his entire life. A is a good life of the sort available to citizens of Western countries. Let us stipulate that at no point does Bill interact with, or receive any care from, other human beings: thus, the experience machine runs entirely on its own, without any human intervention. Indeed, at no point after Bill’s birth is any person even aware of his existence (his mother died during childbirth, she alone was aware of the pregnancy, and a robot plugged him into the machine immediately after he was born).<sup>512</sup>

When we consider A and B, we probably have the intuition that A is prudentially better than B (comparison intuition). In Lin’s reasoning, since according to Prudential Hedonism A and B are equal in value, i.e. it should be irrelevant for me to live A or B, Prudential Hedonism must be false. According to Lin, his version of the EMTE has also the pros of not being affected by the Status Quo Bias and not involving claims about whether we would/should plug in or not.<sup>513</sup> This is Lin’s formalization of his argument:

1. A is prudentially better than B
  2. If Prudential Hedonism is true, A is not prudentially better than B
- Therefore:
3. Prudential Hedonism is false.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Lin, Eden. “How to Use the Experience Machine.” *Utilitas*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2016, pp. 314-332.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid. p. 321.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid. p. 322.

<sup>514</sup> Lin. “How.”

Notice that premise (1) would be rejected by someone who rejects the argument's conclusion. In other words, a (confident) prudential hedonist would reject the claim that A is more prudentially valuable than B.<sup>515</sup> Nevertheless, as said with regard to Richard Rowland's study, it is plausible that many people share the comparison intuition. This is how Weijers formalizes more extensively Lin's argument—notice the adjustment in premise (1) that I italicize:

1. If the *vast majority* of reasonable people have the brute intuition that A is higher in wellbeing than B, then it is reasonable to believe A is higher in wellbeing than B
2. The vast majority of reasonable people have the brute intuition that A is higher in wellbeing than B
3. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe A is higher in well-being than B (from 1 & 2)
4. If Prudential Hedonism is true, then A is not higher in well-being than B

Therefore,

5. It is reasonable to believe Prudential Hedonism is false (from 3 & 4).<sup>516</sup>

Having presented the thought experiment, let's consider what Lin thinks the implications of his revised EMTE are. According to him, the revisionist scholarship was able to discredit the EMTEs, but only in their less-compelling versions: "the conviction that the experience machine leaves Hedonism unscathed is partly due to neglect of the best way to use the experience machine".<sup>517</sup> Therefore, Lin challenges the revisionist scholarship because he claims that the most effective version of the EMTE has not been addressed yet. Consequently, Lin proposes his version of the EMTE as the standard way of invoking these thought experiments.<sup>518</sup>

### **Rowland's EMTE**

Rowland conducted empirical research on a version of the EMTE that holds Lin's claim that two hedonically equal lives should be compared. He recruited eighty one subjects from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform and presented them with the following vignette:

A stranger, named Boris, has just found out that he has been regularly switched between a real life and a life of machine-generated experiences (without ever being aware of the switches); 50% of his life has been spent in an Experience

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid. p. 324.

<sup>516</sup> Weijers, Dan. The Freebie Problem: A Pervasive Flaw in How We Work Out What Has Value, paper presented at the Philosophy Research Seminar Series, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand. 2018.

<sup>517</sup> Lin. "How", p. 314.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid. p. 332.

Machine and 50% in reality. 50% of Boris' most enjoyable experiences occurred while he was in an Experience Machine and 50% of his most enjoyable experiences occurred while he was in reality. Boris now has to decide between living the rest of his life in an Experience Machine or in reality (no more switching). Living in the Experience Machine rather than in reality will not make Boris happier and Boris knows this before making his choice; if Boris chooses a life outside of an Experience Machine his life will be as happy as his life would have been had he chosen a life in an Experience Machine. If Boris does not choose one of these two new forms of life he will not continue living. Boris must make an active choice between these two new lives. And he will not remember having made his choice once he begins his new life.

You have had a go in an Experience Machine before and know that they are extraordinarily safe and can provide remarkable experiences. When in the machine, it still felt like you made autonomous decisions and occasionally faced tough situations, such as striving for your goals and feeling grief, although you didn't really do these things. You felt that your life, plans, relationships, and achievements were real. You also recall that, while you were in the Experience Machine, you had no idea that you had gotten into a machine or that your experiences were generated by a machine.

Boris' life will be the same length in an Experience Machine as it would in reality. No matter which option Boris chooses, you can be sure of four things. First, Boris' life will be very different from your current life. Second, Boris will have no memory of this choice and he will think that he is in reality. Third, the experience machine will not malfunction or break when Boris is in it. Fourth, Boris' life will be as long and happy as it would have been had he made the alternative choice.

(1) Ignoring how Boris' family, friends, any other dependents, and society in general might be affected, and assuming that Experience Machines always work perfectly, what is the best thing for Boris to do for himself in this situation? Tick only one of these options:

Boris should choose the Experience Machine life.

Boris should choose the real life.

(2) Briefly explain your choice.<sup>519</sup>

Rowland's vignette constitutes an adaptation of Weijers' Stranger NSQ accordingly to the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument. Surprisingly, Rowland does not provide the possibility of answering that the two lives have equal value. Since this is the choice that a (confident) prudential hedonist should take, the fact that it is not offered constitutes a damaging methodological flaw. That said, analyzing the choices' explanations, Rowland concludes that "very few subjects would have chosen a 'makes no difference' option if it had been presented".<sup>520</sup> Although Rowland does not clarify, it is charitable to assume that very few or no respondents commented "I would have chosen an equal option, but there wasn't one".

Presented with Rowland's EMTE, more than 90% of the subjects answered that the stranger should choose the life in touch with reality. Given that, ignoring Rowland's methodological mistake, it seems that Lin's claim concerning the comparison intuition is likely to be true. If we are facing the choice between two hedonically equal lives, one in touch with reality (A) and one into the EM (B), the majority of us judges that A is better. Premise (2) of Weijers' version of the argument seems similarly true.

From this, Rowland concludes that Prudential Hedonism is not resuscitated by the revisionist scholarship.<sup>521</sup> Thus, also Rowland shares the view that the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument constitutes a challenge to the revisionist scholarship. Following him, when tested in its more compelling version, it seems that the EMTE is able to disprove Prudential Hedonism.

### **Kagan's "Deceived Businessman"**

Although Lin does not mention it, once the thought experiment is devised as proposed by him, the EMTE assumes the same structure of Shelly Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment. In fact, both thought experiments are based on the strategy of arguing against a view, according to which B-facts are equal in value with A-facts, by devising a scenario where there is intuitively a difference of value between B-facts and A-facts.

Concerning the different narrative, Kagan essentially asks to imagine the life A of a successful businessman that has a happy life because he is loved by his family and respected by his

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<sup>519</sup> Rowland, Richard. "Our Intuitions About the Experience Machine." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2017, pp. 110-17.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid. p. 116.

<sup>521</sup> Rowland. "Our Intuitions."

community and colleagues. Then, Kagan asks to imagine an experientially equal life B where the businessman is deceived about the causes of his happiness:

Imagine a man who dies contented, thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in life: his wife and family love him, he is a respected member of the community, and he has founded a successful business. Or so he thinks. In reality, however, he has been completely deceived: his wife cheated on him, his daughter and son were only nice to him so that they would be able to borrow the car, the other members of the community only pretended to respect him for the sake of the charitable contributions he sometimes made, and his business partner has been embezzling funds from the company which will soon go bankrupt.<sup>522</sup>

Lives A and B contain the same amount of happiness, thus, according to Prudential Hedonism, they are equal in value. Nevertheless, we have the intuition that life A is better than life B (comparison intuition). Therefore, the argument claims, Prudential Hedonism is false. That is how David Lanius formalizes the argument:

- (1) Almost no one considers the life of the deceived businessman as good as one of the businessman who was not deceived.
- (2) If almost no one considers the life of the deceived businessman to be as good as the one of the businessman who was not deceived, there is more that people intrinsically value than mere experiential states.
- (3) If there is more that people intrinsically value than mere experiential states, experienced pleasure cannot be all that matters to well-being.
- (4) If Prudential Hedonism is correct, experienced pleasure is all that matters to well-being.
- (5) Prudential Hedonism is false.<sup>523</sup>

Let's compare Lin's EMTE and Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment. On one hand, the narrative of the "deceived businessman" thought experiment might seem preferable to Lin's EMTE. In fact, this narrative isolates the same prudential question without some of the outlandishness typical of the EMTEs. This may appear as a benefit in terms of reducing Imaginative Failures.

On the other hand, the "deceived businessman" thought experiment generates different plausible Imaginative Failures. Concerning Imaginative Resistance, there are likely problems regarding our inability to disregard information that we have. It is plausible that, when we evaluate

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<sup>522</sup> Kagan, Shelly, "Me and My life." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 94, 1994, p. 311.

<sup>523</sup> Lanius, David. "An Opinionated Area Review: Intuitions and Values: Re-assessing the Classical Arguments Against Quantitative Hedonism." *Kriterion*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2019, p. 61.

the life of the deceived businessman, we cannot isolate being deceived from the effects it usually has on us: when we are deceived we usually feel hurt and we consider ourselves worse off. Thus, we cannot really be in the deceived businessman's shoes because this implies forgetting what we know about his life and he does not.<sup>524</sup> So, we probably cannot easily disregard the suspicion that the businessman realized and suffered because of the deception he was living under. It seems unlikely that most people can fully abide by the stipulation that the businessman dies without ever discovering the deception. Concerning Overactive Imagination, we might wonder about the cognitive and emotional intelligence of the deceived businessman, i.e. how is it possible that a cognitively and emotionally healthy person cannot discover such a deception? Our intuition about the life of the deceived businessman might be biased by a negative judgment about his intelligence. We might unconsciously see the deceived businessman as a “dumb” or emotionally inept individual.

More importantly, the narrative of this thought experiment seems likely to work as a moral intuitions pump. In fact, 1989's EMTE expressly states that the deception is provided in good faith by “friendly and trustworthy beings”.<sup>525</sup> The 1974's version implies that the EM deceives benevolently in terms of its creators' intentions, i.e. the “superduper” neuroscientists created it out of their desire to provide us with a blissful life.<sup>526</sup> Instead, in the “deceived businessman” thought experiment the deceptions operated by the subjects surrounding the main character are maleficent. The intentions of the deceivers are, for different reasons, bad. Thus, it is difficult to not have a repulsive moral intuition toward these characters' behaviors and it is doubtful that this moral intuition fails to affect our response to the thought experiment that should ideally isolate a prudential question. In other words, it is implausible that we have a dispassionate prudential judgment about the life of the deceived businessman—one that is not affected by a negative moral judgement about the callous behaviors he is victim to.

That said, since Lin's EMTE and the “deceived businessman” thought experiment are meant to isolate the same prudential question and employ the same structural design to address it, these thought experiments end up differing only in their narrative. The problem advanced below seems to equally affect both thought experiments because it concerns their structure, not their narrative. Thus, my points below can be considered as directed to both. Life A will be considered the life with pleasure and reality, while life B will be considered the life with only pleasure. This is, I advance, the structure that both thought experiments share:

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<sup>524</sup> Lanius. “An Opinionated”, p. 73; Feldman, “Pleasure”, p. 42.

<sup>525</sup> Nozick. “The Examined”, p. 105.

<sup>526</sup> Nozick. “Anarchy”, pp. 42-44.

(SP1) Faced with the thought experiment, most people react in way R.

(SP2) If most people react in way R, then they hold normative conviction non-H.

(SC1) Most people hold normative conviction non-H. (from SP1 and SP2)

(SP3) It is not the case that most people err with regard to normative convictions.

(SC2) It is the case that non-H. (from SC1 and SP3)

(SP4) If Prudential Hedonism is correct, then it is the case that H.

Therefore,

(SC3) Prudential Hedonism is false (from SC2 and SP4).<sup>527</sup>

### **Freebie Problem**

In this section, I follow Weijers in claiming that a structural problem determines the aforementioned thought experiments to have a limited epistemic value.<sup>528</sup> These scenarios are able to elicit the intuitive judgement that life A is preferable but, when reflection supervises this intuitive response, it emerges that it is not informative about the intrinsic prudential value of reality. In other words, I claim that a proper assessment through reasoning of intuitive judgements seems to discredit the epistemic value of the comparison intuition. This means challenging premise (SP2) of the argument. If the majority of people react in way R to the thought experiment, it does not necessarily mean that they hold the normative conviction non-H. In fact, the phenomenon seems better explained by the so-called Freebie Problem.

According to Weijers' Freebie Problem, since it is irrational to have 100% confidence in the truth of Prudential Hedonism (just think about the number of objections to it that are mentioned in this thesis), it is irrational to not prefer life A to B. If you are not 100% confident about Prudential Hedonism's truth, life A has a >0% chance of being more prudentially valuable than B, making it unreasonable to pass up the freebie of reality. Note that this is especially true when the decision between the two lives is forced (no equal value option) as in Rowland's study.

Put simply, imagine you are discussing with your friend what is more valuable a house or health insurance. Your friend asks: would you prefer a house and health insurance or only a house? Probably, you prefer a house and health insurance but this preference is only informative about the >0% chance of health insurance having positive value. It doesn't tell us more than that about likely

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<sup>527</sup> This formal argument is adapted from Lanius' analysis of Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment. Lanius. "An Opinionated", p. 62.

<sup>528</sup> Weijers. "The Freebie."

the health insurance is to be valuable or how valuable it is expected to be. In order to be confident that health insurance has non-negligible value, we need the comparison case to have something different of non-negligible value. So, to go from the mere possibility of the health insurance's value to the likelihood of its positive value, there needs to be a meaningful trade-off on the other side of the equation. Essentially, we should aim to investigate the relative value of two competing goods, such as a house and health insurance, rather than isolate one good by holding the other constant. Furthermore, there needs to be a meaningful tradeoff between the two goods, such as comparing a big house against a medium house and health insurance. If the vast majority of people prefer the house and health insurance combination, then absent any biases, they must value health insurance in a non-negligible way. This is evidenced by their sacrifice of a larger house. If the vast majority of people prefer the larger house, then we don't know whether they assign non-negligible value to health insurance. This indefinite result occurs because it is plausible that those choosing the larger house still value health insurance somewhat, just not nearly as much as housing.

Because of the Freebie Problem, the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument seems not to increase the strength of the EMTEs. Rather, it seems to make the thought experiments unhelpful because they do not help in comparing our judgements about two lives that roughly track the competing values. To reiterate, since I cannot be 100% sure about the truth of Prudential Hedonism, I would be a bad decision-maker if I did not choose the life with both pleasure and reality. All this fact tells us is that reality has a >0% chance of being intrinsically prudentially valuable, which is presumably true of all the candidate goods philosophers of well-being discuss. The original structure of the EMTEs traded off more reality against more pleasure, so the vast majority of people reporting a preference for reality was a sign that they really valued reality because they appeared to sacrifice something of value (more pleasure) to get more of it.

### **Understanding Intuitions**

Since the Freebie Problem concerns intuitive judgements about well-being, in this section, I explain the conceptualization of "intuition" that my argument employs. The use of "intuition" that I adopt seems different to some philosophers' understandings of it. In philosophy, according to Joel Pust, these are examples of intuitions—claims that a rational person does not believe both  $p$  and not- $p$ :

- (1) If not-not- $p$ , then  $p$ .
- (2) Torturing a sentient being for fun is wrong.
- (3) It is impossible for a square to have five sides.
- (4) A person would survive having their brain transplanted into a new body.

These propositions are considered to appear immediately true. Intuitions, following Pust, are claims that seem true in the manner of these propositions.<sup>529</sup> Therefore, it seems that in philosophy “intuition” denotes a claim that appears true. Psychologists when speaking of intuitions do not seem to refer to the appearance of truth of the proposition. In fact, as claimed by Pust, psychologists and philosophers seem to use “intuition” in different ways. Psychologists when speaking of intuition seem to refer instead to their immediateness. An intuition is a judgement taken on the basis of a fast cognitive process different to conscious deliberation.<sup>530</sup> That said, I hold that sometimes philosophers tend to over-intellectualize intuitions; for example, by considering them to be beliefs resulting from “careful observation” and “reason”.<sup>531</sup> Thus, I adopt an understanding of intuitive and deliberative cognition that is widely accepted in cognitive science,<sup>532</sup> rather than in philosophy.

Dual process theories describe two abstract models of thinking: “System 1”, a fast decision-making system that elaborates intuitive decisions, and “System 2”, a slow decision-making system that supervises System 1’s outputs, and can kick in when intuitive cognition is not apt for the task at stake.<sup>533</sup> Daniel Kahneman describes the functioning of System 1 as affectively charged, automatic, associative, governed by habit, biases, and evolutionary heuristics.<sup>534</sup> System 1 is thought to be cognitively effortless. According to Kahneman, System 1 maintains and updates a model of the world, within the information that has already been gathered through prior experience.<sup>535</sup> Instead, System 2 is thought to be rational, stepwise, rule-based, and deliberately controlled. System 2 effortfully employs the outputs of System 1 to generate its own outputs.<sup>536</sup>

Concerning the use of intuitions in moral philosophy, assuming that these claims apply to philosophy of well-being as well, James Woodward and John Allman identified the neurobiology of intuitive cognition regarding morality and distinguished it from deliberative cognition. Intuition is understood as the affectively-charged moral judgement that results from the unconscious and probabilistic processing of several inputs (System 1). Deliberative thought is understood as the application of induction and deduction to a limited number of inputs (System 2).<sup>537</sup> Following Jorge Moll and colleagues, moral judgments depend both on “gut reactions” and conscious reasoning, not

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<sup>529</sup> Pust, Joel. “Intuition.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 19 Set. 2020.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Crisp, Roger. “Sidgwick and Intuitionism.” *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-evaluations*, edited by P. Stratton-Lake, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 71.

<sup>532</sup> Lieberman, Matthew. “Intuition: A Social Cognitive Neuroscience Approach.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 126, no. 1, 2000, pp. 109-37; Myers, David G. *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*. Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>533</sup> Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011, p. 24.

<sup>534</sup> Solaki, Anthia, et al. “The Logic of Fast and Slow Thinking.” *Erkenntnis*, 2019, pp. 1-30.

<sup>535</sup> Kahneman. “Thinking”, pp. 71, 85.

<sup>536</sup> Solaki et al. “The Logic.”

<sup>537</sup> Woodward, James, and John Allman. “Moral Intuition: Its Neural Substrates and Normative Significance.” *Journal of Physiology*, vol. 101, no. 4-6, 2007, p. 13.

necessarily in the sense that different moral judgments depend on different psychological systems, but more in the sense that Systems 1 and 2 are both operating when every moral judgment is produced.<sup>538</sup>

To understand the functioning of System 1 and 2, consider the questions presented by Shane Frederick in the Cognitive Reflection Test:

- (1) A bat and a ball cost \$1.10 in total. The bat costs \$1.00 more than the ball.  
How much does the ball cost? \_\_\_\_\_ cents
- (2) If it takes 5 machines 5 minutes to make 5 widgets, how long would it take  
100 machines to make 100 widgets? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes
- (3) In a lake, there is a patch of lily pads. Every day, the patch doubles in size. If  
it takes 48 days for the patch to cover the entire lake, how long would it take  
for the patch to cover half of the lake? \_\_\_\_\_ days.<sup>539</sup>

The correct answers to these questions require the suppression of an intuitive, but incorrect, response. Consider (1), here, an answer from System 1 is likely to arise: “10 cents.” But this intuition is wrong. When System 2 kicks in, it recognizes that the difference between \$1.00 and 10 cents is only 90 cents, not \$1.00 as System 1 elaborated.<sup>540</sup>

Although philosophy of well-being perhaps requires some departing evaluative intuitions—Phenomenalist Prudential Hedonism itself, as argued in Part 1, relies on the intuitions that pleasure is good and pain is bad for us<sup>541</sup>—to enjoy the strategic advantage constituted by reflection, we need System 2, the more rational process of thinking. Within this system, data are disposed carefully with a conscious compliance to rules, resulting in a cognitively effortful process that is more likely to end with justified true beliefs concerning philosophy of well-being. System 2, with its slow, step-wise and rule-adhering processes, should determine our conscious beliefs and eventually knowledge. In other words, it is System 2 that generate the rational processes that ultimately characterize proper philosophical reasoning.

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<sup>538</sup> Moll, Jorge, et al. “The Neural Basis of Moral Cognition: Sentiments, Concepts, and Values.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 1124, 2008, pp. 161-80; Moll, Jorge, et al. “Opinion: The Neural Basis of Human Moral Cognition.” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, vol. 6, no. 10, 2005, pp. 799-09.

<sup>539</sup> Frederick, Shane. “Cognitive Reflection and Decision making.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>540</sup> Frederick. “Cognitive.”

<sup>541</sup> Lin. “How”, pp. 328-329.

## Rational Choice

According to Nura Sidarus and colleagues, value-based decision-making involves trading-off the cost determined by an action against its expected reward. Notice that to disregard some information, that for example the author of a thought experiment stipulates to be task-irrelevant, seems to be a cognitive cost in itself because it requires the recruiting of conscious cognition.<sup>542</sup> Thus, no surprise if intuition favors the “more better than less” cost-avoiding choice (life A). Since System 2’s control is effortful, System 1 favors the choice that does not generate any conflict between competing response options.

That said, since choice reality has been understood as having >0% chance to be valuable, I hold that our preference for A seems in line with Expected Utility Theory as a *normative theory on rational choice*.<sup>543</sup> Notice that this claim does not involve any appeal to Expected Utility Theory as a descriptive model, that has been overall shown to make faulty predictions.<sup>544</sup> In other words, I do not attempt to explain why 90% of subjects in Rowland’s testing chose A, I advance that choice A was the most rational decision to take.

In this decision-making situation we can distinguish two *states*—things outside the decision-maker's control which affect the outcomes of the decision: either reality is intrinsically prudentially valuable or it is not. Also, we can distinguish two *acts*—the choices that the thought experiment presents. Given that, there are two possible *outcomes*: either you maximize well-being or you do not. This is illustrated below:

		States	
		<i>Reality is intrinsically prudentially valuable</i>	<i>Reality is not intrinsically prudentially valuable</i>
Acts	<i>Life A</i>	Maximize well-being	Maximize well-being
	<i>Life B</i>	Not maximize well-being	Maximize well-being

<sup>542</sup> Sidarus, Nura et al. “Cost-benefit Trade-offs in Decision-making and Learning.” *PLoS Computational Biology*, vol. 15, no. 9, 2019.

<sup>543</sup> Briggs, Rachael A. “Normative Theories of Rational Choice: Expected Utility.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>544</sup> Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*. Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Expected Utility Theory allows us to rank the acts through their *choiceworthiness*: Life A has some chances of having a higher utility. Since, according to Expected Utility Theory, a rational agent chooses the act with the highest expected utility, it follows that a rational agent chooses life A (System 2's output): life A dominates the other option since it is better or equal in terms of utility in all possible outcomes.

However, the “more better than less” choice, although being rational in terms of individual decision-making, might be misleading if used as evidence against a theory of well-being—a theory that aims at exactly identifying the intrinsic prudential value-maker/s, and distinguish it/them from the many goods that we might perceive as valuable because of their prudential instrumental value or their non-prudential value.

### **Epistemological Fallibilism about Well-being**

In this section, having claimed that it is irrational to have 100% confidence in the truth of Prudential Hedonism, I now claim that it is rational to have an epistemological cautiousness toward any main theory of well-being.<sup>545</sup> In fact, if we consider the main classes of candidates identifiable in the literature, no theory seems convincing beyond any reasonable doubt. All of these theories, I claim, can be objected to on grounds that a reasonable person would not disregard.

Concerning Desire-satisfactionism, as claimed by Crisp, the idea that desire-satisfaction is the good-making property is not very compelling. From a prudential hedonistic perspective, there is no value in having a desire satisfied if this does not feel good; desire-satisfaction seems valuable only instrumentally through the pleasure it might generate. From an Objective List perspective, it seems easy to come up with counter-examples of people desiring things that do not seem to increase well-being, e.g. addiction, self-harm. In general, it is more logical that we desire things because we think that they are good rather than thinking that they are good because we desire them.<sup>546</sup>

Objective List theories, following Crisp, seem elitist.<sup>547</sup> Objective list theories are *objective* in the sense that they hold that something can be good for an individual even without any pro-attitude toward it on her behalf.<sup>548</sup> Thus, I claim that they seem unconvincing because of the strong normativity that they feature. Surely prudence is a normative concept but, since we are dealing with

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<sup>545</sup> I follow van der Deijl among many others in grouping theories of well-being into three main groups: Hedonism, Desire-satisfactionism, and Objective List theories. Despite its limitations, since Parfit advanced it, this taxonomy has become canonical within philosophy of well-being. van der Deijl, Willem. “Are Measures of Well-Being Philosophically Adequate?” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2017, pp. 212-13.

<sup>546</sup> Crisp. “Well-Being.”

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Rodogno, Raffaele. “Prudential Value or Well-Being.” *Oxford Handbook of Value: The Affective Sciences of Values and Valuation*, edited by David Sander and Tobias Brosch, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 290.

the good life *for the person living it*, strong normativity seems misplaced. As Railton writes, “it would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone’s good to imagine that it might fail in any way to engage him”.<sup>549</sup> Implausibly, according to Objective List theories, some goods are valuable for someone’s life even if the person does not enjoy or want them.

Ironically, given the difficulty in reaching a consensus on any objective list, the good life for the person living it seems to collapse into the good life *for the philosopher advancing the theory*.<sup>550</sup> Consider Martha Nussbaum’s objective list of intrinsic prudential goods: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one’s environment.<sup>551</sup> The arbitrariness of the goods featured in the theory, and of Objective List theories in general, descends from them being based on a set of unsystematic intuitions.<sup>552</sup> To reiterate, elitism and arbitrariness seem to undermine Objective List theories.

In conclusion, it seems that a rational agent, well-informed about analytic philosophy of well-being, cannot hold a 100% degree of confidence toward any main theory of well-being. In fact, I hold that a 100% degree of confidence in the truth of Prudential Hedonism, Desire-satisfactionism, or Objective List theories would be similarly irrational.

### **Freebie Problem: Theories of Well-being**

Having claimed that it is not rational to have a 100% confidence toward any main theory of well-being, this section is meant to show that the Freebie Problem equally affects thought experiments against the other main theories of well-being. The Freebie Problem, if not recognized, would apparently disprove any main theory of well-being.

Concerning Desire-satisfactionism, by being a monistic theory, it can be objected to on exactly the same grounds as the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument. According to this theory, desire-satisfaction is the sole intrinsic good.<sup>553</sup> Thus, we can symmetrically come up with a thought experiment where life A, a life of desire-satisfaction and pleasure (or justice, knowledge, etc.), and life B, a life of desire-satisfaction only, are compared. To

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<sup>549</sup> Railton, Peter. “Facts and Values.” *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1986, p. 47.

<sup>550</sup> Subject-dependence seems to be a fundamental intuition about well-being. van der Deijl describes subject-dependence as follows: “The things that are good in life for the person living it depend on the person’s individual characteristics, such as her values, attitudes, desires, and things she enjoys”. van der Deijl. “Are Measures”, p. 219.

<sup>551</sup> Nussbaum, Martha. “Capability and Well-being.” *The Quality of Life*, edited by M. Nussbaum and A. Sen, Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 83-85.

<sup>552</sup> Rodogno. “Prudential”, p. 302.

<sup>553</sup> Crisp. “Well-Being.”

reiterate, imagine a life A where your desires are satisfied and you have pleasure and compare it with a life B where your desires are satisfied but you do not get any pleasure from it.

		States	
		<i>Pleasure is intrinsically prudentially valuable</i>	<i>Pleasure is not intrinsically prudentially valuable</i>
Acts	<i>Life A</i>	Maximize well-being	Maximize well-being
	<i>Life B</i>	Not maximize well-being	Maximize well-being

Since we probably have the intuitive judgement that life A is better and it is rational to choose A, someone not acknowledging the Freebie Problem should conclude that desire-satisfaction is not the only intrinsic prudential value. Again, B-facts do not seem equal in value with A-facts. According to this flawed reasoning, this thought experiment proves that Desire-satisfactionism is false.

In regard to Objective List theories, for any list containing  $n$  items, we might be able to come up with a list containing  $n+1$  items, as long as the extra item is even remotely a possible intrinsic prudential good, intuitively more appealing and more rational to choose. Consider John Finnis' Objective List: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, friendship, practical reasonableness, and religion.<sup>554</sup> Now, imagine a life B with all the aforementioned goods and confront it with a life A where you have the same goods plus pleasure (or desire-satisfaction).

		States	
		<i>Pleasure is intrinsically prudentially valuable</i>	<i>Pleasure is not intrinsically prudentially valuable</i>
Acts	<i>Life A</i>	Maximize well-being	Maximize well-being
	<i>Life B</i>	Not maximize well-being	Maximize well-being

<sup>554</sup> Finnis, John. *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. Clarendon Press, 2011, p. 302.

Again, we probably have the intuitive judgement that life A is better and it seems rational to choose A, therefore, someone not acknowledging the Freebie Problem, should conclude that Finnis' list is false because life B does not seem the best life for the person living it. To reiterate, for any life containing  $n$  goods, there might be lives containing  $n+1$  goods intuitively better and more rational to choose. With a regressum ad infinitum, we might end up concluding that *everything* is intrinsically prudentially valuable. But this absurd implication is a direct result of not recognizing the Freebie Problem.

To summarize, the Freebie Problem is a structural flaw that might inform unhelpful thought experiments directed at any main theory of well-being. More generally, the Freebie Problem seems to emerge in several philosophical thought experiments and acknowledging it might involve a better use of thought experiments.

### Further Exemplificatory Cases

In this section, I present other examples of thought experiments against Value Hedonism that seem to suffer from the Freebie Problem.<sup>555</sup> That is how G. Moore devises the “heap of filth” thought experiment:

Let us imagine one world exceedingly beautiful. Imagine it as beautiful as you can; put into it whatever on this earth you most admire—mountains, rivers, the sea; trees, and sunsets, stars and moon. Imagine all these combined in the most exquisite proportions, so that no one thing jars against another, but each contributes to increase the beauty of the whole. And then imagine the ugliest world you can possibly conceive. Imagine it simply one heap of filth, containing everything that is most disgusting to us, for whatever reason, as far as may be, without one redeeming feature.... The only thing we are not entitled to imagine is that any human being ever has or ever, by any possibility, can, live in either, can ever see and enjoy the beauty of the one or hate the foulness of the other.<sup>556</sup>

G. Moore designs this thought experiment to argue against Sidgwick's hedonistic claim that beauty is only instrumentally valuable.<sup>557</sup> According to G. Moore, considering two worlds with the same

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<sup>555</sup> Feldman presents these thought experiments as objections to what he calls Default Hedonism. Feldman, “Pleasure”, p. 27.

<sup>556</sup> Moore, George E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge University Press, 1962, p. 84.

<sup>557</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. Macmillan, 1972, p. 114; Feldman, “Pleasure”, p. 51.

neutral net-pleasure, one beautiful and one ugly, we have the intuitive judgement that the former is better. Thus, beauty is intrinsically valuable and Value Hedonism is false.

		States	
		<i>Beauty is intrinsically valuable</i>	<i>Beauty is not intrinsically valuable</i>
Acts	<i>World A</i>	Maximize value	Maximize value
	<i>World B</i>	Not maximize value	Maximize value

Similarly, that is how William D. Ross formulates the “two worlds” thought experiment:

If we compare two imaginary states of the universe, alike in the total amounts of virtue and vice and of pleasure and pain present in the two, but in one of which the virtuous were all happy and the vicious miserable, while in the other the virtuous were miserable and the vicious happy, very few people would hesitate to say that the first was a much better state of the universe than the second. It would seem then that, besides virtue and pleasure, we must recognize, as a third independent good, the apportionment of pleasure and pain to the virtuous and the vicious respectively.<sup>558</sup>

Ross asks to imagine two worlds with the same net-pleasure, one just and one unjust. Which do you prefer? Perhaps, you have the intuitive judgement that the world with justice is better. Therefore, in Ross’ reasoning, justice is intrinsically valuable and Value Hedonism is false.

		States	
		<i>Justice is intrinsically valuable</i>	<i>Justice is not intrinsically valuable</i>
Acts	<i>World A</i>	Maximize value	Maximize value
	<i>World B</i>	Not maximize value	Maximize value

Again, likewise the thought experiments based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument, these thought experiments seem to suffer from the Freebie Problem. Why choose

<sup>558</sup> Ross, Sir William David. *The Right and the Good*. Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 138.

pleasure when you can choose pleasure and beauty or pleasure and justice? If you have the choice of having both, it would be irrational to choose otherwise, unless you have a 100% confidence that the good is worthless. But a cautious agent will probably not have the intuition that either beauty or justice (or reality) are *surely* worthless.

### **Morality and the Freebie Problem**

Discussing Crisp's advanced modification of the EMTE, a scenario analogous to the one proposed by the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument, de Lazari-Radek and Singer conclude that our judgements about it are too biased. They attribute this biased component to morality. Life A contributes to the world while life B does not, thus life A is morally superior. Therefore, according to them, our judgement that life A is better is affected by moral considerations extraneous to the prudential question at stake.<sup>559</sup> Although Lin considers this claim "unreasonable",<sup>560</sup> as in the cases of imaginative failures with the original EMTEs, it instead seems possible that the comparison intuition is based on scales of evaluation different than well-being.

Therefore, moral concerns might also be the cause of the Freebie Problem in Lin's EMTE, Rowland's EMTE, and the "deceived businessman" thought experiment, in addition to the "two words" thought experiment. In fact, as I claimed in Ch. 1, I doubt that we are proficient in isolating our prudential intuitions disregarding morality. To show how moral concerns might generate the Freebie Problem, consider this example:

Life Well-Lived. Becky is an amiable scientist at a prestigious university. The research she is conducting, upon completion, will reveal the cure for cancer. She is also committed to the development of her friends' virtues and is a loyal spouse in a rewarding marriage.

Simulacrum. Things are just as described in Life Well-Lived, but Becky's experience is the product of an experience machine.<sup>561</sup>

As advanced by de Lazari-Radek and Singer, it is plausible that our comparison intuition on these lives is biased by moral concerns extraneous to the prudential question at stake. *Life Well-Lived* contributes to the world while *Simulacrum* does not, thus *Life Well-Lived* is morally superior. Given the functioning of our System 1's intuitions, it seems plausible that our judgement about *Life Well-*

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<sup>559</sup> de Lazari-Radek & Singer. "The Point", p. 261.

<sup>560</sup> Lin. "How", p. 321.

<sup>561</sup> These lives are originally described in: Forcehimes, Andrew T., and Luke Semrau. "Well-Being: Reality's Role." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2016, p. 466.

*Lived* being better is biased by moral concerns that proper System 2's prudential reasoning requires us to disregard.

That said, it seems that Weijers' explanation of why the comparison intuition should not be taken as evidence against Prudential Hedonism is particularly interesting here. The reason is that it generates an understanding that does not attribute the confounding component to the difficulties with distinguishing prudential and moral concerns. To reiterate, de Lazari-Radek and Singer's understanding of the issue is useful if we hold that intuitive cognition is not capable of disregarding moral concerns. Rather, Weijers' Freebie Problem casts doubt on the comparison intuition even if we assume that our judgements are unbiasedly about the prudential question at stake.

### **EMTE as Meaningful Pairwise Comparison**

Having shown how the Freebie Problem affects thought experiments, a properly devised EMTE, aiming at revealing subjects' relevant preferences, has to trade against each other a non-negligible difference in amount of the two competing goods. The supposed intrinsic value of reality can be intuitively apprehended only if you have to sacrifice an amount of pleasure computed as significant by the brain. Relatedly to the main point of this chapter, the epistemic value of the EMTEs lies in presenting two options, one capturing the pro-reality intuition and one the pro-pleasure intuition. As Weijers claims: "the great power of Nozick's experience machine thought experiment was that nearly everyone agreed that connecting to an experience machine was a bad choice even though a lot more enjoyment was offered by a life connected to the machine."<sup>562</sup>

Thus, the proper design of the thought experiment involves a meaningful pairwise comparison. Pairwise comparison is the method of comparing entities in pairs to reveal our preferences toward the entities.<sup>563</sup> This simple comparison can constitute the building block of more complex decision-making. Symmetrically, complex decision-making can be reduced to a set of binary comparisons.<sup>564</sup> That is indeed what we want from the EMTE: reducing a complex decision about intrinsic prudential value to a binary comparison between two competing lives that allows us to study people's judgements about the prudential value of two competing goods.

Given that, because of the Freebie Problem, thought experiments based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument do not seem to be apt to study the supposed intrinsic prudential value of reality. These thought experiments prime the subjects to take the "pluralist"

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<sup>562</sup> Weijers. "Nozick's", pp. 34-35.

<sup>563</sup> Ramík, Jaroslav. "Pairwise Comparison Matrices in Decision-Making." *Pairwise Comparisons Method: Theory and Applications in Decision Making*, Springer International, 2020, pp. 17-65.

<sup>564</sup> Fürnkranz, Johannes, and Eyke Hüllermeier. "Preference Learning and Ranking by Pairwise Comparison." *Preference Learning*, edited by Fürnkranz J. and Hüllermeier E., Springer, 2010, pp. 1-17.

choice because, under uncertainty, this is the rational decision to take. Their epistemic value ends up being modest: they just tell us that subjects are *not 100% confident* that the good in question is completely devoid of prudential value. Lin's EMTE, Rowland's EMTE, and Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment only tell us that we are not 100% sure about the intrinsic prudential worthlessness of reality, putting it in the same basket as claims about how many grains of sand there are in the world at any given moment. When the good at stake, in this case reality, is not intuitively intrinsically prudentially worthless, to have 100% confidence in reality not being intrinsically prudentially valuable, especially considering the lively debate in analytic philosophy of well-being, would be irrational.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument and the versions of the EMTE that result from it. Lin and Rowland's EMTEs acquire the same structure of Kagan's "deceived businessman" thought experiment. These thought experiments are a potential challenge to the revisionist scholarship because, in Lin and Rowland's view, they constitute the strongest version of the EMTE, and one that the negative experimental program on the EMTE has not addressed. By presenting these thought experiments, I reported Rowland's empirical testing of his version of the EMTE. I then discussed a flaw in the structure of these thought experiments, the Freebie Problem, that negatively affects their epistemic value. In explaining the Freebie Problem, I adopted a psychological understanding of intuitions and I defended an attitude of epistemological fallibilism toward the main theories of well-being. Considering that, I concluded that the Freebie Problem might affect several thought experiments, not necessarily directed at Prudential Hedonism. Also, for exemplification, I introduced two further thought experiments against Value Hedonism, G. Moore's "heap of filth" and Ross's "two words", that also seem to suffer of the Freebie Problem. Finally, I claimed that the original pairwise comparison methodology of the EMTEs, based on the choice between two lives roughly tracking pleasure or reality, should be preserved for a better understanding of judgements toward the two goods. This claim involved denying the desirability of modifications based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument and objecting the epistemic value of the "deceived businessman" thought experiment. These thought experiments seem not to constitute evidence against Prudential Hedonism.

## Part 2—Conclusion

In Part 2, I dealt with the objection to Mental State theories of well-being based on the EMTEs. By doing so, I concluded that the traditional confidence in these thought experiments as evidence for the falsity of Prudential Hedonism is misplaced. The revisionist scholarship has successfully demonstrated experimentally that the majority's judgement in favor of reality elicited by the original EMTEs is too biased to be taken as evidence concerning intrinsic prudential value. Also, I claimed that recent modifications of EMTEs based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument suffer of the Freebie problem and therefore should be dismissed. Taking stock, it does not seem that the traditional rebuttal of Prudential Hedonism based on the EMTEs is methodologically sound. This does not involve having demonstrated the truth of Prudential Hedonism, but it does show that Prudential Hedonism has fewer convincing objections left against its plausibility as a theory of well-being.

## Part 3—Paradox of Hedonism

Part 3 elaborates on the self-defeatingness objection to Prudential Hedonism. According to the Paradox of Hedonism, a prudential hedonist practically fails to reach the intrinsic good of her theory. If true, the Paradox of Hedonism might also imply that Prudential Hedonism is too demanding—it advises the pursuit of something impossible to obtain by pursuing it—and, thus, it may also weaken it theoretically. Ch. 1 involves a conceptual analysis of the Paradox of Hedonism. The best available definition of the paradoxical mechanism is refined. The overly conscious pursuit of pleasure is identified as a case of Prudential Hedonism’s indirect self-defeatingness—when the conscious effort to comply with the theory generates paradoxical effects. Ch. 2 deals with the explanations of the Paradox of Hedonism identifiable in the literature. From the range of possible explanations, incompetence is identified as a plausible cause of the self-defeating effects of Prudential Hedonism. Thus, incompetence ends up representing a possible mechanism for Prudential Hedonism’s direct self-defeatingness—when acting as prescribed by a theory leads to paradoxical effects. Ch. 3 analyses the Political Paradox of Happiness—the claim that Hedonistic Utilitarianism and the politics of happiness are self-defeating.

# Chapter 7—Paradox of Hedonism: Conceptual Analysis

*“Happiness is as a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you”*<sup>565</sup>

According to the butterfly analogy, happiness is something so evanescent that, if we try to catch it, it escapes. Alternatively, if we forget about happiness, we might find it by the way. This quote, which is sometimes found in pop-psychology literature,<sup>566</sup> evokes the so-called Paradox of Hedonism, which essentially claims that pleasure-seeking leads to unhappiness.<sup>567</sup> According to Roger Crisp, “one will gain more enjoyment by trying to do something other than to enjoy oneself”.<sup>568</sup> Ruut Veenhoven attests that this Paradox strikes at the heart of Hedonism. He argues that if Hedonism does not bring happiness in the end, then the true hedonist should repudiate the theory.<sup>569</sup> Ben Eggleston adds that the Paradox appears to be an obstacle for hedonistic ethical theories, such as Utilitarianism.<sup>570</sup> The worry the Paradox generates for hedonistic theories is that they appear to be self-defeating, since if we pursue the goal that these theories advise, we are less likely to achieve it.<sup>571</sup>

This chapter analyses the Paradox of Hedonism. But first, the Paradox of Hedonism needs conceptual clarification: at present there are several ambiguities that surround the use of this paradox. Consequently, in this chapter, I define and discuss concepts pertinent to Part 3, the Part of this dissertation that concerns paradoxical effects of Prudential Hedonism. First, I present the Paradox of Hedonism (Paradox) and a condensed conceptual history of it. Second, I elaborate my

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<sup>565</sup> Apocryphal.

<sup>566</sup> Marar, Ziyad. *The Happiness Paradox*. Reaktion Books, 2003, p. 28.

<sup>567</sup> More generally, in Western popular culture we often encounter beliefs that seem to relate to the supposed wisdom of the Paradox of Hedonism. For example, a widespread popular belief is that happiness cannot be experienced without the contrast with misery. However, the necessity of suffering for happiness seems questionable. Peirce asks to consider that some people endure lifelong depression or chronic pain. According to the aforementioned reasoning of one state requiring the other, these people do not actually suffer because they cannot contrast their misery with happiness. This seems an absurd consequence. Also, it does not seem that lives have necessarily an equal amount of net-pleasure and net-pain. Thus, the supposed necessity of pain for pleasure does not seem to pose any obstacle to the goal of optimizing a life’s hedonic value. Peirce, David. “The Hedonistic Imperative.” [www.hedweb.com](http://www.hedweb.com), accessed 28 Sep. 2019; Cross-cultural studies show that similar beliefs on happiness and unhappiness being intertwined extend to Asian cultures. Joshanloo, Mohsen, and Dan Weijers. “Aversion to Happiness Across Cultures: A Review of Where and Why People are Averse to Happiness.” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2013, pp. 717-35.

<sup>568</sup> Crisp, Roger. “Hedonism Reconsidered.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2006, pp. 619-45.

<sup>569</sup> Veenhoven, Ruut. “Hedonism and Happiness.” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2003, pp. 437-57.

<sup>570</sup> Eggleston, Ben. “Paradox of Happiness.” *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 3794-99.

<sup>571</sup> Dietz, Alexander. “Explaining the Paradox of Hedonism.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 97, no. 3, 2018, pp. 497-510.

deconstruction of the Paradox, accordingly to the different hedonistic theories and meanings of the word “hedonism”. Third, I argue that the *overly conscious* pursuit of pleasure, rather than other expressions that emerge from the literature, best captures the kind of pursuit that might generate paradoxical effects. Fourth, I present some empirical evidence that seems to support the definition I refined. Fifth, I describe the strategies that might be employed to avoid the self-defeating mechanism. Finally, I discuss the implications for Prudential Hedonism of this version of the Paradox.

### Condensing the Conceptual History

Varieties of Hedonism have been criticized from ancient to modern times.<sup>572</sup> But, along the way, philosophers have given little attention to the Paradox of Hedonism. This is probably because of the number and strength of other objections to this class of theories.<sup>573</sup> But for non-philosophers, and especially “the folk”, the Paradox is a common objection to Hedonism, even if they often do not give that specific name to the supposed phenomenon.<sup>574</sup>

The Paradox of Hedonism, the Paradox of Happiness, and the Pleasure Paradox, are a family of names given to the Paradox that are usually used interchangeably.<sup>575</sup> At their heart, they share the claim that the pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating—that the pursuit of happiness results in attaining less happiness or even unhappiness.<sup>576</sup> These paradoxes, both Peter Singer and Mike Martin notice, are often not paradoxes in the sense of logical contradictions, rather they represent psychological incongruities or empirical ironies about the process of obtaining happiness.<sup>577</sup> In Part 3, I will refer to only the Paradox of Hedonism, and understand happiness as quantitative hedonists do—interchangeably with pleasure.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Discussions of Hedonism, for example, can be found in: Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Aquinas, Butler, Hume, Mill, Nietzsche, Brentano, Sidgwick, G. Moore, Ross, Broad, Ryle, Chisholm, Singer. Moore, Andrew. “Hedonism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>573</sup> For example, Weijers does not mention the Paradox of Hedonism as an objection to the theory. A. Moore only quickly mentions it. Weijers, Dan. “Hedonism.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu), accessed 29 Jan. 2020; Moore. “Hedonism.”

<sup>574</sup> Marar. “The Happiness”, p. 28.

<sup>575</sup> Outside philosophy, the expression “Paradox of Happiness” has also been used to denote a different phenomenon usually called “Easterlin Paradox”. Drakopoulos, Stavros A. “The Paradox of Happiness: Towards an Alternative Explanation.” *Journal of Happiness Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2018, pp. 303-15.

<sup>576</sup> Proudfoot, Michael, and AR. Lacey. “Hedonism.” *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Routledge, 2009, p. 163; Eggleston. “Paradox of Happiness.”

<sup>577</sup> Singer, Peter. “Why Act Morally?” *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 276-96; Martin, Mike W. “Paradoxes of Happiness.” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2008, pp. 171-84.

<sup>578</sup> “By happiness is intended pleasure”. Mill, John S. *Utilitarianism*. Hackett Publishing, 1979, p. 7; This framework is defended by: Davis, Wayne. “Pleasure and Happiness.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1981, pp. 305-17; The problems with this framework are not of direct concern to my enquiry. Haybron’s argument against considering pleasure and happiness as synonyms has no damaging

What is the origin of the Paradox? According to Arthur Herman, the Paradox of Hedonism could be traced back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>579</sup> Aristotle claimed that pleasure represents the outcome of an activity, asking and answering the following question: how does it happen that no one is never-endingly pleased? Aristotle replied that human beings are unable to perpetually perform an activity. Therefore, for Aristotle, pleasure cannot be perpetual because it derives from activity.<sup>580</sup> So, on closer inspection, Aristotle's argument does *not* seem to be the forerunner of the Paradox. This argument does not tackle the issue of whether the pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating. Rather, Aristotle's reflection concerns what causes pleasure (activity) and, according to him, the impossibility of perpetual pleasure.

Later, Joseph Butler elaborates an argument directed against Psychological Egoism, especially its hedonistic version, which can be considered the harbinger to the Paradox, if not its first full instantiation:

That all particular appetites and passions are towards external things themselves, distinct from the pleasure arising from them, is manifested from hence; that there could not be this pleasure, were it not for that prior suitableness between the object and the passion: there could be no enjoyment or delight from one thing more than another, from eating food more than from swallowing a stone, if there were not an affection or appetite to one thing more than another.<sup>581</sup>

The claim is that the experience of pleasure upon the satisfaction of a desire presupposes a desire for something that is not pleasure itself.<sup>582</sup> According to this argument, we do not feel pleasure for getting something (e.g. chocolate) if we did not desire it. The pleasure that arises from the satisfaction of the desire is a result of the wanting itself. Consider, for example, placing second in a marathon. This state of affairs would be a source of joy for the runner if he desired a spot on the podium; but it would make him disappointed if he only wanted first place.<sup>583</sup> This argument, called "Butler's stone", has been interpreted widely as refuting Psychological Hedonism.<sup>584</sup> According to

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implications for a hedonistic theory of value. Haybron, Daniel M. "What Do We Want from a Theory of Happiness?" *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2003, pp. 305-29.

<sup>579</sup> Herman, Arthur L. "Ah, But There is a Paradox of Desire in Buddhism--A Reply to Wayne Alt." *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1980, pp. 529-32.

<sup>580</sup> Aristotle. "Nicomachean Ethics." *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon, Random House, 1941, p. 1099.

<sup>581</sup> Butler, Joseph. "Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel." *British Moralists, 1650-1800*, edited by DD. Raphael, Hackett, 1991, p. 365.

<sup>582</sup> May, Joshua. "Psychological Egoism." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 6 Aug. 2019.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>584</sup> Phillips, David. "Butler and the Nature of Self-Interest." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2000, pp. 421-38; Butler's original argument did not address altruistic forms of Hedonism. Later, other authors have considered similar arguments to discredit altruistic forms of Hedonism. Dietz. "Explaining."

it, Psychological Hedonism is false because people sometimes experience pleasure and this can generate only from the satisfaction of a non-hedonistic desire.<sup>585</sup> And, since Psychological Hedonism is the view that all desires are hedonistic, it must be false.

Linda Austin attributes to John Stuart Mill the first formulation of the Paradox.<sup>586</sup> J.S. Mill states the Paradox in the aftermath of a major depression he suffered in his early twenties:

I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way.<sup>587</sup>

Later, in *Methods of Ethics*, Henry Sidgwick coined the phrase “Paradox of Hedonism” while discussing Egoistic Hedonism.<sup>588</sup> This form of Ethical Hedonism equates the moral good with the pleasure of the individual (rather than pleasure independently from who experiences it).<sup>589</sup> Differently from Prudential Hedonism, that is a theory of well-being, Egoistic Hedonism is a moral theory.<sup>590</sup> Egoistic Hedonism is self-defeating, so said Sidgwick, for the reason that it promotes pleasure-seeking in a way that results in diminished pleasure.<sup>591</sup> According to Sidgwick:

A man who maintains throughout an Epicurean mood, keeping his main conscious aim perpetually fixed on his own pleasure, does not catch the full spirit of the chase; his eagerness never gets just the sharpness of edge which imparts to the pleasure its highest zest. Here comes into view what we may call the fundamental Paradox of Hedonism, that the impulse towards pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim.<sup>592</sup>

So, for Sidgwick, the overly predominant pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating; it generates less pleasure than a less predominant one. For this reason, Sidgwick thinks that Egoistic Hedonism is doomed to bring a less happy life than adopting a different ethical theory.

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<sup>585</sup> Sober, Elliott. “Psychological Egoism.” *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, edited by H. LaFollette and I. Persson, 2013, pp. 148-68.

<sup>586</sup> Austin, Linda. “John Stuart Mill, the Autobiography, and the Paradox of Happiness.” *World Picture*, vol. 3, 2009.

<sup>587</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *Autobiography*. Penguin, 1989, p. 117.

<sup>588</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *Methods of Ethics*. Hackett Publishing, 1981, p. 48.

<sup>589</sup> Duignan, Brian, et al. “Epicureanism.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, www.britannica.com, accessed 8 Dec. 2018.

<sup>590</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>591</sup> Martin. “Paradoxes.”

<sup>592</sup> Sidgwick. “Methods”, p. 48.

## Paradoxes of Hedonism

In this section, I propose my taxonomy of different possible variations of the Paradox generated by the different meanings of the word “hedonism” and the different hedonistic theories: the “Paradox of Folk Hedonism”, the “Paradox of Psychological Hedonism”, the “Individual Paradox of Hedonistic Utilitarianism”, and the “Paradox of Prudential Hedonism”. After, I explain why the Paradox of Prudential Hedonism is important.

The Paradox of Hedonism is most often mentioned in psychological and non-academic debates (albeit sometimes not by this name). From this, we can infer that in these contexts what “hedonism” means corresponds to the meaning that this word has in non-philosophical and non-academic registers, namely folk hedonism. A suitable name for this conceptualization of the Paradox is the “Paradox of Folk Hedonism”. This consists in the claim that pursuing pleasure in the ways that are attached to the meaning of the word “hedonism” in psychological debate and everyday language (e.g. “Jack was a total hedonist in Las Vegas”) results in less happiness. Remember that I understand folk hedonism as the pursuit of base pleasures, heavily weighted in favor of immediate gratification, and devoid of any concern for the pleasure and pain of others.

The distinction between Philosophical Hedonism and folk hedonism, that I underlined at the beginning of this thesis, seems to correspond to the distinction, made by Masha Ksendzova and colleagues, between subjects who value pleasure (philosophical hedonists) and subjects who seek pleasure in a way that brings about reduced happiness (folk hedonists).<sup>593</sup> In fact, in their study, folk hedonists (maladaptive pleasure-seekers in their words), in opposition to philosophical hedonists (value-based hedonists in their words), are defined as individuals with such personality traits as being more impulsive in pursuing positive affect and feeling less concern over the consequences they may face because of pleasurable activities.<sup>594</sup> Similarly, even if with different results, Veenhoven claims that Hedonism manifests itself in two ways: a general mind-set, described as the moral appreciation of enjoyment, and specific behaviors such as frequent sex and use of stimulants.<sup>595</sup>

According to Ksendzova and colleagues, folk hedonism negatively predicts happiness.<sup>596</sup> This research seems to confirm the Paradox of Folk Hedonism. However, it is questionable to consider the Paradox of Folk Hedonism a paradox at all, even in the sense of an empirical irony. To be empirically ironic, a paradox should involve the empirical truth of a seemingly absurd claim.

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<sup>593</sup> Ksendzova, Masha, et al. “The Portrait of a Hedonist: The Personality and Ethics Behind the Value and Maladaptive Pursuit of Pleasure.” *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 79, 2015, pp. 68-74.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Veenhoven. “Hedonism.”

<sup>596</sup> Ksendzova et al. “The Portrait.”

Common sense already holds that certain ways to pursue happiness, like committing crimes to finance your heroin addiction, are not effective (certainly in the long run). Since common sense widely holds that folk hedonism does not lead to happiness, this “paradox” lacks even the counter-intuitiveness that is required for it to be labeled in such a way.

Furthermore, if we consider the short-term gains that are the focus of folk hedonism, this kind of pursuit is not paradoxical.<sup>597</sup> When, for example, Suzy consumes cocaine during a party in order to have fun, she does reach the pleasure she is aiming for. Suzy may encounter future displeasure, perhaps from addiction, but as a folk hedonist, Suzy does not care much about how her future-self fares. So, neither common folk nor folk hedonists should be surprised that folk hedonism is a bad strategy for maximizing happiness over a lifetime.

Psychological Hedonism is the claim that conscious or unconscious intrinsic desires are exclusively oriented toward pleasure. According to Justin Garson, for any individual and for any desire, the individual holds the desire because he believes that the satisfaction of it is going to give him pleasure.<sup>598</sup> For example, Jane desires to garden because she believes that gardening will increase her pleasure. In other words, Psychological Hedonism claims that all behaviors are ultimately directed to pleasure or to the avoidance of pain.

The “Paradox of Psychological Hedonism” consists in the claim that, because of the functioning of our motivational system, we get less pleasure than we would have if our motivational system worked differently, specifically by allowing non-pleasures to motivate us. Unfortunately for this Paradox, if Psychological Hedonism is a true description of our motivational system, it would have no prescriptive value because it advises us to do something impossible, at least until it becomes possible to alter our motivational system. The Paradox of Psychological Hedonism can be seen as advice to stop being human. On the other hand, if Psychological Hedonism is not a true description of our motivational system, then we needn’t worry about the Paradox at all—it simply congratulates us for not being psychological hedonists. As such, this version of the Paradox of Hedonism is not particularly useful.

The “Individual Paradox of Hedonistic Utilitarianism” consists in the claim that Hedonistic Utilitarianism has paradoxical effects from the perspective of the agent that applies the theory. Hedonistic Utilitarianism approves of the actions that maximize happiness and disapproves of the actions that do not maximize it.<sup>599</sup> The principle of equal consideration of interests requires the agent to choose the right action from an “impartial spectator” or, using Bentham’s expression,

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<sup>597</sup> Arnold, Felix. “The So-Called Hedonist Paradox.” *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1906, pp. 228-34.

<sup>598</sup> Garson, Justin. “Two Types of Psychological Hedonism.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, vol. 56, 2016, pp. 7-14.

<sup>599</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.  
www.historyofeconomicthought.mcmaster.ca, accessed 9 May 2018, ch.1, para. 1.

“observant bystander” perspective.<sup>600</sup> The Greatest Happiness Principle requires “everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one”.<sup>601</sup> It is Hedonistic Utilitarianism’s commitment to equal consideration of interests generates paradoxical consequences for the individual who adopts it.

An agent, while applying this happiness-promoting theory, would likely become less happy as a result because Hedonistic Utilitarianism often requires the agent to sacrifice their own pleasure. Imagine that five people can be saved from death by the donation of your organs. According to Hedonistic Utilitarianism, you might decide to die and be a donor because your loss of happiness is outweighed by the sum of the five people’s gains. Considering that, the “too demanding” objection seems a serious problem for Hedonistic Utilitarianism as a moral theory.<sup>602</sup> However, this issue does not emerge from the hedonistic foundations of the theory. Non-hedonistic versions of Utilitarianism generate similar demandingness issues. The problem is not pleasure but its distribution between subjects. A preference utilitarian, for example, would often have to sacrifice their satisfaction to generate more satisfaction in other people. So, the Individual Paradox of Hedonistic Utilitarianism is not best thought of as an objection to Hedonism, rather it is an objection to the maximizing nature of Utilitarianism. Therefore, this paradox exceeds the scope of my research.

Given the arguments above, these understandings of the Paradox of Hedonism do not capture the seed of wisdom at its heart. To reiterate, the Paradox of Folk Hedonism is not counter-intuitive enough to be a paradox. Also, for short-term gains, folk hedonism does not seem to back-fire. Any wisdom that resides in the Paradox of Folk Hedonism collapses into the Incompetence Account that will be analyzed further in the next chapter. The Paradox of Psychological Hedonism is a descriptive claim that does not fit with the prescriptivity that is usually attached to the Paradox of Hedonism (i.e. it does not generate any useful advice). The Individual Paradox of Hedonistic Utilitarianism seems to represent a problem for Hedonistic Utilitarianism as a moral theory but it does not challenge Prudential Hedonism as a theory of well-being.

On the other hand, the Paradox of Prudential Hedonism best captures the heart of the expression “Paradox of Hedonism”: (1) It is a prescription: if you do x, the result will be y, which is a bad result. This is the structure that the Paradox of Hedonism usually has and that we expect from the most refined version of it. (2) It is counter-intuitive: if you try to maximize your life’s net-pleasure, you end up with less. The apparent absurdity of this claim is a necessary condition for

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<sup>600</sup> Guidi, Marco. “Everybody to Count for One, Nobody for More than One.” *Revue d’Études Benthamiennes*, www.journals.openedition.org, accessed 1 Set. 2019.

<sup>601</sup> Mill, John Stuart. “Utilitarianism.” *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, edited by JM. Robson, University of Toronto Press/Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 267.

<sup>602</sup> For Utilitarianism’s demandingness: Nathanson, Stephen. “Act and Rule Utilitarianism.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 2 Set. 2019.

considering it a paradox. Imagine telling a musician: if you aim at beautiful music, you will end up with ugly noises. Or consider advising a student not to study because aiming at good grades will make their grades worse. We do not usually think this way. We usually assume that if you aim at something, you will be more motivated to pursue it and, thus, more likely to get it. (3) It is a claim about self-interest. It advises us in our individual decision-making. The wisdom of the Paradox is supposed to advise a choice about the good of the individual. Again, this is the structure that the Paradox of Hedonism usually has and that we expect from the most refined version of it.

However, points (1), (2), and (3) apply to Egoistic Hedonism as well. So, how do I justify the choice of Prudential Hedonism over Egoistic Hedonism for the most refined version of the Paradox? Let's consider the relevant similarities and differences between these theories. Both Egoistic Hedonism and Prudential Hedonism are normative theories that claim you should pursue happiness.<sup>603</sup> Yet, Prudential Hedonism is a theory of rationality or well-being while Egoistic Hedonism is a theory of morality.<sup>604</sup> According to Prudential Hedonism it is rational to pursue happiness, according to Egoistic Hedonism it is a moral obligation. Given that, it now appears why Prudential Hedonism is the best candidate for the most refined version of the Paradox of Hedonism. The Paradox, in fact, questions Hedonism's rationality, not Hedonism's morality. In other words, the claim of the Paradox concerns the self-defeatingness of pursuing happiness, not its moral blameworthiness. For this reason, Part 3 focuses on the Paradox of Prudential Hedonism: if you try to maximize your life's happiness, you could minimize it. To reiterate, the Paradox of Hedonism is best seen as an argument against Prudential Hedonism.

### **Isolating the Paradox of Hedonism**

For economy, I restrict my investigation to the common understanding of the Paradox, that refers to the pursuit of pleasure, and I do not cast light on the avoidance of displeasure. The points being made may or may not apply to both. Further research is required to understand to what extent, if any, these processes overlap. For example, Nicholas White claims that we should abandon the idea of happiness because it is based on a false hope. There cannot be a coherence of aims: happiness is a mirage.<sup>605</sup> Still, White's claim does not imply that minimizing suffering is unrealizable too. A pessimist such as Arthur Schopenhauer, for example, advised to avoid suffering instead of pursuing

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<sup>603</sup> Fletcher, Guy. "Taking Prudence Seriously." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, edited by Russ Shafer Landau, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 70-94.

<sup>604</sup> Nagel, Thomas. *The Possibility of Altruism*. Princeton University Press, 1978, chs. 5-8.

<sup>605</sup> White, Nicholas. *A Brief History of Happiness*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. vii, 162, 166; Haybron, Daniel M. Review of *A Brief History of Happiness* by Nicholas White, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 85, no. 3, 2012, pp. 729-32.

happiness. According to Schopenhauer, keep your expectations low and you will have the most bearable life.<sup>606</sup>

Therefore further research is needed to understand to what extent reflection on the Paradox of Hedonism applies to what I call the “Paradox of Negative Hedonism”, the claim that the avoidance of displeasure is self-defeating. This distinction might have an important implication for Prudential Hedonism: if the pursuit of pleasure is paradoxical but the avoidance of displeasure is not, Prudential Hedonism is safe from the objection of self-defeatingness. Prudential hedonists would have to pursue the “good life” by minimizing displeasure rather than by maximizing pleasure.

Since moods can alter decision-making,<sup>607</sup> I exclude from the most refined version of the Paradox of Hedonism this mechanism (moods altering decisions, and consequently moods). The opposite is the relevant mechanism: decisions affecting moods. The Paradox is usually thought to concern the relation between pursuing happiness and getting it, not the relation between being happy and the continuation of it.

For example, every time Sarah is cheerful she abandons her housework because she wants to sustain this mood and she fails in keeping up her cheerfulness. This supposed phenomenon consists in the claim that pleasure elicits mental states or behaviors that impair its preservation. However, empirical evidence seems to contradict the psychological reality of this phenomenon: when in a good mood subjects seem more prone to engage in activities that maximize long-term happiness (e.g. housework) but not maximize present-moment happiness (e.g. play).<sup>608</sup>

A related popular belief consists in the claim that happiness necessarily collapses into boredom. Likewise, Jens Timmermann’s “New Paradox of Hedonism” is based on the claim that “there can be cases in which we reject pleasure because there is too much of it”.<sup>609</sup> However, this cultural belief and Timmermann’s New Paradox of Hedonism seem questionable.<sup>610</sup> Certainly, some pleasures can lead to temporary satiation and loss of interest, but to not practice these

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<sup>606</sup> Schalkx, Rozemarijn, and Ad Bergsma. “Arthur’s Advice: Comparing Arthur Schopenhauer’s Advice on Happiness with Contemporary Research.” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2008, pp. 379-95.

<sup>607</sup> Gear, Tony, et al. “The Impact of Mood on Decision-Making Process.” *EuroMed Journal of Business*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2017, pp. 242-57.

<sup>608</sup> Taquet, Maxime, et al. “Hedonism and the Choice of Everyday Activities.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 113, no. 35, 2016, p. 9769; Quoidbach, Jordi, et al. “From Affect to Action: How Pleasure Shapes Everyday Decisions in Japan and the U.S.” *Motivation and Emotion*, vol. 43, no. 6, 2019, pp. 948-55.

<sup>609</sup> Timmermann, Jens. “Too Much of a Good Thing? Another Paradox of Hedonism.” *Analysis*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2005, pp. 144-46.

<sup>610</sup> Feldman presents arguments to the effect that Timmermann’s New Paradox of Hedonism is neither new nor paradoxical and that it does not constitute a problem for Prudential Hedonism. Feldman, Fred. “Timmermann’s New Paradox of Hedonism: Neither New nor Paradoxical.” *Analysis*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2006, pp. 76-82.

pleasures in rotation is a case of incompetence in the pursuit of happiness.<sup>611</sup> This phenomenon does not imply that pleasant states necessarily impair themselves.

Another clarification consists in describing the Paradox of Hedonism as the only mechanism that concerns decision-making and expected pleasure.<sup>612</sup> In other words, the possible cases where Prudential Hedonism defeats itself momentarily are not included in the most refined understanding of the Paradox. According to the Paradox of Hedonism, the agent's decision to maximize pleasure does not optimize it in the long-term. A different mechanism involves decision-making and immediately experienced pleasure or pain. Since empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that decision-making involves immediate pleasure and pain,<sup>613</sup> I consider the Paradox of Hedonism to refer only to the paradoxical effects concerning expected utility.

Following Andrew Moore, the Paradox is also distinct from cases of weaknesses of will<sup>614</sup>—when the subject acts, freely and intentionally, contrary to his better judgement.<sup>615</sup> Imagine, for example, the case of Bill. After years of studying philosophy, Bill concludes that Prudential Hedonism is the true theory of well-being. Meanwhile, he cannot bring himself to implement any change directed at taking care of his neurotic personality despite knowing that there are things he could and should try. Bill is an unhappy prudential hedonist exhibiting weakness of will.

Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that, when we imagine what will make us happier, we fail to be consistent with the plans that rationally follow.<sup>616</sup> Parker Schiffer and Tomi-Ann Roberts, for example, showed how subjects, besides knowing that “flow activities” facilitate happiness, end up over-practicing passive leisure and underutilizing more active leisure activities that could elicit periods of flow.<sup>617</sup> Nevertheless, considering that the Paradox of Hedonism is understood as the pursuit of happiness resulting in less happiness, cases of weakness of will are not included in the refined version of the Paradox because it is indeed the pursuit of pleasure that is missing in cases of weakness of will. Cases of weakness of will do not represent Prudential Hedonism's paradoxical effects, unless the belief about the truth of Prudential Hedonism somehow disposes people to

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<sup>611</sup> Levenstein, Michael D. *The End of Knowledge: A Discourse on the Unification of Philosophy*. Algora Pub, 2013.

<sup>612</sup> Orthodox normative decision-theory claims that, under uncertainty, the agent should prefer the choice with the greatest expected utility. Steele, Katie, and H. Orri Stefánsson, “Decision Theory.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* edited by Edward N. Zalta, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 28 May 2020.

<sup>613</sup> Cabanac, Michel, et al. “Pleasure in Decision-Making Situations.” *BMC Psychiatry*, vol. 2, no. 7, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>614</sup> Moore. “Hedonism.”

<sup>615</sup> Stroud, Sarah, and Larisa Svirsky. “Weakness of Will.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>616</sup> Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. “Choices, Values and Frames.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1984, pp. 341-50; Gilovitch, Thomas, et al. *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment*. Cambridge University Press, 2002; Hsee, Christopher K., and Reid Hastie. “Decision and experience: Why Don't we Choose What Makes Us Happy?” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2006, pp. 31-37.

<sup>617</sup> Parker Schiffer L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. “The Paradox of Happiness: Why are We not Doing What we Know Makes us Happy?” *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2017, pp. 1-8.

weakness of will more so than other beliefs. But this kind of paradox seems both indirect and unlikely.

Thus, my refined version of the Paradox of Hedonism excludes the phenomena that I discussed in this section: the Paradox of Negative Hedonism, pleasure impairing its continuation, momentary self-defeatingness, and weakness of will. Accordingly, this is the relevant mechanism: the pursuit of pleasure results in less net-pleasure.

## Defining the Paradox

The exact nature of the mental state or behavior that determines the Paradox is still debated.<sup>618</sup> Immanuel Kant states the Paradox in these words: “The more a cultivated reason purposely occupies itself with the enjoyment of life and with happiness, so much the further does one get away from true satisfaction”.<sup>619</sup> Eggleston considers self-defeating “regarding happiness as the sole ultimately valuable end or objective”.<sup>620</sup> Dietz describes the Paradox as “the idea that making pleasure the only thing that we desire for its own sake can be self-defeating”.<sup>621</sup>

In some versions of the Paradox authors find the “direct” pursuit of pleasure to be problematic,<sup>622</sup> in one other it is the “direct and intentional” pursuit of pleasure that causes the problem.<sup>623</sup> In still other cases, the claim is that happiness cannot be pursued as an “exclusive” or “independent” end.<sup>624</sup> Martin also uses the adverbs “devotedly” and “exclusively” to define the paradoxical pursuit.<sup>625</sup> J.S. Mill and Sidgwick analyze the implications of “consciously” aiming at happiness.<sup>626</sup> Michael David Levenstein refers to the “conscious” pursuit of pleasure too.<sup>627</sup> Also Crisp seems to endorse this understanding.<sup>628</sup> This variety of definitions reveals that the exact mental state or behavior leading to the Paradox of Hedonism is not settled. For this reason, it is

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<sup>618</sup> Martin. “Paradoxes.”

<sup>619</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 51.

<sup>620</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>621</sup> Dietz. “Explaining”; Silverstein also reports this definition of the Paradox: Silverstein, Matthew. “In Defense of Happiness.” *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, p. 295.

<sup>622</sup> Mill. “Autobiography”, p. 117; Crisp, Roger. “Well-Being.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018; Belliotti, Raymond A. *Happiness Is Overrated*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, p. xi; Zagzebski, Linda T. *Divine Motivation Theory*. Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 108; Martin. “Paradoxes.”

<sup>623</sup> Levenstein. “The End”, p. 73.

<sup>624</sup> Telfer, Elizabeth. *Happiness*. St. Martin’s Press, 1980, p. 30; Dietz. “Explaining”; Hewitt, Sharon. “What Do Our Intuitions about the Experience Machine Really Tell Us about Hedonism?” *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 151, no. 3, 2009, p. 346.

<sup>625</sup> Martin. “Paradoxes.”

<sup>626</sup> Sidgwick describes with these words the subject that experiences the Paradox: “his main conscious aim perpetually fixed on his own pleasure”. Sidgwick. “Methods”, p. 48; J.S. Mill endorses this definition when he speaks of happy people as those with their “minds fixed” on something other than happiness. Mill, “Autobiography”, p. 117.

<sup>627</sup> “Essentially, just because happiness cannot often be gleaned through direct conscious pursuit, does not mean that its indirect pursuit is not informed by this conscious desire”. Levenstein. “The End”, p. 73.

<sup>628</sup> Crisp. “Hedonism”, pp. 338-39.

necessary to identify the definition of the Paradox that seems to be most plausible. Below, I analyze the expressions that I mentioned.

The “direct” pursuit of pleasure is frequently used to express the Paradox of Hedonism. What is the difference between the direct pursuit of pleasure and the indirect pursuit of pleasure? Imagine taking an opioid. The opiates travel along the bloodstream into the brain and attach to particular proteins, the mu-opioid receptors, located on the surfaces of opiate-sensitive neurons. The union of these chemicals and the mu-opioid receptors starts the biochemical brain processes that make subjects experience feelings of pleasure.<sup>629</sup> Taking an opioid seems to be the most direct way to pursue pleasure.

But notice that several steps are still required: owning a sufficient amount of money, acquiring the drug, taking the drug. Consequently, our pursuit of pleasure is always indirect in the sense that it is always mediated, at least, by various actions and activities in the brain. Unfortunately, it seems that we cannot substantially up-regulate at will our hedonic experience. So, if the pursuit of pleasure is universally indirect, using the Paradox to advise the avoidance of the direct pursuit of happiness is pointless in the sense that there exists no audience of “direct pursuers of pleasure” that could benefit from the advice.

However, even if I have shown that the direct pursuit of pleasure is impossible, it is still possible for the pursuit of pleasure to be more or less direct. Imagine the directness of the pursuit as a spectrum: the action of consuming a psychoactive substance or the use of other technologies (such as transcranial magnetic stimulation) stand on the far left of the spectrum, further to the right there are less controversial activities, such as going to a party to socialize with friends. These activities themselves also include a wide range of more or less direct paths to the goal of pleasure. For example, diving into a pool on a hot summer’s day seems to be a shortcut to pleasure compared to the challenges of studying hard and eventually securing a fulfilling job.

Considering this spectrum of directness of pursuit, the issue seems to lie in how long one has to wait for the pleasure to be experienced and/or how circuitous a route the causal spark must take before it ignites the experience of pleasure. Incorporating this more plausible spectrum of directness into the Paradox, we get the “too direct” pursuit of happiness results in less happiness. But this formulation seems empirically questionable. Unless endorsing some forms of ascetism, it does not seem that happiness simply depends on always choosing the long and hard route to it. Sometimes, like for pool-owners on very hot days, the highly direct pursuit seems to produce more

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<sup>629</sup> Kosten, Thomas R., and Tony P. George. “The Neurobiology of Opioid Dependence: Implications for Treatment.” *Science & Practice Perspectives*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, pp. 13-20.

(immediate and) net-happiness. So, any form of the direct pursuit of happiness does not seem to uniformly generate any paradoxical effects.

What then of the “intentional” pursuit of pleasure? This seems problematic because, if we think about what people generally intend for themselves, it appears that almost every human intends to be happy.<sup>630</sup> Certainly very few people intend to be miserable. But discussions of the Paradox make it seem like it is only a minority who are foolish enough to pursue pleasure in such a way as to achieve less of it, rather than the vast majority of people who intend to be happy. In other words, this definition of the Paradox seems to capture the vast majority of people, making it much less likely that this is a good description of the Paradox. Also, as reported by Sebo Uithol and colleagues, the concept of intention seems to encompass both the concepts of action-initiation and action-control.<sup>631</sup> Given that, I advance, the paradox seems to descend from the latter rather than form the former, the conscious pursuit of pleasure, which I analyze further below, appears more precise by pointing only to the paradoxical mechanism of action-control. The adverb used by Kant, “purposely”, seems to be a synonym of intentionally.

The “exclusive” pursuit of pleasure elicits the idea of a pursuit that does not allow the pursuit of other goals, even instrumentally, besides pleasure—the ultimate good. Because of that, it coincides with the extreme version of the conscious pursuit of pleasure that I analyze below: a pursuit that is experientially ubiquitous in the consciousness of the pursuer. The “independent” pursuit of pleasure means a pursuit that does not depend on any other pursuit. So, this independence implies that this pursuit of pleasure cannot, even instrumentally, be directed at goals different than pleasure, making it just like the exclusive pursuit I have just mentioned.

In this form (no instrumental pursuits), the exclusive pursuit formulation is not very useful because no one continuously consciously pursues only pleasure. So, again, there is no audience for the advice that this understanding of the Paradox would generate. However, having pleasure as the only *ultimate* goal is much more plausible and applies to at least some people (prudential hedonists). So we can identify a more reasonable definition consisting of the “exclusive intrinsic” pursuit of pleasure. This definition coincides with the aforementioned definition that considers it paradoxical to regard happiness as the “sole ultimately valuable end”. If we associate what is intrinsically good with what is intrinsically desirable, the formulation of the Paradox as a consequence of holding pleasure as the “only intrinsic desire”—the thing you desire for its own sake—seems to correspond to it as well.

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<sup>630</sup> Diener, Ed, et al. “Subjective Well-Being Is Essential to Well-Being.” *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1998, pp. 33-37.

<sup>631</sup> Uithol, Sebo, et al. “Why we may not Find Intentions in the Brain.” *Neuropsychologia*, vol. 56, 2014, pp. 129-39.

However, the exclusive intrinsic definition seems poorly descriptive. These aforementioned expressions correspond to broader definitions of Prudential Hedonism. By definition, every prudential hedonist considers pleasure the ultimate goal, the intrinsic good, the sole ultimately valuable end, the only intrinsic desire. According to these interpretations, the belief in the truth of Prudential Hedonism is itself the mental state that generates paradoxical effects. Instead, it seems more useful to identify the mental state or behavior that, descending from the belief in the truth of Prudential Hedonism, determines the Paradox, e.g. the conscious pursuit of pleasure. In other words, the expressions at stake do not seem descriptive because it seems that the paradoxical trait is not a philosophical belief, but another mental state or behavior that the philosophical belief determines.

The expression “devotedly” seems a vague way to express the Paradox. In fact, the related noun “devotion”, implying a sense of religious ferment, corresponds to an ardent dedication. This characterization does not seem useful in trying to describe the kind of pursuit that has paradoxical effects. To devotedly pursue pleasure, meaning pursuing pleasure “religiously” or “passionately”, can be interpreted, given the broadness of the related concepts of religion and passion, as corresponding to many of the more specific expressions that have already been analyzed in this section.

### **Definition: Conscious Pursuit of Pleasure**

All things considered, the *conscious* pursuit of pleasure seems to be the most appropriate definition. The conscious pursuit of pleasure can be understood as the pursuit that holds pleasure in the mind’s eye. Pleasure is kept in mind by the agent as her regulative objective. This is a case of what Derek Parfit calls “indirect self-defeatingness”, when the counter-productive effects of a theory are caused by the conscious efforts to comply to it.<sup>632</sup> Among different passages, Sidgwick advances this interpretation when he writes: “Happiness is likely to be better attained if the extent to which we set ourselves consciously to aim at it be carefully restricted”.<sup>633</sup>

Which share of our conscious awareness should the pursuit of pleasure occupy? Or better, how often should we perform a conscious recollection of the goal of pleasure? Perhaps, the wisdom underlying the Paradox of Hedonism can be found in answers to these questions. Sonja Lyubomirsky claims that the Paradox should be regarded as soft advice against focusing constantly on hedonic maximization, rather than as a problem for the very notion of seeking happiness.<sup>634</sup> J.S.

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<sup>632</sup> Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 5; Rabinowicz, Wlodek. “Derek Parfit's contributions to Philosophy.” *Theoria*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2016, pp. 104-09.

<sup>633</sup> Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. Macmillan, 1907, p. 405.

<sup>634</sup> Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness*. Penguin, 2007.

Mill goes further by trying to identify why pursuing happiness too consciously may lead to unhappiness. He claims that allowing happiness to occupy our internal discourse too much brings about an excessive critical scrutiny of the pleasures.<sup>635</sup> This scrutiny spoils a pleasure, either by frustrating our expectations, in the sense that it is “felt to be insufficient,” or by diminishing the enjoyment of it, whether by “putting it to flight by fatal questioning” or by “forestalling it in imagination”.<sup>636</sup> Sidgwick also seems to have identified the paradoxical mechanism of a too conscious pursuit of happiness:

The habit of mind resulting from the continual practice of hedonistic comparison is sometimes thought to be unfavourable to achieving the hedonistic goal because the habit of reflectively observing and examining pleasure is thought to be incompatible with the capacity for experiencing pleasure in normal fullness and intensity.<sup>637</sup>

Sidgwick also presented this warning argument: (1) the awareness of pleasure’s impermanence either (1a) spoils the pleasure at the time or (1b) elicits a consequent pain, and (2) the conscious pursuit of pleasure increases this awareness.<sup>638</sup>

Given the arguments above, I acknowledge the most defensible definition of the Paradox of Hedonism to be the claim that the *overly conscious* pursuit of pleasure is self-defeating. It is self-defeating to fix attention on happiness too often (to *always* fix the attention on pleasure has already been considered when dealing with the exclusive pursuit of pleasure). As claimed by John Wild, it seems that the Paradox of Hedonism constitutes advice about how to maximize pleasure: to temporarily forget about it.<sup>639</sup>

Following Action Theory, we can distinguish three modes of awareness of the processes and representations that regulate actions: (1) unconscious regulation; (2) a knowledge-based and possibly conscious regulation; (3) a conscious intellectual regulation.<sup>640</sup> I assume that, in the nervous system, there are mechanisms that involve consciousness and mechanisms that do not involve consciousness.<sup>641</sup> Some have questioned the existence of unconscious mechanisms.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> He writes: “Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so”. Mill, John S. *Autobiography*. Henry Holt and Company, 1874, p. 142.

<sup>636</sup> Mill. “Autobiography”, p. 118.

<sup>637</sup> Sidgwick. “Methods”, part 2, ch. 3.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>639</sup> Wild, John. “The Resurrection of Hedonism.” *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1927, pp. 11-26.

<sup>640</sup> Hacker, Winfried. “Action Regulation Theory: A Practical Tool for the Design of Modern Work Processes?” *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2003, pp. 105-30.

<sup>641</sup> Morsella, Ezequiel, and T. Andrew Poehlman. “The Inevitable Contrast: Conscious vs. Unconscious Processes in Action Control.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 4, 2013.

<sup>642</sup> Bargh, John A., and Ezequiel Morsella. “The Unconscious Mind.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science: A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2008, pp. 73-79; Tsikandilakis, Myron, et al. “The

however, research has shown the reality of many unconscious processes of behavioral guidance, including perceptual, evaluative, and motivational processes.<sup>643</sup> Unconscious processes can be advantageous: Ap Dijksterhuis and Loran Nordgren have highlighted how some complex decisions can be made faster and more accurately unconsciously rather than consciously.<sup>644</sup> For example, these authors claim that difficult decision-making can be performed more effectively following the old adage of “sleeping on it” rather than consciously thinking about it too much.<sup>645</sup>

According to the definition of the Paradox that we are currently considering, to consciously pursue pleasure *too often* results in obtaining less pleasure than *occasionally* being conscious of the pursuit of pleasure. In other words, as historically advanced by J.S. Mill and Sidgwick, thinking too much about how to secure more pleasure leads to a life with a lower amount of pleasure than letting our pursuit of pleasure lie in our unconscious and only surface in our conscious experience from time to time.

### **Conscious Pursuit of Pleasure: Logical Paradox**

Concerning the paradoxical conscious pursuit of pleasure, it does not seem, that the following attempt to devise it as a logical argument is successful. Let’s consider this argument reported by Felix Arnold:

That we may strive for a thing, it must be before us during the period of effort if it is to be an end; it must be an end in view. As such, it must exist as an idea, and to seek pleasure, therefore, we must transform it; it must exist in idea. It is not present; it must be kept in view as an end and so must undergo ideal transformation. But so soon as this is done, we have no longer the pleasure. The pleasure sought has become an idea, such idea being an idea of a pleasure giving object, of a pleasurable state of the self with serial connection with the present moment. But an idea is no longer a pleasure; we have passed from feeling to intellect, and the pleasure has, logically, apparently vanished.<sup>646</sup>

The argument is supposed to work this way: the pleasure kept in view (so that it can be sought) must be an idea. An idea is no longer a feeling and the intellectual nature of ideas prevents them

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Unconscious Mind: From Classical Theoretical Controversy to Controversial Contemporary Research and a Practical Illustration of the ‘Error of Our Ways’.” *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 74, 2019, p. 102771.

<sup>643</sup> Bargh & Morsella. “The Unconscious”; Pashler. “Unconscious”, p. 753.

<sup>644</sup> Dijksterhuis, Ap, and Loran F. Nordgren. “A Theory of Unconscious Thought.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2006, pp. 95-109.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>646</sup> Arnold. “The So-Called”, p. 231.

from being pleasurable. However, as claimed by Arnold, one of the fallacies of this argument lies in a false conception of the function of logical constructions: a hedonist aims at pleasant conscious states, not at the idea of such states. The idea of pleasure is just a signpost, a concept supposed to lead to pleasure-producing choices.<sup>647</sup> Besides, keeping in mind “pleasure” the signpost might impair one’s ability to experience “pleasure” the feeling seems to be an empirical claim rather than a logical necessity.

Therefore, the Paradox seems best understood as an empirical rather than a logical paradox because the aforementioned attempt to make it a logical paradox fails. Given that the overly conscious paradoxical pursuit seems to be a matter of empirical psychology rather than a logical paradox, it is likely that the Paradox of Hedonism is agent-relative rather than agent-neutral. This means that the optimal balance between conscious and unconscious pursuit of pleasure is not presumably the same for each individual. Individual differences, such as skills or personality traits, are presumably non-negligible factors. For this reason, I do not make any attempt to quantify how conscious the optimal pursuit should be. My claims are only directed to the extreme ends of the spectrum of conscious pursuit: (1) never holding happiness in the mind-eye (unconscious pursuit of pleasure), and (2) too often holding happiness in the mind-eye (overly conscious pursuit of pleasure). (1) and (2) are argued to be ineffective strategies in the pursuit of happiness, (2) is claimed to be the best understanding of the Paradox of Hedonism.

Concerning (1), the strategy of *never* being conscious of the goal of pleasure, despite being considered by some authors,<sup>648</sup> also seems to be an irrational approach, especially when we consider normative theories of instrumental rationality.<sup>649</sup> The calculation of the best means to any given end is assumed to be more effective than chance to secure the end. It does not seem wise to never think of the outcome we aim for. Sometimes, we need to remember why we are acting, even in the broad sense of directing or sustaining our attention.

To never aim at happiness and yet still achieve happiness may happen by chance. Chance is taken to be the most plausible factor even when happiness is found by serendipity, the strategy that is advised by Mill: “Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way”.<sup>650</sup> In fact, it is possible to find something looking for something else, such as finding happiness while pursuing a life of moral or intellectual perfection. Still, if I enter a supermarket with the aim of finding peanuts,

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid. pp. 231-233.

<sup>648</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>649</sup> For normative theories of instrumental rationality see: Jollimore, Troy. “Why Is Instrumental Rationality Rational?” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2005, pp. 289-307; Briggs, Rachael A. “Normative Theories of Rational Choice: Expected Utility.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>650</sup> Mill, “Autobiography”, p. 117.

to look for toothpaste does not seem to be the most rational strategy, although during my walk I might possibly find peanuts.

### **Conscious Pursuit of Pleasure: Empirical Evidence**

The term “mindfulness” refers to a psychological process, originating from the Buddhist tradition, that has been incorporated into aspects of Western psychology.<sup>651</sup> Several studies on mindfulness have found correlations between self-reported mindfulness and psychological health.<sup>652</sup> In particular, the trait of mindfulness has been reported to be linked with higher rates of pleasant affect and life satisfaction.<sup>653</sup> Despite difficulties in finding a shared definition, mindfulness is usually characterized by two elements: “awareness” and “nonjudgmental acceptance of one's moment-to-moment experience.”<sup>654</sup> The second element can be defined as an “attitude of openness and acceptance”<sup>655</sup> and divided in two facets: “nonjudging of inner experience” and “nonreactivity to inner experience.”<sup>656</sup>

Why does the evidence on mindfulness suggest that it is not prudent to focus constantly on hedonic maximization? Imagine you are in a forest while cultivating a mindful state. You are cultivating a profound awareness of present-moment sensory, affective, and cognitive experiences.<sup>657</sup> This state requires “an even-minded mental state or dispositional tendency toward all experiences or objects, regardless of their affective valence (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral)”, also called equanimity.<sup>658</sup> Your mindful state depends on the fact that your attention is not directed at hedonic maximization. To consciously pursue pleasure would, instead, end this state by causing you to lose the necessary attitude of equanimity. So, since mindfulness is associated with greater happiness and mindfulness is incompatible with the conscious pursuit of pleasure, being conscious of the pursuit of pleasure too frequently seems likely to be associated with lower happiness.

Regarding further evidence, the concept of “flow” concerns experiences in which subjects are fully immersed in the present moment, such that they experience complete absorption in what they are doing. Flow states characterize intrinsically motivated activities—activities that are

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<sup>651</sup> Germer, Christopher K., et al. *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy*. Guilford Press, 2005.

<sup>652</sup> Keng, Shlan-Ling, et al. “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies.” *Clinical Psychology Review*, vol. 31, no. 6, 2011, pp. 1041-56.

<sup>653</sup> Brown, Kirk W., and Richard M. Ryan. “The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and its Role in Psychological Well-being.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 84, no.4, 2003, pp. 822-48.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid.

<sup>655</sup> Desbordes, Gaëlle, et al. “Moving beyond Mindfulness: Defining Equanimity as an Outcome Measure in Meditation and Contemplative Research.” *Mindfulness*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2015, pp. 356-72.

<sup>656</sup> Baer Ruth A., et al. “Construct Validity of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire in Meditating and Nonmeditating Samples.” *Assessment*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2008, pp. 329-42.

<sup>657</sup> Dreyfus, Georges. “Is Mindfulness Present-centred and Non-judgmental? A Discussion of the Cognitive Dimensions of Mindfulness.” *Contemporary Buddhism*, 2011, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 41-54.

<sup>658</sup> Desbordes et al. “Moving.”

rewarding in themselves, besides any end-products they may bring about.<sup>659</sup> The ability to experience flow moderates happiness, a propensity to “flow experiences” helps one convert everyday experiences into happiness.<sup>660</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Jaenne Nakamura describe several characteristics of flow. For the purpose of this section, I focus on two of them: “intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment” and “experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding”.<sup>661</sup>

Why does the evidence on flow suggest that it is not prudent to over-focus on hedonic maximization? Imagine you love surfing and you are in the act of riding a perfect wave: you are presumably completely immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, enjoyment in the process of the activity, and you lose awareness of yourself. Action and awareness are merged, you are highly concentrated and you lose self-consciousness.<sup>662</sup> While you are “in the zone”, the activity becomes autotelic. In that moment, you perform the activity for its own sake, to experience it is your conscious end.<sup>663</sup> In this experience, no space in your consciousness is occupied by the pursuit of pleasure. To shift your attention to hedonic maximization would, instead, end the state of flow because the activity would lose the necessary feature of being intrinsically motivated.<sup>664</sup> So, being conscious of the pursuit of pleasure too frequently leaves less time for happiness-increasing flow experiences, which would seem to result in less happiness.

Also the empirical research on introspection about happiness seems to warn about over-consciously pursuing happiness. Usually, when a goal is pursued, subjects use deliberative cognition to examine their progress to the end.<sup>665</sup> Research shows that when individuals try to be aware of their own hedonic state, these efforts can adversely affect their hedonic experience. The mechanism resembles the Heisenberg uncertainty principle—the observation of a phenomenon alters the phenomenon itself.<sup>666</sup> Indeed this seems to be a specific instance of general phenomenon that focusing on emotions seems to dampen them.<sup>667</sup> Thus, different authors have claimed that

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<sup>659</sup> Nakamura, Jaenne, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. “The Concept of Flow.” *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by CR. Snyder and SJ. Lopez, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 89-105.

<sup>660</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. Basic Books, 1997.

<sup>661</sup> Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi. “The Concept of Flow.”

<sup>662</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety. Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*. Jossey-Bass, 2000.

<sup>663</sup> Csikszentmihalyi. “Finding Flow”, p. 117.

<sup>664</sup> Deci, Edward L., et al. “A Meta-analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 125, no. 6, 1999, pp. 627-68; Schooler, Jonathan W., et al. “The Pursuit and Assessment of Happiness can be Self-defeating.” *The Psychology of Economic Decisions*, edited by JCI. Brocas, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 41-70; Van Boven, Leaf, and Thomas Gilovich. “To Do or To Have? That is the Question.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 85, no. 6, 2003, pp. 1193-1202.

<sup>665</sup> Lawrence, John N., et al. “Velocity Toward Goal Attainment in Immediate Experience as a Determinant of Affect.” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2002, pp. 788-802.

<sup>666</sup> Schooler et al. “The Pursuit.”

<sup>667</sup> Schooler et al. “The Pursuit.”; Cupchik, Gerald C., and Howard Leventhal. “Consistency Between Expressive Behavior and the Evaluation of Humorous Stimuli: The Role of Sex and Self-observation.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1974, pp. 429-42; Wilson, Thomas D., et al. “Introspecting About Reasons Can

meta-awareness of happiness (deliberative attention on happiness) can lead to a decrease in happiness.<sup>668</sup>

Moreover, the overly conscious pursuit of happiness may be connected with subjects setting standards that are too high, a possible cause of the paradoxical effects. Consider, for example, the individuals that Barry Schwartz calls “maximizers”, those who usually assess all possibilities in an attempt to make the very best decision. Schwartz’s examination of the “paradox of choice” shows that we should be maximizers only in the most important decisions. In everyday choices, such as shopping, it is advisable to be “satisficers”: rapidly determine a satisfactory option and act accordingly.<sup>669</sup> Schwartz advises this because his research shows that maximisers tend to be much less happy with their decisions after the fact and tend to be less happy than satisficers in general. Following this research, it seems that we are likely to be happier if we settle for what is satisfactory rather than taking a lot of time over all of our decisions in an attempt to maximize our pleasure.

Following Charles Carver and Michael Scheier, goals set not only what subjects want to achieve, but also the expectations against which they judge their achievements.<sup>670</sup> According to Iris Mauss and colleagues, this characteristic of goal pursuit may determine ironic outcomes, unlike with non-hedonic goals, in the case of happiness because the result of the subject’s evaluation (i.e., disappointment and discontent) can spoil the subject’s achievement (happiness).<sup>671</sup> As an everyday-life example, if you carefully organize a party and have very high expectations for how fun it should be, you might enjoy it less than if you have no expectations and improvise the evening with your friends.<sup>672</sup> This line of thought leads to this mechanism: individuals that pursue happiness too consciously set standards that are hard to reach, causing them to experience discontent about their hedonic state, paradoxically diminishing their happiness the more they consciously pursue it.<sup>673</sup> In other words, people who think about happiness very often tend to expect a lot of it and, since a lot of happiness is difficult to attain, they become disappointed and thereby less happy.

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Reduce Post-choice Satisfaction.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1993, pp. 331-39; Wilson, Thomas D., and Jonathan W. Schooler. “Thinking Too Much: Introspection can Reduce the Quality of Preferences and Decisions.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 60, no. 2, 1991, pp. 181-92.

<sup>668</sup> Ford, Brett Q., and Iris Mauss. “The Paradoxical Effects of Pursuing Positive Emotion: When and Why Wanting to Feel Happy Backfires.” *Positive emotion: Integrating the Light Sides and Dark Sides*, edited by J. Gruber and JT. Moskowitz, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 363-81; Schooler, Jonathan W., and Iris B. Mauss. “To be Happy and to Know it: The Experience and Meta-awareness of Pleasure.” *Pleasures of the Brain*, edited by ML. Kringsbach and KC. Berridge, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 244-54.

<sup>669</sup> Schwartz, Barry. *The Paradox of Choice*. HarperPerennial, 2005, pp. 77-116.

<sup>670</sup> Carver, Charles S., and Michael F. Scheier. *Attention and Self-regulation: A Control Theory Approach to Human Behavior*. Springer-Verlag, 1981.

<sup>671</sup> Mauss et al. “Can Seeking.”

<sup>672</sup> Schooler et al. “The Pursuit.”

<sup>673</sup> Mauss et al. “Can Seeking.”

That said, a study by Lahna Catalino and colleagues, while recognizing that the pursuit of happiness is not inherently self-defeating, hypothesized that it might backfire sometimes.<sup>674</sup> Therefore, they introduced a new individual variable called “prioritizing positivity”. Prioritizing positivity describes the extent to which subjects pursue happiness by means of how they organize their day-to-day life (as opposed to how often they think about happiness being their goal). This new individual difference was associated with several happiness indicators, such as the frequency of positive emotions (positive association) and depressive symptomology (negative association).<sup>675</sup>

If replicable, the implications of Catalino and colleagues’ results are important. First of all, this study suggests that pursuing happiness is not per se doomed to be self-defeating and that it has the potential to be rewarding. Second, this research suggests that seeking happiness is challenging because there are effective as well as ineffective strategies for doing it. The overly conscious, too frequent, pursuit of happiness seems to be an example of an ineffective strategy.

Third, Catalino and colleagues’ study seems to confirm that never having happiness as the main goal in mind is also an ineffective strategy. Remember that prioritizing positivity predicted the happiness of the subjects. Perhaps, if the agent stops considering happiness as the ultimate goal of his actions, then the optimization of his hedonic state will no longer constitute for him the end in light of which he monitors, critically assesses, and periodically adjusts his decision-making, resulting in less happiness. For example, if you are choosing among different places where to live and you have enough evidence that one will be a source of misery, while another will be a cause of joy, it is irrational, from a hedonistic perspective, not to incorporate this information into the decision.<sup>676</sup>

Fourth, Catalino and colleagues’ study might back up the idea that too frequently focusing on hedonic maximization could be self-defeating. In fact, by prioritizing positivity—the variable that the study reports to be associated with happiness—we consciously pursue happiness as the main goal from time-to-time and let it lie in our unconscious at other times. Like a pilot who usually employs the auto-pilot but at other times switches to manual control, hedonic regulation may be effective when subjects occasionally perform a conscious regulation of their hedonic experience—a process we might call “intermittent conscious hedonic regulation”.

To summarize, in this section, I presented several lines of empirical research that support what J.S. Mill and Sidgwick recognized: the overly conscious pursuit of pleasure seems to be an ineffective strategy for attaining happiness. Frameworks of goal pursuit usually endorse the

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<sup>674</sup> Catalino, Lahna I., et al. “Prioritizing Positivity: An Effective Approach to Pursuing Happiness?” *Emotion*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1155-61.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

<sup>676</sup> Haybron, Daniel M. “Happiness.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 4 July 2019.

intuitive view that we should keep our goal in mind to increase our chances of achieving it. If happiness followed this general rule, then being more conscious of the goal of happiness should result in greater happiness. However, particular characteristics of the certain ways of pursuing happiness seem to produce less achievement of the goal rather than more.

### **Conscious Pursuit of Pleasure: How to avoid the Paradox**

The need for an optimal balance between being conscious and unconscious of the goal of hedonic maximization emerges as the main implication of the definition of the Paradox that I have outlined. As such, the wisdom to be found in the Paradox of Hedonism is that being conscious of the goal of happiness too frequently can frustrate our achievement of that goal. Consequently, prudential hedonists and anyone with an interest in becoming happier should only occasionally be conscious of their goal of happiness. They should be conscious of the goal just enough to organize their life in such a way as to experience a lot of it. An example could be willfully developing good habits such as positive psychology interventions in order to increase longer-term happiness.

It seems imprudent to have happiness as one's focus continuously, but it does not seem that anyone has ever advised that.<sup>677</sup> I doubt anyone has prescribed the following meditative practice: think of happiness as ferociously as you can for as long you can, and you will be happy. As Ralph Mason Blake writes: “The fact that hedonists judge the value of acts by reference to their consequences in pleasure by no means commits them to the view that such consequences are best attained by making them directly the sole human motive and the sole object of human desire.”<sup>678</sup> As claimed by Sheldon, pleasure can be a by-product of states that require us to not pursue pleasure overly consciously. So, happiness may be the reason to forget happiness, at some times anyway.<sup>679</sup>

Following Hassin Ran and colleagues, the core of everyday goal pursuit is likely unconscious: conscious intention and attention are demanding and should be employed infrequently for the sake of a productive life.<sup>680</sup> Subjects might benefit from transforming the pursuit of happiness into a habit.<sup>681</sup> Evidence on automatic goal pursuit<sup>682</sup> and on automatic emotion

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<sup>677</sup> Haybron. “Happiness.”

<sup>678</sup> Blake, Ralph Mason. “Why Not Hedonism? A Protest,” *The International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1926, pp. 1-18.

<sup>679</sup> Sheldon, WH. “The Absolute Truth of Hedonism.” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 47, no. 10, 1950, pp. 285-304.

<sup>680</sup> Hassin, Ran, et al. “Non-conscious Goal Pursuit and the Effortful Control of Behavior.” *The Psychology of Action*, edited by E. Morsella, PM. Gollwitzer, and JA. Bargh, Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>681</sup> E.g. through implementation intentions. Gollwitzer, Peter M. “Implementation Intentions: Strong Effects of Simple Plans.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 54, no. 7, 1999, pp. 493-503.

<sup>682</sup> Aarts, Henk, et al. “Preparing and Motivating Behavior Outside of Awareness.” *Science*, vol. 319, no. 5870, 2008, p. 1639; Bargh, John A. “The Four Horsemen of Automaticity: Awareness, Intention, Efficiency, and Control in Social Cognition.” *Handbook of Social Cognition*, edited by RS. Wyer Jr. and TK. Skroll, Erlbaum, 1994, pp. 1-40.

regulation<sup>683</sup> suggests that, as claimed by Brett Ford and Mauss, affective goals can be efficiently accomplished without awareness.<sup>684</sup> By making the pursuit of happiness more automatic, the dangers of an overly conscious pursuit will be avoided.

To summarize, the best hedonistic strategy might be to reduce conscious focus on hedonic maximization in the moment, and rather maximize the probability of feeling spontaneous pleasant states. As we commonly fall asleep when we stop to force ourselves to sleep, the paradoxical effects of pursuing happiness might decrease if we relax our attempts at mental control. To control how frequently or intensely we consciously pursue happiness might be an effective strategy: after all, following Daniel Wegner, mental control seems to be trainable.<sup>685</sup> Practicing the automatization of hedonic maximization might succeed in making it less conscious.

Meanwhile, never taking happiness into consideration also seems a poor strategy for becoming happier. As Levestein suggests, one should consciously identify that pleasure is the end goal and pursue it through other means which should temporarily assume one's full attention.<sup>686</sup> Just because happiness cannot be obtained via an overly conscious pursuit, does not imply that it is not advisable, at given times, to consciously remind ourselves of what ultimately makes our life go well for us (intermittent conscious hedonic regulation). These reminders will, for example, help us plan (prioritizing positivity) to engage in activities that tend to bring about happiness rather than activities that do not. These reminders will enable us to increase the net-pleasure in our lives, which Prudential Hedonism claims is good for us. In fact, as long as one's balance of pleasure over pain can be influenced by one's agency, there seem to be good reasons for "maximum happiness" representing his regulative object.

### **Self-defeatingness Objection to Prudential Hedonism**

In this section, I argue that the version of the Paradox I refined gives no reasons to think that Prudential Hedonism is theoretically weakened by it. As Eggleston claims, the Paradox of Hedonism:

may capture a genuine fact about human nature—one with important practical implications— but it has no bearing on theoretical projects claiming that happiness

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<sup>683</sup> Mauss, Iris B., et al. "Automatic Emotion Regulation." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 146-67.

<sup>684</sup> Ford & Mauss. "The Paradoxical."

<sup>685</sup> Wegner, Daniel M. "Ironic Processes of Mental Control." *Psychological Review*, vol. 101, no. 1, 1994, pp. 34-52.

<sup>686</sup> Levenstein. "The End", pp. 73-74.

must, in the last analysis, be acknowledged as the foundation of morality or instrumental rationality.<sup>687</sup>

Also J.S. Mill seems to support this conclusion when he starts his exposition of the Paradox by saying: “I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life.”<sup>688</sup> Even when formulating the Paradox of Hedonism, he does not seem to question the prudential primacy of pleasure.

In fact, a theory that (1) considers pleasure to be the only intrinsic prudential good is not doomed to be internally inconsistent just because it (2) acknowledges that we should forget about pleasure at some points. (1) is a claim of theoretical reason, the kind of reason concerned with the truth of propositions; (2) is a claim of practical reason, it concerns the value of actions. The former addresses beliefs, the latter addresses intentions.<sup>689</sup> Given that Prudential Hedonism advises the maximization of happiness, it also advises that agent instrumentally shapes the pursuit in whatever way is most effective.<sup>690</sup> Therefore, the Paradox of Hedonism does not constitute a theoretical problem for Prudential Hedonism.

The Paradox could assume the features of a theoretical problem only if the paradoxical effects were impossible to be avoided. In this case, Prudential Hedonism could have been accused of being too demanding a theory. However, as Sidgwick claims, the Paradox of Hedonism does not seem to cause any practical problem once the possibility of it has been acknowledged.<sup>691</sup> The recommendations on how to avoid the Paradox I presented above determine this version of the Paradox of Hedonism to be a contingent practical problem for Prudential Hedonism, a problem that can be overcome. To sum up, according to the definition of the Paradox that I proposed, the argument based on the Paradox does not constitute a valid objection to Prudential Hedonism.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I broke down the concept “Paradox of Hedonism” into its constituent parts in order to better understand it. First, I presented the Paradox of Hedonism and its condensed conceptual history. Second, I elaborated my different variations of the Paradox of Hedonism according to the different hedonistic theories and meanings of the word “hedonism”. Then, I justified the choice to dedicate Part 3 to the Paradox of Prudential Hedonism. The common understanding of the Paradox,

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<sup>687</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>688</sup> Mill, “Autobiography”, p. 117.

<sup>689</sup> For theoretical and practical reason: Wallace, R. Jay, “Practical Reason.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 4 July 2019; Harman, Graham. *Change in View*. MIT Press, 1986; Bratman, Michael. *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*. Harvard University Press, 1987.

<sup>690</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>691</sup> Sidgwick. “Methods”, part 2, ch. 3.

at least among non-philosophers, is that it is a strong argument against Prudential Hedonism. Third, I claimed that the overly conscious pursuit of pleasure is the best definition to describe the trait that generates paradoxical effects. Fourth, I presented empirical evidence supporting this claim. Fifth, I elaborated some recommendations on how to avoid the paradoxical effects of over-consciously pursuing pleasure. Finally, I argued that, although the Paradox contains some wisdom and could pose a practical problem for some people, it does not constitute a valid objection to Prudential Hedonism.

# Chapter 8—Contemporary Explanations of the Paradox

What I call the definition and explanation of the Paradox correspond to the “what” and the “how” of it. The definition aims at describing the Paradox of Hedonism by refining the trait that has paradoxical effects. The explanation aims at inserting the Paradox into a causal relation—explaining how the Paradox occurs in various contexts. In this chapter, I present the different explanations of the Paradox proposed recently by Martin and Dietz. Also, I argue that the only explanation of the Paradox that apparently poses a problem for Prudential Hedonism, in addition to the definition presented in Ch. 7, is the Incompetence Account. Meanwhile, I show how, even in this case, the Paradox is not a logical paradox and that it is a paradox only in the sense of being a psychological irony. After that, practical philosophy and the science of happiness are identified as tools that determine the Incompetence Account to not be a theoretical problem for Prudential Hedonism. In fact, I argue that the Incompetence Account does not provide any good reason to think that Prudential Hedonism is too demanding a theory.

## Martin’s Explanations of the Paradox

Besides the scarce historical literature specifically on the Paradox of Hedonism, there are two thorough contemporary deconstructions of it: Martin’s and Dietz’s analyses of the Paradox.<sup>692</sup> Below, I will focus on them. This discussion is directed at working out what are the viable explanations of the Paradox from the wide range proposed in the literature. This involves grouping, reducing, assessing the logic, plausibility, and relevance of the explanations.

Martin divides the “Paradox of Happiness” into a dozen sub-paradoxes, grouped under the categories of Aim, Success, Freedom, and Attitude.<sup>693</sup> It should be noted that Martin considers the Paradox of Hedonism a species of the genus Paradox of Happiness. In his framework, happiness and pleasure do not coincide: happiness is described as “long-term overall satisfaction” and pleasure as “briefer episodic enjoyment”. However, as I said, the framework I employ considers pleasure and happiness as interchangeable. Even if Martin adopts a different conceptualization of happiness, related, in addition to “high levels of enjoyment”, to life-satisfaction and meaning,<sup>694</sup> it seems that the categories that he discusses could apply to a hedonistic framework too.

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<sup>692</sup> Martin. “Paradoxes”; Dietz. “Explaining.”

<sup>693</sup> Martin. “Paradoxes.”

<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

According to Martin's Paradoxes of Aim, attentive effort is counter-productive to the effective pursuit of happiness.<sup>695</sup> Rather, if you want happiness, you should aim for something else. For example, aiming to be a good friend is more likely to make you happy than aiming to be happy. This would be ironic because, if true, it represents an empirical anomaly: normally hard-won achievements, such as Olympic medals and presidencies, are earned most effectively by aiming at them. According to the "overly conscious" definition of the Paradox of Hedonism, the formulation I used to express the mechanisms that Martin calls Paradoxes of Aim, this is not true for happiness: too much attentive effort at it defeats its aim (previously, I have excluded that attentive effort per se, attentive effort even carefully restrained, could be the mental state that determines the Paradox). In this case, the *explanation* and *definition* of the Paradox coincide. The "overly conscious pursuit" is considered both definition and explanation because it makes explicit both what is supposed to be paradoxical and the causal relation that drives the paradoxical effect.

Martin's Paradoxes of Success contradict popularly-held beliefs that reaching certain goods will give us happiness.<sup>696</sup> Contrary to the expectations of many people, goods such as money, consumer products, social status and other external rewards turn out to make us less happy than is commonly expected, and may even make us unhappy. Martin's related Paradoxes of Freedom are based on the possibly ironic conflict between the idea that we need to be free to be happy and the idea that sometimes more freedom makes us less happy.<sup>697</sup> Indeed, freedom is one of the most cherished values of Western culture. We tend to think that the more choices we have, the more freedom we have and the happier we are.<sup>698</sup> Nonetheless, Barry Schwartz argues that although contemporary Americans have more choice than any group ever has before, and thus, presumably, much autonomy, they are not happier.<sup>699</sup>

Martin's Paradoxes of Attitude claim that equating happiness with things we do not possess is ineffectual; in large part, we do not lack anything we need to be happy—we just need to change our attitudes.<sup>700</sup> The paradox lies in the fact that we normally believe that our happiness will derive from something we currently do not have: a higher paying job, a faster car, a bigger TV, etc., that are always just beyond our grasp. At the same time, these things when achieved will not bring us happiness because desires are relative to our current status. The Greek and Roman Stoics, reflecting on this phenomenon, proposed a philosophical modification of attitude.<sup>701</sup> Epictetus, for example,

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> Piasecki, Michal, et al. "A Redefinition of the Paradox of Choice." *Design Computing and Cognition '10*, edited by Gero JS., Springer, 2011, pp. 347-66.

<sup>699</sup> Schwartz, Barry. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. HarperCollins, 2009, p. 99.

<sup>700</sup> Martin. "Paradoxes."

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

writes, “do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well”.<sup>702</sup>

As should be clear, Martin’s various interpretations of the Paradox focus mainly on phenomena that are not even seeming contradictions to philosophers. Paradoxes of Success, Freedom, and Attitude correspond to claims that challenge popular beliefs about the pathways to happiness. These phenomena collapse into what, below, is called the Incompetence Account, namely the claim that humans are systematically incompetent at pursuing happiness. Indeed, since these beliefs about happiness are widespread, this already gives us a hint about the extent of human ineptitude in pursuing it.

### **Dietz’s Explanations of the Paradox**

Dietz deconstructs the Paradox into four different explanations: the Incompetence Account, the Special Goods Account, Butler’s Account, and the Evidentialist Account.<sup>703</sup> The Incompetence Account holds that we are catastrophically incompetent at pursuing happiness. We are so inept at pursuing happiness that if we try to pursue it, we fail, and perhaps fail systematically, resulting in a decrease in happiness.<sup>704</sup>

The Special Goods Account affirms that the greatest pleasures derive from certain special goods which supposedly egoistic hedonists specifically cannot enjoy.<sup>705</sup> Michael Stocker, discussing this account, writes that “love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community are among the greatest (sources of) personal pleasures”, but adds that egoistic hedonists cannot obtain these goods. Stocker explains: egoistic hedonists “cannot act for the sake of the intended beloved, friend, and so on; thus, they cannot love, be or have a friend, and so on”.<sup>706</sup> Empirical evidence at least partially corroborates Stocker’s claim that the goods on his list are among the main causes of pleasure. For example, in his review of psychological research on the sources of happiness, Jonathan Haidt writes that “the condition that is usually said to trump all others in importance is the strength and number of a person’s relationships”.<sup>707</sup>

Dietz also discusses an older explanation of the Paradox of Hedonism, based on Butler’s reflections mentioned in Ch. 7, that considers the Paradox to generate from pleasure itself and its

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<sup>702</sup> Epictetus. *The Handbook of Epictetus*. Translated by Nicholas P. White, Hackett Publishing, 1983, p. 13.

<sup>703</sup> Dietz. “Explaining.”

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> Stocker, Michael. “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories.” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 73, no. 14, 1976, pp. 453-66.

<sup>707</sup> Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. Basic Books, 2006.

relation to the satisfaction of desire.<sup>708</sup> This explanation, and Dietz's modern spin on it, the Evidentialist Account are supposed to represent logical paradoxes. The Evidentialist Account relies on a desire-belief condition for pleasure and Evidentialism.<sup>709</sup> The desire-belief condition claims that pleasure requires the subject to believe that she is getting what she wants. Note the similarity to Chris Heathwood's view, discussed earlier, that pleasure consists in having an intrinsic desire for some state of affairs and believing this state of affairs to be the case.<sup>710</sup> Evidentialism is an epistemological theory according to which a rational agent will hold beliefs only if justified by evidence.<sup>711</sup> This theory is supposed to dictate the rules for the formation of the belief about whether the desire is satisfied.

According to this account, Prudential Hedonism is self-defeating as long as the subject is epistemically rational and not deceived. Opposite to the Incompetence Account, that arises from our irrationality and lack of self-knowledge, the Evidentialist Account arises for ideal agents.<sup>712</sup> According to Dietz, if I pose that I will experience happiness only if I believe in my own happiness, and that I am going to be rational and well-informed, there will be no option for me to find independent support for this belief, thus, I will not be able to form such a belief, and I will never experience happiness.<sup>713</sup> In other words: as an evidentialist, I will only believe what I have good evidence to believe. To be happy, I have to believe I am happy. But, to believe I'm happy, I need good evidence that I'm happy. Unfortunately, the only available evidence of my happiness is the belief that I am happy. So, no happiness-beliefs ever get off the ground, because the evidence is tightly circular and therefore, not compelling.

The underlying reasoning of the Evidentialist Account has the same structure as Peter Cave's placebo paradox. Cave imagines a sick person that receives a placebo. This person will regain his health only if he believes that he will regain his health.<sup>714</sup> In the same way, a hedonist, following this account, will be happy only if he believes that he is or will be happy. But if the sick person is rational, he will only have the belief that he will regain his health if he has solid evidence that this is the case. Likewise, if a hedonist holds that his pleasure itself is the unique thing in which he will take pleasure and, so, the belief that he will experience pleasure is not independently true, and he is rational, he cannot form this belief.

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<sup>708</sup> Dietz. "Explaining."

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Heathwood, Chris. "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism." *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 128, no. 3, 2006, pp. 539-63.

<sup>711</sup> Chignell, Andrew. "The Ethics of Belief." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu), accessed 9 May 2018.

<sup>712</sup> Dietz. "Explaining."

<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> Cave, Peter. "Too Self-Fulfilling." *Analysis*, vol. 61, no. 270, 2001, pp. 141-46.

To summarize, in the previous sections, I explained how Martin and Dietz have analyzed the Paradox of Hedonism. By doing so, I engaged in the process of analyzing the explanations of the Paradox given by Martin: at this point, I reduced Paradoxes of Success, Freedom, and Attitude to the Incompetence Account. Paradoxes of Aim have been equated with the paradoxical overly conscious pursuit of pleasure discussed in Ch. 7. Below, I will analyze and assess the plausibility of the explanations mentioned by Dietz.

### **Special Goods Account**

The Special Goods Account is considered relevant only for one species of Ethical Hedonism, Egoistic Hedonism. The mechanism advanced by this account is supposed to arise from pursuing one's own pleasure. It is claimed that those who pursue the pleasure of others would not have any difficulty, or would at least have fewer difficulties, in finding the “special goods” (love, friendship, etc.) which are considered some of the strongest predictors of happiness. However, we should restrict further the relevance of the Special Goods Account to just what I call psychopathic hedonism, a kind of folk hedonism that is characterized by a ruthlessly selfish pursuit of pleasure.

Psychopathic hedonism can be portrayed with the anthropology that sets up Thomas Hobbes' political philosophy.<sup>715</sup> Hobbes imagines the state of nature as a state of war of all against all. Mankind's pursuit of pleasure is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish.”<sup>716</sup> As I said, psychopathic hedonism is a kind of folk hedonism. The psychiatric meaning of “psychopathy” is not of direct concern for this argument.<sup>717</sup> However, empirical evidence indicates a negative association between being a psychopath in the clinical sense and subjective well-being (negative association with positive affect and life satisfaction).<sup>718</sup> Researchers attribute these results to the worsened interpersonal relationships deriving from psychopathic traits,<sup>719</sup> as the Special Goods Account suggests.

Egoistic Hedonism should not be equated with psychopathic hedonism as everyday language and philosophers sometimes have done.<sup>720</sup> A egoistic hedonist, even if he considers his own happiness as the sole intrinsic good, can still adopt seemingly ethical behaviors for

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<sup>715</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. “Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policy.” *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by William Molesworth and Otto W. Streckler, Scntia Verlag, 1966, p. 32, sect. 7.3.

<sup>716</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Penguin Books, 1968, ch. 6.

<sup>717</sup> For it, see: Hart, Stephen D., and Alana N. Cook. “Current Issues in the Assessment and Diagnosis of Psychopathy (Psychopathic Personality Disorder).” *Neuropsychiatry*, vol. 2, no. 6, 2012, pp. 497-508.

<sup>718</sup> Love, Ashley B., and Mark D. Holder. “Psychopathy and Subjective Well-Being.” *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 66, 2014, pp. 112-17.

<sup>719</sup> Durand, Guillaume. “Demystification of the Relationship between Psychopathy and Happiness.” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2018, pp. 381-95.

<sup>720</sup> Lafleur, Laurence J. “In Defense of Ethical Hedonism.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1956, pp. 547-50; Weijers. “Hedonism.”

instrumental reasons. Indeed, following the aforementioned empirical research, he should pursue the “special goods” instrumentally in order to maximize his happiness.

The fact that a good is considered instrumental does not imply that the subject does not passionately pursue it. Imagine, for example, a stereotypical psychopathic hedonist and the instrumental goods of money or power. These means to pleasure are passionately pursued by the stereotypical psychopathic hedonist. Similarly, an egoistic hedonist would not have any difficulty, or would at least have fewer difficulties, in finding love, friendship, etc., if he passionately adopted pro-social behaviors as a means to pleasure for himself. In other words, an egoistic hedonist can also incorporate others’ ends into their framework of instrumental goals. The dedication to the social pursuit, more than the intrinsic/instrumental goods hierarchy, determines the Special Goods Account. In fact, it is not plausible that your friendships or romantic relationships directly depend on your philosophical beliefs about axiology, rather they depend on your attitude in pursuing these goods.

A closer inspection also reveals that the Special Goods Account collapses into the Incompetence Account. The belief that by psychopathically pursuing our own happiness we will maximize it seems to be empirically wrong (and psychopaths in the psychiatric sense seem to be less happy). Given that, it appears that psychopathic hedonism would, if it were a normative theory, defeat its aim. The Special Goods Account collapses into the Incompetence Account because to pursue happiness in a psychopathic hedonistic fashion is a fallacious strategy in terms of self-interest. If only individuals could be rational and well-informed about what leads to happiness, they would abandon psychopathic hedonism (or perhaps search for a cure for clinical psychopathy).

To sum up, competent prudential (or egoistic) hedonists should cultivate the “special goods” for their prudential (or moral) goal of being happy. The Special Goods Account ends up being a species of the Incompetence Account, an explanation of the Paradox that is discussed more in detail below.

### **Logical Paradoxes**

The remaining accounts mentioned by Dietz consider the self-defeatingness objection to extend to non-psychopathic Hedonism. This is due to the fact that the problem, in these cases, is not a consequence of ruthlessly pursuing pleasure, but it derives from individual pleasure as an object of desire (Butler’s Account) or pleasure, even someone else’s,<sup>721</sup> as an object of desire (Evidentialist Account), or human limitations in pursuing pleasure (Incompetence Account).

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<sup>721</sup> The Evidentialist Account, according to its author, under certain conditions, also applies to altruistic forms of Hedonism. Dietz. “Explaining.”

Butler's Account, based on the view that pleasure consists in the satisfaction of non-hedonistic desires—desires for anything but pleasure—is implausible: we can take delight in pleasure itself, and not only by gratifying non-hedonistic desires.<sup>722</sup> The concepts of meta-emotions (emotions about emotions) and meta-moods (moods about moods) have been adopted and explored by researchers within both philosophy and psychology.<sup>723</sup> It is possible to feel, for example, content about being relaxed, hopeful about being relieved, and grateful about being euphoric (positive-positive secondary emotions). These are counterexamples to Butler's Account because they involve feeling good about feeling good, precisely what is supposed to be impossible in Butler's view. The implausibility of Butler's theory of pleasure has already been discussed in Part 1, Ch. 2, so no more needs to be said about it here.

Concerning Dietz's Evidentialist Account, it is weakened by being based on a problematic theory of rational belief. This is, following Daniel Mittag, one of the major objections to Evidentialism: pragmatic reply—it can be rational for the subject to believe a proposition even lacking sufficient evidence, e.g. Pascal's wager.<sup>724</sup> The Evidentialist Account is also weakened by concerning ideal agents; given that human beings are not as this account presupposes, it has scant practical value. Nevertheless, my main dismissal of the Evidentialist Account targets its assumption of a questionable theory of pleasure, Heathwood's Motivational Theory. My argument, presented in Part 1, Ch. 2 rejects the theory of pleasure that the Evidentialist Account assumes.

To summarize, Butler's and the Evidentialist accounts do not seem reliable explanations of the Paradox of Hedonism because they are built on implausible theories of pleasure. Both accounts are fallacious if the theories of pleasure upon which they rest are false. Indeed, both Butler's theory of pleasure and the Motivational Theory of pleasure are unconvincing, so Butler's and the Evidentialist accounts of the Paradox are also unconvincing.

### **Incompetence Account**

Having rejected Butler's and the Evidentialist accounts and reduced the Special Goods Account to the Incompetence Account, we are left with this and the "overly conscious pursuit" description as possible explanations of how the Paradox occurs. According to Eggleston, the Incompetence Account:

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Norman, Elisabeth, and Bjarte Furnes. "The Concept of 'Metaemotion': What is There to Learn from Research on Metacognition?" *Emotion Review: Journal of the International Society for Research on Emotion*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2016, pp. 187-93.

<sup>724</sup> Mittag, Daniel M. "Evidentialism." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu), accessed 15 Aug. 2019.

appeals to the claim that when people have choices to make, they are generally poor judges of their available options' effects on happiness ... In this view, people are systematically so inept at making happiness-promoting choices that a surer route to happiness is for people to aim, when making choices, at objectives other than the promotion of happiness.<sup>725</sup>

Much empirical evidence has been amassed on the multiple ways in which humans are likely to make errors pursuing their interests, including happiness.<sup>726</sup> Haybron presents compelling empirical evidence confirming that individuals are systematically unskillful at forecasting what will bring them happiness.<sup>727</sup> Individuals seem to suffer from several cognitive biases that undermine their capacity to elaborate accurate predictions about what will make them happy.<sup>728</sup> For example, subjects usually overestimate the positive impact that additional income will have on their happiness, and usually underestimate the negative impact that a longer work-home commute will have on their happiness.<sup>729</sup>

Several researchers have investigated “affective forecasting”, subjects’ predictions about their future feelings.<sup>730</sup> Results show that subjects are quite competent at forecasting the valence of their future emotional reactions: if the choice is between going to the park on a sunny day versus a rainy day, most subjects know which experience would be pleasant and which would be unpleasant.<sup>731</sup> Subjects are also quite proficient in predicting the emotional reaction they will have, such as guessing whether a noise in the garage at night-time is more likely to cause fear or disgust. However, subjects are prone to errors when forecasting the intensity and duration of their future emotional reactions.<sup>732</sup> Multiple mechanisms result in inaccurate affective forecasting. According to Timothy Wilson and colleagues, the most common is “impact bias”, the propensity to overestimate the duration of the impact that future states of affairs will have on our emotional life.<sup>733</sup> Between several factors, impact bias is apparently caused by “focalism”, the tendency to fail to anticipate our emotional responses to unrelated events, and thus overestimate the impact of the event under scrutiny.<sup>734</sup> Another important factor in impact bias is thought by Wilson and Daniel Gilbert to be

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<sup>725</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>726</sup> Haybron. “Happiness.”

<sup>727</sup> Haybron, Daniel M. *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*. Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 231-232.

<sup>728</sup> Gilbert, Daniel. *Stumbling on Happiness*. Knopf, 2006.

<sup>729</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>730</sup> Wilson, Timothy D., and Daniel T. Gilbert. “Affective Forecasting: Knowing What to Want.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2005, pp. 131-34.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid.

<sup>733</sup> Wilson, Timothy D., et al. “Focalism: A Source of Durability Bias in Affective Forecasting.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 78, no. 5, 2000, pp. 821-36.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid.

“ordinization neglect”, the failure to anticipate the extent to which the event, through the processes of assimilation, accommodation, and explanation, will be accepted.<sup>735</sup>

This inability to make accurate predictions about the affective impact of future events might be problematic for Prudential Hedonism, especially if we apply what Sidgwick calls the “empirical-reflective method”. The empirical-reflective method consists of:

- (1) to represent in advance the different series of feelings that our knowledge of physical and mental causes leads us to expect from the different lines of conduct that are open to us;
- (2) to judge which of the represented series appears to be over-all preferable, taking all probabilities into account;
- (3) to adopt the corresponding line of conduct.<sup>736</sup>

As Sidgwick already recognized, to imagine future pleasures and pains, sub (1), is an unreliable operation, so our confidence in the empirical-reflective method should be restricted.<sup>737</sup> Kant seems to have explained the Paradox of Hedonism similarly. His claim, in different passages, is that we do not have an accurate idea of what will make us happy. According to him, pursuing wealth can generate troubles and anxiety, pursuing knowledge can determine a sense of tragedy, pursuing health can highlight the pains of ill health in advanced age, and so forth.<sup>738</sup> Indeed, his version of the Paradox seems to rely on the Incompetence Account and especially on the failures of affective forecasting.

Many life-defining choices are based on affective forecasts. Should I get married? Have children? Pursue a career as an academic or in finance? These important decisions are heavily influenced by forecasts about how the different scenarios will make us feel. Consequently, the aforementioned line of empirical research shows that, in pursuing happiness, we are not the rational agents we tend to think we are: we make mistakes and we can fail miserably. Perhaps this is not surprising. Who has not at some time chosen a job, holiday, partner, etc., only to find out that the choice did not bring nearly as much happiness as we had expected?

To summarize, in this section, I presented evidence on affective forecasting failures. These failures represent an example of our ineptitude in pursuing happiness, as claimed by the Incompetence Account. Given this evidence of human incompetence in the pursuit of happiness, it seems we lack the skills and knowledge required to effectively grasp and sustain this elusive

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<sup>735</sup> Wilson & Gilbert. “Affective.”

<sup>736</sup> Empirical-reflective method of Egoistic Hedonism in his words. Sidgwick. “Methods”, part 2, ch. 3.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid.

<sup>738</sup> Kant. “Practical Philosophy”, pp. 70-71.

feeling. This weakness about our psychology seems another plausible cause of the Paradox—a case of what Parfit labels “direct self-defeatingness”, when the counter-productive effects of a theory are caused by the compliance to it.<sup>739</sup> Pity for us that we are so bumbling in our pursuit of happiness that pursuing it might destine us to fail, and perhaps fail so catastrophically that we might find ourselves more miserable than when we started.

### “Science of happiness” Informed Practical Philosophy

In this section, I advance a solution to the problem of incompetence in the pursuit of happiness: practical philosophy informed by the science of happiness. The rapidly accumulating wealth of philosophical wisdom and scientific insights regarding happiness may provide us a handbook to guide us through the perilous quest that is the pursuit of happiness. Scholarship in this area is eroding human incompetence in this important chase.

In ancient Greece, theory (“*theoria*”) meant the activity performed by those who pursued knowledge for its own sake.<sup>740</sup> Theoretical philosophy meant this kind of enquiry. Another form of human action was called by the Greeks “*praxis*”. In *praxis*, acquiring knowledge of what is the good and knowing how to apply it in specific situations are not two separate processes but two cooperative elements within a single process of practical reasoning. In practical philosophy, gaining knowledge of what is valuable and knowing how to pursue it on a case-to-case basis are two mutually supportive elements.<sup>741</sup>

Pierre Hadot’s scholarship on the history of philosophy and meta-philosophy demonstrates that in ancient philosophy, since the time of Socrates, “the choice of a way of life [was] not . . . located at the end of the process of philosophical activity, like a kind of accessory or appendix.”<sup>742</sup> As shown by David Konstan, Epicureanism, for example, gives us many insights on the way happiness is to be pursued.<sup>743</sup> Just like in ancient times, practical philosophy is currently a discipline that can guide the hedonistic pursuit of happiness, especially when it is informed by empirical evidence.

In fact, as claimed by Veenhoven, although the study of happiness has long been the work of philosophers, during recent decades natural and social scientists have also taken an interest in the

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<sup>739</sup> Parfit. “Reasons and Persons”, p. 55; Rabinowicz. “Derek Parfit.”

<sup>740</sup> Carr, Wilfred. “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2006, pp. 421-35.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> Hadot, Pierre. *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Translated by Michael Chase, Harvard University Press, 2002, ch. 3; Sharpe, Matthew. “Pierre Hadot.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 13 Sep. 2019.

<sup>743</sup> Konstan, David. “Epicurus.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 24 Jan. 2020.

subject.<sup>744</sup> Seemingly undeterred by the extant range of philosophical conceptions of happiness, empirical researchers have developed a suite of methods for measuring happiness.<sup>745</sup> Survey-based research methods implemented by social scientists, for example, have heralded a break-through in happiness science. Some of these measures have proved fairly reliable, and have led to the evolution of a significant body of knowledge about happiness.<sup>746</sup> Some philosophers working in the area, such as Haybron, accept this methodology and agree that there is no theoretical obstacle to the idea of approximately measuring happiness.<sup>747</sup>

In relation to this body of knowledge, Veenhoven shows that the number of scientific publications on happiness has been growing rapidly since the 1970s. In 2020, for example, the number of annual publications in this field was about 50,000.<sup>748</sup> John Helliwell and colleagues summarize the evidence and argue that at least some measures of subjective wellbeing are valid and reliable.<sup>749</sup> Within psychology, reliability is gauged by the extent to which the same questions yield similar answers when administered to the same respondents in similar conditions.<sup>750</sup>

The validity of subjective well-being measures has been demonstrated in four ways.<sup>751</sup> Subjective well-being scores are plausibly explained by various measures of life circumstances and other variables commonly thought to predict happiness. Subjective well-being scores are also significantly correlated with more objective happiness measures, such as physiological and neurological measurements. Subjective well-being scores also predict the kinds of subsequent outcomes and behaviors that we would expect happiness to lead to.<sup>752</sup> Moreover, subjective well-being self-reports are correlated with the evaluations of friends, family members, and third parties of how happy they think the subject is (cross-rater validity).<sup>753</sup>

At the same time, future neuroscientific advances may provide a better understanding of the biological features of various conceptions of happiness. According to Morten Kringelbach, recent developments in affective neuroscience suggest progress in our ability to objectively measure the

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<sup>744</sup> Veenhoven, Ruut. "The Utility of Happiness." *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1988, pp. 333-54.

<sup>745</sup> For a review: OECD. *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*. OECD Publishing, 2013; Weijers, Dan, and Aaron Jarden. "The Science of Happiness for Policymakers: An Overview." *Journal of Social Research & Policy*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013, pp. 21-40.

<sup>746</sup> Veenhoven, Ruut. "Advances in Understanding Happiness." *Revue Québécoise de Psychologie*, vol. 18, 1997, pp. 29-74.

<sup>747</sup> Haybron. "Happiness."

<sup>748</sup> Tov, William et al. *Well-Being Science for Teaching and the General Public*. 2020.

<sup>749</sup> Helliwell, John, et al. *World Happiness Report*. The Earth Institute, Columbia University, 2012, ch. 2.

<sup>750</sup> Price, Paul et al. *Research Methods of Psychology*. BCcampus, 2015, ch. 5.

<sup>751</sup> Frijters, Paul, et al. "A Happy Choice: Wellbeing as the Goal of Government." *IZA Discussion Papers*, no. 12720, 2019; Helliwell et al. "World", ch. 2.; Notice that studies on subjective well-being often measure life-satisfaction, a construct different but nevertheless correlated with pleasure.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup> Frijters et al. "A Happy."

experience of pleasure.<sup>754</sup> These scientific insights about happiness are remarkable; it looks like a hedonimeter might exist one day.<sup>755</sup> The science of happiness might soon provide us with decisive findings about this previously elusive state. And, these findings will likely get more accurate and precise as the science progresses.

At long last, we could have the tools to fix our incompetence and prevent us from stumbling when pursuing happiness. The success of positive psychology interventions, as shown by different studies, strongly suggests that happiness is not an impossible goal.<sup>756</sup> It is possible that, if done in the right way, pursuing happiness is effective in achieving happiness, at least as much as the dedicated pursuit of a career can be effective in attaining that career.

### **Self-defeating Theories: Incompetence**

After having identified a second plausible causal relation underpinning the Paradox, in this section, I investigate whether the Incompetence Account represents a theoretical issue for Prudential Hedonism. Remember that, according to the argument based on the Paradox of Hedonism, Prudential Hedonism “fails even in its own terms. And thus condemns itself”.<sup>757</sup>

In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit elaborates on Self-interest Theory—a name under which he includes several theories of well-being—and the problem of self-defeatingness.<sup>758</sup> Prudential Hedonism is taken by Parfit as an example of a Self-interest Theory.<sup>759</sup> Following Parfit, the Incompetence Account relegates the Paradox to a peculiar category of self-defeatingness; a category that he considers unproblematic. In fact, in setting the boundaries of his study, he excludes from it the cases where the paradoxical effects are caused by what the agent does mistakenly. For Parfit, incompetence is not a legitimate objection to a theory because the fault is not in the theory, but in the agent.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> Kringelbach, Morten L., et al. “The Neuroscience of Happiness and Pleasure.” *Social Research*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2010, pp. 659-78.

<sup>755</sup> “Let there be granted to the science of pleasure what is granted to the science of energy; to imagine an ideally perfect instrument, a psychophysical machine, continually registering the height of pleasure experienced by an individual, exactly according to the verdict of consciousness, or rather diverging therefrom according to a *law of errors*. From moment to moment the hedonimeter varies; the delicate index now flickering with the flutter of the passions, now steadied by intellectual activity, now sunk whole hours in the neighbourhood of zero, or momentarily springing up towards infinity”. Edgeworth, Francis Y. *Mathematical Physics*. Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 101.

<sup>756</sup> Fredrickson, Barbara L., et al. “Open Hearts Build Lives: Positive emotions, Induced Through Loving-kindness Meditation, Build Consequential Personal Resources.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 95, no. 5, 2008, pp. 1045-62; Layous, Kristin, and Sonja Lyubomirsky. “The How, Who, What, When, and Why of Happiness: Mechanisms Underlying the Success of Positive Activity Interventions.” *Light and Dark Side of Positive Emotion*, edited by Gruber and Moskowitz, Oxford University Press, 2003; Seligman, Martin, et al. “Positive Psychotherapy.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 61, no. 8, 2006, pp. 774-78.

<sup>757</sup> Parfit. “Reasons and Persons”, p. 3.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 3-24.

<sup>759</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

Once again, not dissimilarly from the definition/explanation of the Paradox identified in the previous chapter, the Incompetence Account can be seen as a practical problem that does not affect Prudential Hedonism as a theory. Prudential Hedonism cannot be accused of being too demanding—it does not advise the pursuit of something that is impossible to reach by pursuing it. Although many of us are currently somewhat incompetent in pursuing happiness, we possess the tools, such as empirically-informed practical philosophy, to gradually erode this incompetence.

To reiterate, the possible practical self-defeatingness of Prudential Hedonism does not disprove any of Prudential Hedonism's claims because our incompetence is not irreversibly systematic. The Paradox does not prove Prudential Hedonism's falsity. Our incompetence in pursuing happiness does not affect the validity of a theory that holds happiness as the only ultimate prudential good. If the Paradox of Hedonism emerges merely because of some contingent mechanisms in our psychology, then prudential hedonists have no reason to reject the theory.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I first I claimed that Martin's explanations of the Paradox largely collapse into the Incompetence Account and that Martin's Paradoxes of Aim end up having the same structure as the overly conscious pursuit of pleasure discussed in Ch. 7. Second, I argued that the multiple explanations of the Paradox presented by Dietz are either unconvincing due to being based on questionable theories of pleasure or collapse into the Incompetence Account. Third, I demonstrated that the Incompetence Account does not constitute a genuine problem for the idea that happiness should rationally be pursued. Practical philosophy, informed by the science of happiness, is providing us with empirically based insights about this elusive state of mind. We now have available, and we will have even more access with advancements in scholarship, an increasing knowledge about how to pursue happiness astutely instead of clumsily. The Paradox of Hedonism, once again, does not seem a theoretical hindrance for Prudential Hedonism.

## Chapter 9—The Political Paradox of Happiness

*“Political deliberation presupposes hope. It presupposes that things can be changed for the better...What should guide our political struggles is the hope that unnecessary suffering can be decreased, and human happiness thereby increased.”<sup>761</sup>*

This chapter devises the Paradox of Hedonism as the paradox of collectively pursuing happiness. The resulting Political Paradox of Happiness is analyzed as an issue for the political philosophy of Hedonistic Utilitarianism. Nevertheless, employing an empirical method, it does not result that the political pursuit of happiness seems daunted by its self-defeatingness. In fact, there is strong evidence confirming that mental health policies, the case-study I employ, are a cost-effective way to purposefully increase the happiness of a collective. The chapter is organized in the following way: I first introduce the Political Paradox of Happiness and I present a case-study, mental health policies. Second, I justify the empirical methodology which I employ to conduct the research. Third, I analyze the evidence on mental health policies and thus, generalizing, on the politics of happiness. Fourth, I claim that the Political Paradox of Happiness is not a damaging obstacle for the political philosophy of Hedonistic Utilitarianism. Finally, I present a reflection on the role of evidence and innovation in policy-making.

### Politics of Happiness

The impact of classical or hedonistic utilitarians has been significant, not only in moral philosophy, but in political philosophy and public policy too.<sup>762</sup> In 1789, eminent utilitarian philosopher and lawyer Jeremy Bentham advanced a "felicific calculus" for policy makers with the aim of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain among people.<sup>763</sup> Bentham's hedonic calculus was intended to support policy makers to determine policies that would generate the greatest happiness.<sup>764</sup>

In the 20th century, Welfare Economics—the sub-discipline of economics that judges economic policies in respect of their effects on the well-being of the population—became an

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<sup>761</sup> Rorty, Richard. "Hope and the Future." *Peace Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2002, pp. 149-55.

<sup>762</sup> Driver, Julia. "The History of Utilitarianism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 17 Nov. 2019.

<sup>763</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Edited by JH. Burns and HLA. Hart, Clarendon Press, 1970.

<sup>764</sup> Weijers, Dan. "Hedonism." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu, accessed 29 Jan. 2020; Willmore, Larry. "Derek Bok: The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being." *Population and Development Review*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2013, pp. 350-53.

established field of economic theory.<sup>765</sup> Welfare Economics adopted Gross Domestic Product—the traditional measure of the value of goods and services produced by a country<sup>766</sup>—and it became the standard proxy for social welfare.<sup>767</sup> Presently, GDP is still the most used measure of macroeconomic performance,<sup>768</sup> even if it has been recurrently criticized for being an inaccurate metric of social welfare and, thus, lacking in terms of government’s design of economic policies.<sup>769</sup> Several scholars have criticized the use of GDP as a measure of societal well-being, something for which it was not invented.<sup>770</sup> Therefore, the creation of better indicators of social welfare is a topical debate for policy-makers.<sup>771</sup> Welfare Economics has investigated several possibilities, relating to: the theory of social choice, the theory of fair allocation, the capabilities approach, and the study of happiness and its causes. These conceptual novelties are now employed in measurements and policy-making.<sup>772</sup>

The most relevant to this thesis of these developments is the recent emergence of the “politics of happiness”. In 1972, Jigme Singye Wanchuck, the King of the Buddhist nation of Bhutan, declared “Gross National Happiness”, instead of Gross Domestic Product, the goal of his policies.<sup>773</sup> Since then, countries such as Ecuador, France, Italy, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden and the United Kingdom have used happiness indexes to inform their policies.<sup>774</sup> In 2019, New Zealand announced its first “well-being budget”, a massive investment directed at improving the quality of life of its citizens.<sup>775</sup> At the present moment, policy-makers have available authoritative tools, such as the *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, to help them implement policies directed at people’s happiness.<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Welfare economics.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com), accessed 15 Apr. 2018.

<sup>766</sup> OECDlibrary. 2018, OECD, [www.oecd-ilibrary.org](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org), Accessed 15 Apr. 2018.

<sup>767</sup> Abazi, Xhensila. “Welfare Economics in Albania in Terms of Gross Domestic Product.” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2014, pp. 343-48.

<sup>768</sup> Cartwright, Alexander C. Review of *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* by Diane Coyle, *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2017, pp. 97-107.

<sup>769</sup> Fleurbaey, Marc. “Beyond GDP: The Quest for a Measure of Social Welfare.” *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2009, pp. 1029-75.

<sup>770</sup> They doubt that economic growth necessarily determines improvements in well-being. Lassenius Kramp, Paul. “Gross Domestic Product and Welfare.” *Monetary Review*, no. 2, 2010; Costanza, Robert, et al. “Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress.” *The Pardee Papers*, no. 4, 2009.

<sup>771</sup> Fleurbaey. “Beyond GDP”; Syrquin, Moshe. “GDP as a Measure of Economic Welfare.” *ICER Working Paper*, no. 3, 2011.

<sup>772</sup> Syrquin. “GDP as a Measure.”

<sup>773</sup> Bok, Derek C. *The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

<sup>774</sup> The Global Happiness Council. *Global Happiness Policy Report 2018*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2018.

<sup>775</sup> [www.budget.govt.nz](http://www.budget.govt.nz), accessed 17 Nov. 2019.

<sup>776</sup> OECD. *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*. OECD Publishing, 2013.

Given the analogies between the politics of happiness and Hedonistic Utilitarianism,<sup>777</sup> this chapter addresses a possible issue with Hedonistic Utilitarianism that is supposedly a consequence of its hedonistic foundations. What I call the “Political Paradox of Happiness” consists in the claim that the political pursuit of happiness is self-defeating. States that subscribe to Hedonistic Utilitarianism will be likely to achieve the theory’s goal of maximizing happiness less effectively than States who subscribe to an alternative political theory.<sup>778</sup> So, the worry expressed by the Political Paradox of Happiness is that a hedonistic utilitarian political organization, while trying to increase public happiness, would end up diminishing it. Notice that the Political Paradox of Happiness does not affect Prudential Hedonism because this theory concerns individual rationality and it is not a political theory, a code for the collectivity.<sup>779</sup>

Given the popularity of happiness among citizens of Western liberal-democracies,<sup>780</sup> and the interest in adopting happiness to direct policy making, it is important to analyze this objection to Hedonistic Utilitarianism, the problem of self-defeatingness. By doing so, this chapter defends the effectiveness of the politics of happiness and highlights the relevance of Hedonistic Utilitarianism within contemporary political theory.

In fact, we might be at a turning point in the history of Hedonistic Utilitarianism and policymaking.<sup>781</sup> Thanks to the science of happiness, we will likely have the tools to solve some of the measurement problems of the theory.<sup>782</sup> As a consequence, it is timely to address this political issue that Hedonistic Utilitarianism generates. Citizens of states considering the maximization of Gross National Happiness as the goal of public policy would be remiss to support these policies if no defense of their effectiveness is presented.<sup>783</sup> In fact, the idea of collective happiness sometimes elicits pessimism.<sup>784</sup> Thus, it is topical to analyze the Political Paradox of Happiness in order to assess whether this skepticism about the political pursuit of happiness is justified.

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<sup>777</sup> Layard, Richard. *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. Allen Lane, 2005; Veenhoven, Ruut. “Happiness as a Public Policy Aim: The Greatest Happiness Principle.” *Positive Psychology in Practice*, edited by PA. Linley and S. Joseph, John Wiley, 2004, pp. 658-78; Oishi, Shigehiro, and Ed Diener. “Can and Should Happiness Be a Policy Goal?” *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 195-203.

<sup>778</sup> This definition is adapted from Eggleston’s understanding of the paradoxical effects of Utilitarianism as an ethical theory. Eggleston, Ben. “Paradox of Happiness.” *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 3794-99; Okulicz-Kozaryn and colleagues employ the expression “subjective well-being political paradox” to describe a different phenomenon. Okulicz-Kozaryn, Adam, et al. “The Subjective Well-Being Political Paradox: Happy Welfare States and Unhappy Liberals.” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 99, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1300-08.

<sup>779</sup> Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press, 1986, chs. 1-5.

<sup>780</sup> Joshanloo, Mohsen, and Dan Weijers. “Aversion to Happiness Across Cultures: A Review of Where and Why People are Averse to Happiness.” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2013, pp. 717-35.

<sup>781</sup> Duncan, Grant. “Should Happiness-Maximization be the Goal of Government?” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2010, pp. 163-78; Booth, Philip, et al. *...And the Pursuit of Happiness: Wellbeing and the Role of Government*. Institute of Economic Affairs, 2012.

<sup>782</sup> Booth et al. “...And the Pursuit”; Weijers & Jarden. “The Science.”

<sup>783</sup> Booth et al. “...And the Pursuit.”

<sup>784</sup> Coyne Christopher J., and Peter Boettke J. “Economics and Happiness Research: Insights from Austrian and Public Choice Economics.” *Happiness and Public Policy*, edited by Ng YK. and Ho LS., Palgrave Macmillan, 2006;

## Political Paradox of Happiness: Case Study

The (individual) Paradox of Hedonism can be understood as applying to collectives as well.<sup>785</sup> The Political Paradox of Happiness holds that the political attempt to maximize happiness results in less net-happiness. The State, by pursuing happiness, brings about less happiness than pursuing some other political goals.

The phrase “overly conscious” was identified as the best definition of the paradoxical pursuit when dealing with the Paradox of Hedonism. This description of the paradoxical pursuit also seems to fit with the Political Paradox of Happiness, although the psychological mechanisms that determine the Paradox at an individual level do not apply in large part to the political version. Still, we can understand the idea that a government can pursue the happiness of its population more or less consciously.<sup>786</sup>

That said, below, I examine empirically the Political Paradox of Happiness by focusing on a set of specific policies recommended by the literature on the politics of happiness: mental health policies constitute the case-study that I employ for this appendix. In fact, as claimed by Derek Bok, relieving suffering represents an exceptional opportunity for any Government aiming to improve the happiness of the population and in developed Western societies mental illness seems to be a prime cause of suffering.<sup>787</sup> According to Rachel Jenkins, some common goals for mental health policy include: promotion of mental health, decrease of the incidence and prevalence of mental health disorders (prevention and treatment), decrease of the extent and severity of related disability (rehabilitation), increase of services for mental health patients and reduction of stigma, promotion of human rights and human dignity for mental health patients, and reduction of the mortality caused by mental illness.<sup>788</sup>

The focus on these policies does not necessitate a negative utilitarian approach, in which the reduction of suffering is necessarily privileged to the promotion of happiness.<sup>789</sup> This chapter is based on a classical utilitarian approach, according to which pleasure and pain are weighted equivalently, and mental health policies are evaluated under the light of this paradigm. The priority given to mental health policies is not at odds with a classical utilitarian approach because the causes

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Wilkinson, Will. “In Pursuit of Happiness Research: Is It Reliable? What Does It Imply for Policy?” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis*, vol. 11, 2007; White, Mark D. “The Problems with Measuring and Using Happiness for Policy Purposes.” *Mercatus Research*, 2014.

<sup>785</sup> Eggleston. “Paradox.”

<sup>786</sup> Whitby, Alistar, et al. *The BRAINPOoL Project Final Report: Beyond GDP-From Measurement to Politics and Policy*. www.brainpoolproject.eu, accessed 19 Nov. 2019.

<sup>787</sup> Bok. “The Politics”, p. 124.; Layard, Richard, et al. “Mental Illness and Unhappiness.” *IZA Discussion Paper*, no. 7620, 2013.

<sup>788</sup> Jenkins, Rachel. “Supporting Governments to Adopt Mental Health Policies.” *World Psychiatry: Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2003, pp. 14-19.

<sup>789</sup> Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Princeton University Press, 1952, ch.5, note 6.

of unhappiness seem easier to address through policy than the more personal causes of happiness.<sup>790</sup> Even Classical Utilitarianism seems to recommend policies that give preference to the least happy people. In many cases, happiness gains are simply easier to achieve by focusing on those that are worst off.

To escape unhappiness is assumed to be a valid means to get happiness and to pursue happiness is assumed to be a valid means to avoid unhappiness.<sup>791</sup> As an example of the latter, positive psychology interventions, conceptually directed at increasing happiness, have also proven to be effective in relieving depression.<sup>792</sup> In addition, it seems irrational to devise mental health policies that address only the clinical population and do not strive for the prevention of mental illnesses in people that do not currently belong to the clinical population. Rather, it seems sensible to devise policies that aim at shifting the entire collectivity toward better mental health.<sup>793</sup> For all these reasons, the conceptual difference between politics of happiness and mental health policies seems to vanish.

So, according to the Political Paradox of Happiness, the political attempt to increase public happiness, including through mental health policies, is self-defeating: the population would be less happy as a result. This supposed phenomenon might be attributed to the negative effects of counterproductive policies. These ironic effects, in the most moderate version, can derive from the waste of available resources on ineffective policies. By diverting resources from other goals which we know better how to reach (e.g. GDP maximization), we slightly reduce people's happiness through taxation and ineffective public-spending.

Therefore, this chapter will focus on this possible mechanism of the Political Paradox of Happiness: happiness-policies might turn out to be happiness-reducing. For example, according to David Ingleby, mental health interventions are not evidence-based.<sup>794</sup> In the USA, from 1988–1994 through 2005–2008, use of antidepressants raised by nearly 400%<sup>795</sup> while, roughly at the same

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<sup>790</sup> Lelkes, Orsolya. "Minimising Misery: A New Strategy for Public Policies Instead of Maximising Happiness?" *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 114, no. 1, 2013, pp. 121-37; According to Dolan and colleagues, for example, poor health, separation, unemployment, and lack of social contact are strongly negatively associated with Subjective Well-being. Dolan, Paul, et al. "Do We Really Know What Makes Us Happy? A Review of the Economic Literature on the Factors Associated with Subjective Well-Being." *Journal of Economic Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, pp. 94-122.

<sup>791</sup> Buss, Sarah. "The Irrationality of Unhappiness and the Paradox of Despair." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 101, no. 4, 2004, pp. 167-96.

<sup>792</sup> Clarry, Laura, and Jerome Carson. "Positive Psychology for Depression: A Critical Review." *Mental Health Practice*, vol. 23, no.1, 2019, pp. 34-41.

<sup>793</sup> Huppert, Felicia. "A Population Approach to Positive Psychology: The Potential for Population Interventions to Promote Well-Being and Prevent Disorder." *Positive Psychology in Practice*, edited by PA. Linley and S. Joseph, John Wiley & Sons, 2004, p. 693-709.

<sup>794</sup> Ingleby, David. "How 'Evidence-based' is the Movement for Global Mental Health?" *Disability and the Global South*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2014, pp. 203-26.

<sup>795</sup> Pratt, Laura A., et al. "Antidepressant Use in Persons Aged 12 and Over: United States, 2005-2008." *NCHS Data Brief*, no. 76, 2011, pp. 1-8.

time, the incidence of major depression between adults more than doubled.<sup>796</sup> According to this supposed mechanism, our knowledge of the complex dynamics that determine public happiness is so unreliable that we end up implementing policies that actually undermine the happiness of the population. Given that, the Incompetence Account of the Paradox of Hedonism is considered the most likely explanation of the Political Paradox of Happiness.

### **Justifying the Case-study Methodology**

Bentham described the dimensions of value of a pleasure and a pain that need to be taken into consideration when devising a policy.<sup>797</sup> Among them, there is “purity” or “the chance [pleasure] has of not being followed by sensations of the opposite kind”.<sup>798</sup> So, it emerges that the Benthamite calculation already excludes the possibility of the Political Paradox of Happiness. The value of purity determines that a pleasure is better if it is not followed by pain. The pain following a pleasure (e.g. addiction of the population to a State-provided drug) is already computed in the felicific calculus.<sup>799</sup> If purity is appropriately weighted in the calculation, the possibility of the Political Paradox of Hedonism is theoretically excluded.

Since it seems that we are facing a practical problem, an empirical investigation seems more adequate. The empirical investigation of the paradoxical effects of Hedonistic Utilitarianism has the limitation that it can evaluate only non-ideal hedonistic utilitarian policies, since an ideal hedonistic utilitarian political organization has never existed. However, the generalizability of the findings to ideal hedonistic utilitarian policies does not seem particularly problematic.

What we can investigate empirically is only a political pursuit of happiness that is not exclusive: policy-makers have never pursued happiness without, at the same time, pursuing different political goals. Nevertheless, Hedonistic Utilitarianism advocates the ultimate political pursuit of happiness, not the exclusive political pursuit of happiness. Hedonistic Utilitarianism has no theoretical or practical problem in adjusting to a pursuit that is not exclusive, if this happens to be self-defeating. Theoretically, pursuing instrumental goals for the sake of public happiness does not contradict having public happiness as the ultimate goal. Practically, Governments are already experienced with the pursuit of goods as instrumental goals, e.g. justice, wealth, etc.

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<sup>796</sup> Compton, Wilson M., et al. “Changes in the Prevalence of Major Depression and Comorbid Substance Use Disorders in the United States between 1991-1992 and 2001-2002.” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 163, no. 12, 2006, pp. 2141-47.

<sup>797</sup> Crimmins, James E. “Jeremy Bentham.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 17 Nov. 2019.

<sup>798</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Edited by JH. Burns and HLA. Hart, Clarendon Press, 1970, pp. 38-39.

<sup>799</sup> Mitchell, Wesley C. “Bentham's Felicific Calculus.” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1918, pp. 161-83.

Someone could still object that the happiness policies we can analyze have never been implemented with happiness in mind as the *only* ultimate goal. This is true but, since political organizations tend to be axiologically pluralist, this could be said about findings on every kind of policy. In other words, if no State considers happiness its only ultimate goal, the same is true for justice, education, health, GDP, military power, etc. The generalizability of the findings on non-ideal hedonistic utilitarian policies to ideal hedonistic utilitarian policies, despite being an assumption, is entitled to the same degree of confidence that, for example, the generalizability of the evidence on increasing GDP to a hypothetical State that pursues only that.

To reiterate, although not daunting, the empirical investigation of the paradoxical effects of Hedonistic Utilitarianism has some limitations. On the other hand, a purely ideal philosophical investigation seems even less useful to address this practical problem.

### **Mental Health Policies: Empirical Evidence**

Given that the Political Paradox of Happiness is considered likely to arise at a practical level, it is desirable to employ an empirical method to study it. In this section, I employ the best viable way to determine if Hedonistic Utilitarianism has practically counter-productive effects determined by the Incompetence Account. After having individuated non-ideal hedonistic utilitarian policies that have been implemented in the past, mental health policies, I analyze the extant empirical evidence about them.

Considering the literature on the cost-benefits of mental health policies, the worry about their counter-productiveness seems unjustified. In 2013, the World Health Organization claimed that there was “a growing body of evidence demonstrating both the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of key interventions for priority mental disorders in countries at different levels of economic development”.<sup>800</sup> According to the *Global Happiness Policy Report 2018*, proper mental health treatments are now available, even if many governments’ fail to recognize their advancements.<sup>801</sup> Unfortunately, the stigma that surrounds mental illness often causes its absence from political debate even though the huge cost of mental illness for society (in addition to individuals) and the huge benefits that funding mental health services would have.<sup>802</sup> As claimed by the *Global Happiness Policy Report 2019*, in high-income countries, the evidence for the benefits of spending on mental health is “overwhelming”.<sup>803</sup> For common mental health illnesses such anxiety and

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<sup>800</sup> World Health Organization. *Investing in Mental Health: Evidence for Action*. 2013, p. 18.

<sup>801</sup> The Global Happiness Council. “Global Happiness 2018.”

<sup>802</sup> Ibid.

<sup>803</sup> The Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing. *Global Happiness and Wellbeing Policy Report 2019*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019.

depression we can treat them with a success rate of 50% or more, which means that the treatments are effective at least as many physical treatments.<sup>804</sup>

Not only does mental health spending alleviate a significant amount of suffering, it can also be financially beneficial.<sup>805</sup> Richard Layard shows how cost-effective treatments for depression and anxiety disorders do exist, they have good recovery rates, and are not expensive.<sup>806</sup> To give an example of the cost-effectiveness of mental health interventions, Nicola Wiles and colleagues have studied the cost-effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy as an adjunct to pharmacotherapy for treatment-resistant depression. Their findings show a 92% probability of this treatment to be cost-effective.<sup>807</sup> Importantly, the economic benefits of employment and productivity outweigh the expenses: mental health spending has a negative net-cost for the State.<sup>808</sup> To repeat, the fiscal impact of employment, through reduced benefits and increased tax receipts, outweighs the cost of the treatments.

To give the examples of more specific policies, David McDaid and colleagues summarize the “strong economic evidence” on measures to promote the mental health of children and adolescents and of adults in the workplace.<sup>809</sup> In the United States, programs for children experiencing behavioral difficulties have been shown to produce, considering the benefits to health, education, criminal justice sectors, and the labor market, a positive return on investment. These returns are in a range between \$1.80 and \$3.30 for every \$1 spent on these programs.<sup>810</sup> Concerning the workplace, in Europe, several interventions directed at the whole organization or at the individual worker have been estimated to produce returns on investment, over a 1-year period, of between \$0.81 and \$13.62 for every \$1 spent on these programmes.<sup>811</sup>

Thus, the empirical evidence on mental health policies shows that these are not counter-productive. More in general, several countries are collecting data about happiness and analytical tools do exist to assess the impact of policies.<sup>812</sup> The data we possess do not give us any legitimate

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<sup>804</sup> Clark, David, et al. “Cost-Benefit Analysis of Psychological Therapy.” *CEP Discussion Papers*, vol. 202, no. 1, 2007, pp. 90-98.

<sup>805</sup> The Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing. “Global Happiness 2019.”

<sup>806</sup> The Global Happiness Council. “Global Happiness 2018.”

<sup>807</sup> Wiles, Nicola J., et al. “Long-Term Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy as an Adjunct to Pharmacotherapy for Treatment-Resistant Depression in Primary Care: Follow-up of the Cobalt Randomised Controlled Trial.” *Lancet Psychiatry*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2016, pp. 137-44.

<sup>808</sup> Clark et al. “Cost-Benefit”; The Global Happiness Council. “Global Happiness 2018.”

<sup>809</sup> McDaid, David, et al. “The Economic Case for the Prevention of Mental Illness.” *Annual Review of Public Health*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2019, p. 376.

<sup>810</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy. *Benefit-cost Results*. 2017. [www.wsipp.wa.gov](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov), accessed 21 Jan. 2021.

<sup>811</sup> EU's Consumer, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency. *Economic Analysis of Workplace Mental Health Promotion and Mental Disorder Prevention Programmes and of their Potential Contribution to EU Health, Social and Economic Policy Objectives*. 2013, [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu), accessed 21 Jan. 2021.

<sup>812</sup> The Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing. “Global Happiness 2019.”

reason to hold that Hedonistic Utilitarianism, the political philosophy that inspires these political actions, is doomed to be self-defeating.

### **Incompetence and Political Pursuit of Happiness**

Above, incompetence was identified as the most likely explanation of the Political Paradox of Happiness. However, demonstrating that this Paradox is not systematic, as I have just done, is not the same as demonstrating that we are thoroughly competent in politically pursuing happiness. However, political incompetence is not exclusive to the pursuit of happiness. Errors have arisen from the pursuit of GDP-maximization too, such as policies directed at economic growth that have in the past turned out to be failures. It seems that we are not fully competent in any area of policy-making. Thus, incompetence justifies the demand for evidence-based policies. In fact, research can lead to a more precise understanding of social affairs and allow policy-makers to design and implement policies that can benefit the population effectively.<sup>813</sup>

That said, the demand for evidence-based policies still has to be balanced with the demand for innovative policies. Decision-making should not be shut down by a political status-quo bias.<sup>814</sup> Collective decision-making seems to happen, by large part, under a condition of risk and uncertainty. Even assuming an always more reliable happiness-research, its translation into public policy will be likely still characterized by complexity. The politics of happiness, as every kind of political action, has a *political* nature that should not be obscured by its *scientific* starting point.<sup>815</sup> Happiness-research, as with social research in general, cannot provide findings that can be translated directly into policies without a public debate about the associated political risk.<sup>816</sup>

Happiness seems for many a valuable political goal; our limited experience, compared for example with GDP-maximization, should not prevent us from pursuing people's release from suffering because of a maladaptive risk-aversion. It would be irrational to not implement policies aimed at progress in mental health just because we are more experienced with the denial of their urgency. Also, innovative policies would allow us to study their effects, our competence would grow and the probability of the Political Paradox of Happiness would further decrease.

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<sup>813</sup> OECD. *Social Sciences for Knowledge and Decision Making*. OECD Publishing, 2001.

<sup>814</sup> Valderrama, Laura. "Political Risk Aversion." *IMF Working Papers*, vol. 09, no. 194, 2009.

<sup>815</sup> Duncan. "Should."

<sup>816</sup> Duncan, Grant. "After Happiness." *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2007, pp. 85-108.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I firstly presented a definition of the Political Paradox of Happiness and I configured mental health policies as a case-study. By doing so, I assumed that there is not a conceptual difference between mental health policies and the politics of happiness. Second, I justified the employment of an empirical methodology by claiming that the Political Paradox of Happiness is more likely a practical problem determined by the Incompetence Account. For this reason, a purely theoretical investigation does not seem desirable. Meanwhile, I defended the generalizability of the empirical evidence on non-ideal hedonistic utilitarian policies to an ideal hedonistic utilitarian Government. Third, I analyzed the evidence on mental health policies and, generalizing, on the politics of happiness and I argued that the Political Paradox of Happiness is not a damaging issue for Hedonistic Utilitarianism as a political theory. In the end, I advanced that evidence-requirements and innovation have to be balanced when devising a policy. Given that the empirical evidence on mental health policies is unambiguous and that collective decision-making always happens under conditions of uncertainty, caution does not seem a good reason to oppose these policies.

## Part 3—Conclusion

In this Part, I analyzed the Paradox of Hedonism, the self-defeatingness objection that is sometimes advanced against Prudential Hedonism. First, I refined the most plausible definition of the Paradox. The overly conscious pursuit of happiness was identified as the trait that might determine paradoxical effects in a prudential hedonistic agent. This constitutes a possible case of Prudential Hedonism's indirect self-defeatingness, when the conscious effort to comply to the theory defeats its aims. Secondly, I assessed the explanations of the Paradox that are identifiable in the contemporary literature. The Incompetence Account and the aforementioned definition emerged as the only plausible causal mechanisms behind the Paradox of Hedonism. This is a possible case of Prudential Hedonism's direct self-defeatingness, when acting in accordance with the theory defeats its aims. However, both accounts of the Paradox end up being contingent psychological mechanisms. The possible practical problems I identified, overly conscious and incompetent pursuits of happiness, do not theoretically affect the plausibility of Prudential Hedonism that concerns prudential value and not practical rationality. Nevertheless, both the overly conscious and the incompetent pursuits of pleasure seem avoidable. Indeed, I concluded that, at the present moment, we have not generated evidence proving the empirical necessity of the Paradox. Psychological evidence tells us that it should be possible to train our conscious efforts in order to maximize pleasure. Similarly, empirically informed practical philosophy can erode our incompetence in pursuing happiness. Prudential Hedonism does not end up being too demanding. Minimizing displeasure and maximizing pleasure do not seem impossible goals: Prudential Hedonism does not imply a necessarily self-defeating pursuit.

# Conclusion

To summarize, in Part 1, I addressed the perceived problems with a unified account of the intrinsic good of Prudential Hedonism. Phenomenalist Quantitative Prudential Hedonism does not seem severely daunted by the difficulties with describing the feeling of pleasure. Rather, by focusing on the common understanding of the concept rather than on the verbal expression of it, it seems that we can sensibly think of a phenomenological class that is “pleasure”. Given that the intuitiveness of Prudential Hedonism seems to depend on its direct phenomenological access to value, I concluded that Attitudinal Hedonism, a prominent contemporary theory, does not seem to be a convincing version of Prudential Hedonism.

In Part 2, I analyzed the experience machine thought experiments that, in the past, have been considered as a knock-down argument against Prudential Hedonism. Similarly to the most recent scholarship on these thought experiments, I concluded that the argument based on them is not able to knock-down Prudential Hedonism. For example, the expertise objection does not seem able to discredit the revisionist scholarship. Also, I claimed that the modifications of the thought experiments based on the Experientially Identical Lifetime Comparison Argument should be granted limited epistemic value.

In Part 3, I defended Prudential Hedonism from the Paradox of Hedonism—the objection of self-defeatingness. By doing so, I refined the most plausible definition of the paradoxical trait, the overly conscious pursuit of pleasure, and the most plausible explanation of the Paradox identifiable in the literature, the Incompetence Account. These two versions of the Paradox constitute, respectively, cases of Prudential Hedonism’s indirect and direct self-defeatingness. Nevertheless, the Paradox of Hedonism ends up being a contingent practical problem with no consequences concerning the truth of Prudential Hedonism.

Concerning future directions of the research, new scholarship might investigate the negative side of Prudential Hedonism. The present research has analyzed this theory by focusing on its intrinsic value, pleasure. Future scholarship might investigate the intrinsic disvalue of the theory, displeasure. In fact, the extent to which claims about pleasure and displeasure overlap is controversial and further research is needed to address this issue. For example, let’s consider how the objections dealt with in each part of the present thesis relate to displeasure:

- (1) descriptive theory of displeasure: is there a shared feeling identifiable among the diverse experiences that constitute displeasure? Someone might claim that he cannot identify a shared phenomenology between, for example, a bodily pain and existential suffering. In

this view, there might be a heterogeneity problem of displeasure—the intrinsic disvalue of Prudential Hedonism lacks a coherent account. Moreover, still at a descriptive level, the relation between pleasure and displeasure as opposites in a continuum through neutrality is far from uncontroversial. For example, it has been argued that mixed feelings entail that pleasure and displeasure are not opposites, rather they are independent dimensions of variation of experience.<sup>817</sup> According to this view, pleasure and displeasure are orthogonal dimensions.

- (2) Normative claims about displeasure: it might be that, concerning axiology, pleasure and displeasure are not symmetrical. Prudential claims about displeasure might not be symmetrical to prudential claims about pleasure. Continued studies of the commonalities and differences between normative claims about displeasure and pleasure seem topical for advancements in our understanding of well-being. Concerning the experience machine thought experiment, remember that Nozick asks us to ignore cases in which plugging into an experience machine might be better than a torture-like life. Since in these cases plugging in seems a reasonable choice, further research is necessary to understand the implications of them for Prudential Hedonism. Also, remember that Hindriks and Douven claim that they could not observe any effect in results determined by an experience machine that prevents a future of almost exclusive unpleasant experiences.<sup>818</sup> Given that loss-aversion is a well-established psychological phenomenon, this unexpected result needs replication to be accepted with confidence.
- (3) Practical reason: there are multiple scenarios in which pleasure-seeking and displeasure-avoidance are in competition. Thus, further research is needed to understand to what extent a competent prudential hedonist should prioritize one over the other. Concerning the Paradox of Hedonism, remember that, for economy, I excluded from my investigation what I called the Paradox of Negative Hedonism—the claim that the avoidance of displeasure is self-defeating.

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<sup>817</sup> Diener, Ed, and Robert A. Emmons. “The Independence of Positive and Negative Affect.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 47, 1994, pp. 1105-17; Watson, David, and Auke Tellegen. “Toward a Consensual Structure of Mood.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 98, no. 2, 1985, pp. 219-35; Cacioppo, John, and Gary Berntson. “Relationship between Attitudes and Evaluative Space: A Critical Review, with Emphasis on the Separability of Positive and Negative Substrates.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 115, 1994, pp. 401-23; Watson, David. *Mood and Temperament*. The Guilford Press, 2000, pp. 26–33, 44-54; Larsen, Jeff T., et al. “The Agony of Victory and Thrill of Defeat: Mixed Emotional Reactions to Disappointing Wins and Relieving Losses.” *Psychological Science*, vol. 15, 2004, pp. 325-30; Larsen, Jeff T., and A. Peter McGraw. “Further Evidence for Mixed Emotions.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 100, 2011, p. 1095.; Larsen, Jeff T., et al. “The Evaluative Space Grid: A Single-item Measure of Positivity and Negativity.” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 23, 2009, pp. 453-80.

<sup>818</sup> Hindriks, Frank, and Igor Douven. “Nozick’s Experience Machine: An Empirical Study.” *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2018.

Taking stock, this thesis defended the plausibility of Prudential Hedonism by addressing some key objections to it. In conclusion, these objections do not seem to disprove Prudential Hedonism. Obviously, this does not imply that I have proven the truth of the theory. Nevertheless, having dismissed some of the main objections to Prudential Hedonism, does imply that displeasure and pleasure are still plausible candidates for being, respectively, the intrinsic disvalue and value for people's lives. This conclusion might have remarkable consequences for some of the latest developments in psychology and public policy that involve the promotion of people's pleasure. These research agendas would be problematic if happiness was clearly not good for people's lives. Also, the plausibility of Prudential Hedonism seems topical to defend the morality of new technological developments that might allow us to hack the biology of happiness or to live in a pleasant virtual reality. Again, the morality of these interventions seems directly related to the plausible goodness of happiness for people's well-being.

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