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Hedonism reconsidered – again

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Abstrakt

Hedonizm na nowo przemyślany – raz jeszcze

Niniejszy artykuł oferuje wielowymiarową i krytyczną analizę hedonizmu, podważając jego fundamentalne założenia z nowej, głębszej perspektywy, która bada naturę przyjemności. Według autorów rzetelna dyskusja o hedonizmie wymaga rozpatrywania przyjemności nie zaledwie jako zwykłego odczucia, ale jako formy świadomości dobra lub „odczuwalnych ewaluacji”, zgodnie z koncepcją przedstawioną przez Bennetta Helma i innych. Przyjęcie tego podejścia prowadzi do wniosku, że przyjemność, postrzegana głównie jako dobro instrumentalne, nie może być jedynym ani najwyższym dobrem wewnętrznym, co podważa kluczowe założenia hedonizmu. W artykule dokonano systematycznej oceny różnych form hedonizmu, od jego klasycznej postaci po hedonizm związany z dobrostanem, jednocześnie odpowiadając na potencjalne argumenty obrońców tych teorii. Proponowana w artykule percepcyjna interpretacja przyjemności wpływa na implikacje hedonistycznych twierdzeń, prowadząc do odrzucenia zarówno klasycznych, jak i zmodyfikowanych wersji hedonizmu. Artykuł stanowi istotny wkład w debatę filozoficzną, oferując pogłębioną, wnikliwą i opartą na szczegółowej analizie koncepcjonalnej przyjemności krytykę hedonizmu oraz otwiera nowe pole do rozważań nad rolą przyjemności w dyskursie etycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: hedonizm, dobrostan, przyjemność, percepcyjna interpretacja przyjemności, dobro wewnętrzne

Abstract

Hedonism reconsidered—again

This paper presents a comprehensive re-examination of hedonism, challenging its foundational assertions with a fresh perspective on the nature of pleasure. We embark on a critical analysis through a deeper exploration of the notion of pleasure. The paper argues that a meaningful discussion of hedonism necessitates an understanding of pleasure not as a mere sensation but as a form of awareness of the good or “felt evaluations,” as conceptualized by Bennett Helm and others. This nuanced perspective leads to the conclusion that pleasure, primarily seen as an instrumental good, cannot be the sole or highest intrinsic good, thereby questioning the feasibility of hedonistic claims. The paper systematically evaluates various hedonistic assertions, from classical to well-being hedonism, and addresses potential objections from hedonist advocates. The perceptual interpretation of pleasure significantly impacts the evaluation of these claims, leading to the rejection of both classical hedonism and its modified versions. In conclusion, we assert that understanding pleasure as a consciousness of the good not only challenges the core of hedonism but also invites a shift in how pleasure is positioned within ethical discourse. This paper contributes to the philosophical debate by offering a nuanced critique of hedonism grounded in a detailed conceptual analysis of pleasure.

Keywords: hedonism, well-being, pleasure, perceptual approach to pleasure, intrinsic good

For long, hedonism has been considered a refuted view of historic importance. Three arguments seem to have decisively caused its decline¹: the argument from John Stuart Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures,² Robert Nozick's argument from the impression machine,³ and George Edward Moore's "naturalist fallacy" objection.⁴

According to the first objection, if there are higher and lower pleasures, there must be some fundamental criterion of goodness other than pleasure and its quantity or intensity. And, if we allow such additional criteria, we need to adopt other intrinsic goods apart from pleasure. Nozick's argument aims to show that apart from having pleasant experiences, we want to achieve some objective goods that would justify our pleasure or satisfaction. Moore's objection comes down to showing that we cannot reduce goodness to pleasure. It is always possible to reasonably ask whether a given pleasure is morally good. The most obvious are examples of so-called evil pleasures.

Nevertheless, some authors have recently tried to revive hedonism.⁵ Recognizing the strength of the above arguments, they maintain these objections do not lead to the abandonment of hedonism but to its refinement, e.g. admitting that there could exist non-hedonic goods while, at the same time, claiming that pleasure or "enjoyment alone matters to well-being,"⁶ or that "the intrinsic value of a life is equal to the sum of the intrinsic values of the episodes of attitudinal pleasure and pain contained in that life."⁷

This paper does not aim to discuss hedonism by directly objecting to Roger Crisp or Fred Feldman's formulations of this ethical view. We believe a serious discussion of hedonism requires a deeper analysis of the nature of pleasure

1 R. Crisp, *Hedonism reconsidered*, "Philosophy and Phenomenological Research" 73 (2006) no. 3, pp. 619–645.

2 J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Auckland 2009.

3 R. Nozick, *Anarchy, state and utopia*, New York 1977.

4 G. E. Moore, *Principia ethica*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 111–160.

5 E.g. F. Feldman, *Pleasure and the good life: On the nature, varieties, and plausibility of hedonism*, Oxford 2004; D. Brax, *Hedonism as the explanation of value*, Lund 2009; R. Crisp, *Hedonism reconsidered*. Another example is Katarzyna Lazari-Radek who seems to even defend hedonism in its classical form. See K. Lazari-Radek, *Godny pożądania stan świadomości*, Łódź 2021, *passim*.

6 R. Crisp, *Hedonism reconsidered*, p. 634.

7 F. Feldman, *Pleasure and the good life*, p. 129.

or enjoyment. It seems to us that most criticisms of hedonism resort to our intuitions regarding pleasure and good (or evil), to counterexamples, thought experiments, or undesired consequences of focusing on pleasure as the only intrinsic good. It is rarely the case that authors focus on the conceptual analysis of pleasure itself to conclude whether hedonistic claims are feasible.⁸ Only then, by answering the question of what exactly is that thing we call pleasure, can we evaluate it and assess the hedonist claims.

To achieve our goal, we are going to take the following steps. First, we will set a list of hedonist claims, from the strongest one, that pleasure or enjoyment is the only intrinsic good, to the weakest one, that pleasure or enjoyment is among the highest intrinsic goods. We will also include the modified formulations of hedonism offered by Crisp and Feldman. Then, we will argue that pleasure by nature should be considered a form of awareness of good or felt evaluations (for example, as it is understood by Bennett Helm). As such, pleasure plays the role of tracking down or representing what is good, and thus, it primarily seems to be an instrumental good. So-understood pleasure cannot be the only or the highest intrinsic good and does not seem a sufficient condition of human well-being. For this reason, hedonism fails. We will also consider a possible objection that the advocate of hedonism could raise against our argument, especially that pleasure may be a reasonable goal of human action or desires, regardless of its function of identifying other goods.

Hedonist claims

It is reasonable to assume that different philosophers understood hedonism differently. We can, for example, distinguish classical hedonism, advocated by Aristipus of Cirene, Epicurus, Jeremy Bentham, or John Stuart Mill, from what could be called well-being hedonism, advocated by Roger Crisp or Fred Feldman. While the former focuses on pleasure as the only or the highest

⁸ Such attempts seem to be very rare. A very good latest exceptional example is Matthew Pianalto's paper, in which he bases his argument on the analysis of pleasure as an evolutionary development aiming to track down what suits one's survival and to motivate one to behavior enhancing survival. See M. Pianalto, *Against the intrinsic value of pleasure*, "The Journal of Value Inquiry" 43 (2009), pp. 33–39.

intrinsic good, the latter focuses more on answering the question of what constitutes human well-being. As it is conceivable to make further, more subtle distinctions in the characterization of various hedonisms, to avoid possible misunderstandings, we will offer a list of various claims that one might hold as hedonistic. These claims will then be the object of our evaluation once we offer a convincing way to characterize pleasure or enjoyment.

It seems plausible to order at least a part of the list of hedonistic claims according to how strongly they value pleasure. The list would go as follows:

- a. **Pleasure (enjoyment) is the only intrinsic good, while pain (suffering) is the only intrinsic evil.**
- b. **Pleasure (enjoyment) is the highest intrinsic good.**

The above two formulations could be classified as instantiations of classical hedonism. Although the formulation below could hardly deserve the name hedonistic, we will include it in the list as its natural extension on the spectrum of possibilities. According to this formulation:

- c. **Pleasure (enjoyment), along with some other goods, is an intrinsic good.**

Yet another formulation can complete this list, called the well-being hedonism, according to which:

- d. **Pleasure (enjoyment) is a necessary and sufficient condition of human well-being.⁹**

⁹ We could break this claim into three separate formulations, namely that: i. Pleasure (enjoyment) is a necessary condition of human well-being; ii. Pleasure (enjoyment) is a sufficient condition of human well-being; and iii. Pleasure (enjoyment) is a necessary and sufficient condition of human well-being. However, we leave out i. and ii. We accept the necessity of pleasure for one's well-being (we develop this point at 4d, but do not think it alone defines a hedonistic position (most non-hedonists easily affirm it, too). Accepting i. excludes ii. (We justify such rejection of ii. in 4d). Therefore, the only formulation worth a closer analysis as a separate section left is iii., namely that **Pleasure (enjoyment) is a necessary and sufficient condition of human well-being.**

The nature of pleasure

Before we proceed to evaluate all the abovementioned formulations, let us focus on how we should understand pleasure. It seems that their plausibility may be importantly determined by what pleasure is or what its function is.

According to one of the earliest and most spread views of pleasure, it is a raw and irreducible feeling or sensation. Historically, the most prominent advocates of this view were Locke¹⁰ and Bentham,¹¹ and it was widely accepted throughout the 18th century. What enables us to distinguish pleasure from other experiences (e.g., the sweet taste of a piece of chocolate in our mouth, the impression of warmth, or pain) is solely the way it feels. Thus, when explaining what pleasure is to another person, the best we can do is point to experiences that typically include pleasure, like tasting a doughnut, listening to beautiful music, or reading a fascinating novel. We can say that pleasure is the feeling that these experiences share.

Many authors challenged the simple view,¹² the most influential being the objection of heterogeneity by Henry Sidgwick. He stated that there is no single feeling of pleasure. For example, the pleasantness of eating ice cream phenomenologically differs from that of listening to music or reading an engaging story.¹³ To some authors, e.g., Justin C. B. Gosling, the heterogeneity of pleasure leads to the conclusion that maybe there is no single category of pleasure but a number of loosely related categories. Gilbert Ryle¹⁴ develops further this line of criticism by arguing that pleasure cannot be itself a sensation, as every sensation can be pleasurable or unpleasurable.

The above criticism led to the formulation of a more nuanced version of the simple feeling view. According to it, pleasure is not a single, separable phenomenological *qualium* but something that could be called a hedonic tone,

¹⁰ J. Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, London 1998, ch. 20.

¹¹ J. Bentham, *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*, New York 2012, ch. 4.

¹² E.g. H. Sidgwick, *The methods of ethics*, London 1962; G. Ryle, *The concept of mind*, London 2009, ch. 4; J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and desire: The case of hedonism reviewed*, Oxford 1969; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Cambridge–London 2000.

¹³ See H. Sidgwick, *The methods of ethics*.

¹⁴ See also G. Ryle, *Dilemmas: The tarner lectures*, Cambridge 2015.

a feature pervading various pleasurable experiences regardless of their phenomenological differences. Shelly Kagan explains the idea of such an experience of pleasure by pointing to the analogy of experiencing sound volume. Just as we can speak of a high volume of phenomenologically various sounds, like a loud guitar or piano, so it is with pleasure.¹⁵ We can conceive of a spectrum of pleasurability, representing a unified category of hedonic tone that can be ascribed to diverse experiences despite their phenomenological differences.

The concept of hedonic tone seems to respond to the objection of heterogeneity convincingly; however, one can still ask questions about pleasure, the most important being whether pleasure has any function, to which one would have to refer, trying to point at pleasure's essential features. The question seems justified if we take a closer look at the analogous experience of sound volume that Kagan refers to in his explanation of pleasure heterogeneity. The experience of the volume of sound informs us about an objective feature of sound understood as a physical process. The experience in question plays a cognitive function. Maybe the same is the case with pleasure.

Before we pass on to the concept that the experience of pleasure plays such a cognitive role, let us first mention another interpretation of pleasure, called the attitudinal approach. According to this interpretation, pleasure is a kind of favoring attitude towards a given sensation.¹⁶ The advocates of the attitudinal view claim that if a given experience is pleasant to us, this means that we desire it, like it, or want it to continue.¹⁷ "Desire" is usually applied as a pro-attitude term that covers all favorable attitudes like acceptance, fondness, love, etc.

Taking such an understanding of pleasure allows its advocates to avoid the objection of the heterogeneity of pleasant experiences. It is not

¹⁵ See S. Kagan, *The limits of well-being*, "Social Philosophy & Policy" 9 (1992) no. 2, pp. 169–189.

¹⁶ See H. Sidgwick, *The methods of ethics*; G. Ryle, *The concept of mind*; G. Ryle, *Dilemmas: The tarner lectures*; C. D. Broad, *Five types of ethical theory*, London 1930, pp. 237–238.

¹⁷ See W.P. Alston, *Pleasure*, in: *The encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards, New York 1996, pp. 341–347; R. Brandt, *The explanation of moral language*, in: *Morality, reason, and truth: New essays on the foundations of ethics*, eds. D. Copp, D. Zimmerman, Totowa 1985; F. Feldman, *The intrinsic value of pleasure*, "Ethics" 107 (1997) no. 3, pp. 448–466; J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and desire*; C. Heathwood, *Desire satisfaction and hedonism*, "Philosophical Studies" 128 (2006), pp. 539–563; H. Sidgwick, *The methods of ethics*; I. Singer, *The nature of love*, vol. 2: *Courteous and romantic*, Chicago 1984.

the phenomenological content but our attitude that defines the experience as pleasant. This view can also explain how phenomenologically equivalent experiences may be pleasant in some cases and unpleasant in others. For example, the same song, when heard for the first time, may not sound so pleasant, and later on, once one gets more acquainted with it, it may become pleasant. The song seems to evoke the same phenomenal content in the experience in both cases; however, what makes the difference, namely what makes hearing the song a pleasant or unpleasant experience, seems to be our attitude towards the experience.

The attitudinal view, however, faces a number of difficulties. First of all pleasant experiences seem to be too complex, and there are too many differences between them to explain them all in terms of desire or liking. One may also object to the claim that listening to the same song when liked and when not always has the same phenomenal content. If, later on, the sounds of a given song seem more pleasing, it may result from the phenomenal differences between the experiences. Our perceiving certain new elements in the song, deeper relations between notes or themes or (if words play a role in the song) discovering new profound meanings, may influence our differences in feeling pleasure while listening to the song.

One can also ask whether these experiences are pleasurable because we desire; like them or we desire; like them because they are pleasant. In fact, sometimes, we do not want or like pleasant experiences. A good example is Schadenfreude, or the pleasure we might find in an addictive substance that we consciously want to stop using. We may find some pleasure in experiencing the taste of alcohol, at the same time, not accept or like the fact that we drink. It seems then that the attitudinal approach to pleasure does not give a satisfactory explanation of what pleasure is, nor what its function is.

Pleasure as a representation of good

In evaluating theories on the nature of pleasure, the hedonic tone perspective emerges as particularly compelling. Nonetheless, its conceptual richness could be augmented by incorporating insights from the representational or

perceptual approach. This approach posits pleasure as a marker of positive value, resonating with Anscombe's rejection of pleasure as merely an internal impression devoid of external context. Anscombe posited that experiencing an action as pleasurable, such as horseback riding, necessitates perceiving the action as inherently good. Consequently, the concept of pleasure presupposes an antecedent understanding of the good, aligning pleasure with actions and behaviors perceived by an individual as conducive to a specific good.¹⁸

This idea was interestingly developed by Bennett Helm in his theory of pleasure and pain as *felt evaluations*. He rejected a cognitivist view, in which all mental states, pleasure and pain included, are constructed by desires, beliefs or bodily sensations. Instead, he suggested that all emotions, sensations and desires share a feature of being "intrinsically motivating evaluation[s]" that impose themselves through pleasant or painful feelings.¹⁹ Felt evaluations would be characteristics of a mental state, similar to perceptions. They appear spontaneously like perceptions; we do not choose to have them.²⁰

In this view, pleasure and pain primarily function as guiding forces, directing individuals' attention towards positive or negative values (the good or bad). The (immediately) felt evaluations motivate us to either pursue the good or avoid the bad. Despite these evaluations being subjective, they also carry some objective information. To illustrate this claim, let us look more closely at an example of the pain experienced when breaking a leg or arm. Its representational function is obvious — it informs the individual about the problem within their body. Not being able to feel any pain is considered

¹⁸ Anscombe has also indicated a resemblance between "wanting" and "good," and "judgement" and "truth." She pointed out that "Truth is the object of judgement, and good is the object of wanting; it does not follow from this either that everything judged must be true, or that everything wanted must be good" (G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 76–77).

¹⁹ See B. W. Helm, *The significance of emotions*, "American Philosophical Quarterly" 31 (1994) no. 4, pp. 319–331; B. W. Helm, *Emotional reason: Deliberation, motivation and the nature of value*, Cambridge 2001; B. W. Helm, *Emotional and practical reason: Rethinking evaluation and motivation*, "Noûs" 35 (2001) no. 2, pp. 190–213; B. W. Helm, *Felt evaluations: A theory of pleasure and pain*, "American Philosophy Quarterly" 39 (2002) no. 1, pp. 13–30; B. W. Helm, *Emotions as evaluative feelings*, "Emotion Review" 1 (2009) no. 3, pp. 248–255.

²⁰ Similar view, but restricted to evolutionary considerations, takes Pianalto, see M. Pianalto, *Against the intrinsic value of pleasure*.

a serious disorder. Similarly, pleasure (although not perfectly, perhaps) informs an agent about the presence of something good.

We can give an analogous example of pleasure. The view of an old friend whom we have not met for a long time is usually experienced as pleasant. We may interpret it as perceiving the situation as good and the person we see as dear to us.²¹

We need to note, however, that pleasure and pain are not ideal indicators of good and evil. Similarly to the senses, which can be prone to hallucinations, our felt evaluations might be misleading. For example, one could perceive physical activity as “painful” (uncomfortable) despite its beneficial impact on one’s health. Or one could find pleasure in harmful activities. This imperfection, however, does not deny the cognitive (perceptual) function of pleasant experiences. It only shows that they may require correction.²²

Evaluating various formulations of hedonism

Suppose we assume the perceptual (representational) interpretation of pleasure. In that case, we can find out what consequences such an understanding of pleasure might have on each of the four formulations of hedonism mentioned earlier.

²¹ Helm does not merely speak of pleasure or pain but proposes a more comprehensive view that focuses on emotions, pleasure or pain being their aspects or elements. Apart from Helm, there are other authors who take a similar view of axiological perception e.g.: C. Tappolet, *Emotions, values, and agency*, Oxford 2016; R. C. Roberts, *Emotions: An essay in aid of moral psychology*, Cambridge 2003; R. C. Roberts, *Emotions in the moral life*, Cambridge 2013.

²² We can understand pleasure (or pain) similarly to what John Bolender understood by emotional moral intuitions, which were generated by “informationally encapsulated modules.” These modules, as having access to limited information, are, in the light of Bolender’s view, prone to making “jumping conclusions.” This fact, however, does not make them totally unreliable but they need some (sometimes deep) corrections via reflection. See J. Bolender, *A two-tiered cognitive architecture for moral reasoning*, “Biology and Philosophy” 16 (2001), pp. 339–356.

Pleasure is the only intrinsic good

According to this strongest version of hedonism, pleasure is the only intrinsic good. In the light of perceptual interpretation of pleasure, such a formulation should be rejected. If we agree that, by nature, pleasure is a form of awareness of what is good, accepting such a strong hedonist view would lead to serious difficulties. In such a view, pleasure would be supposed to identify merely itself (as the only intrinsic good) and the means which lead to it. Such a situation would be equivalent to a vicious circle.²³

Of course, one might try to avoid this objection by saying that one pleasure is an awareness of a different pleasure. Such a response, however, would not be of much help. If pleasure₁ were a form of awareness of some pleasure₂, or some instrumental good leading to pleasure₂, we could ask: awareness of what would be pleasure₁? It seems that explaining pleasure_n in terms of informing us about some other pleasure_{n+1} would lead to infinite regress. Each time we point to some example of pleasure as an explanation, we need to go on to some further instances of pleasure as an explanation of what was to explain the first instance of pleasure. The only way out would be to admit that there are other intrinsic goods than pleasure; therefore, the version of hedonism claiming that pleasure is the only intrinsic good must be false.²⁴

Pleasure is the highest good

How about the formulation of hedonism, according to which pleasure is the highest good? Such a view would avoid the vicious circle or infinite regression objection. Since, according to this view, there are other intrinsic goods, one's pleasure would not only point to itself or other pleasures. Can we, however, consider pleasure to be the highest intrinsic good? Let us use an argument

²³ Pianalto seems to take a similar strategy in his criticism of hedonism. See M. Pianalto, *Against the intrinsic value of pleasure*, pp. 33–39.

²⁴ One might persist in claiming that there might exist “fundamental pleasures” that are not serving as indicators of other goods but are original goods. Such a possibility, however, would go against our assumption that each pleasure fulfils such a cognitive function.

from an analogy that might help us see the relation between pleasure and other goods. Metaphorically speaking, the relation of pleasure to other goods is like that of a map to some real places on the Earth. Just like the map helps us identify these places, pleasure helps us track down goods. The metaphor of the map follows from what we have said about pleasure's function of representing or identifying goods.

It seems reasonable to say that the map is of instrumental value. Its function is to help us find hidden treasures.²⁵ If the places shown on the map contained no treasure, the map would be useless. Thus, the map's value is ontologically dependent on the value of the treasures it helps one identify. Similarly, the value of pleasure seems ontologically reliant on the value of the goods it helps us track down. If so, pleasure cannot be considered the highest intrinsic value. If enabling us to track other values is its function, its value is derivative, and as such, it cannot surpass the value of what is being tracked. Thus, the second formulation of hedonism must be false. The above claim does not lead to denying pleasure's intrinsic goodness. It merely points to the fact that pleasures' function to track other goods makes it somehow subordinated to those other goods.²⁶

Pleasure is one of the intrinsic goods

According to the third formulation, pleasure would be one of the intrinsic goods. Concerning such a view, two things can be said. Firstly, treated as a form of awareness of good, pleasure seems to be only of instrumental value.

²⁵ For obvious reasons, we have to ignore the fact that these treasures would also be instrumental goods. What matters in this metaphor is the relation between the map and the places it serves to identify.

²⁶ It might be said in response that even if pleasure lost its function to indicate other goods, one could still argue for its supreme value. The argument would consist in showing that while one could consider his own life as good without having particular other intrinsic goods, one could not consider his life as good had there been no pleasure in it. As such a defence is characteristic of well-being hedonism, we will leave our answer to it for a later section of this paper.

Secondly, and more importantly, such a formulation can hardly be classified as hedonistic.

Returning to the first remark, we do not claim that pleasure must always be interpreted as instrumental.²⁷ We admit that sometimes, it is rational to be motivated merely by pleasure. For example, it is completely reasonable to go to a movie, listen to music, or have ice cream only for the sake of pleasant experiences. However, we do not claim pleasure has non-instrumental value, either. We leave this question open.

Nevertheless, admitting that pleasure may be autotelic or that it has some *prima facie* intrinsic axiological force does not make one a hedonist yet. Such a claim is not sufficient to be hedonistic. For this reason, John Stuart Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures is considered to undermine hedonism.²⁸ Moreover, if we accepted that the mere claim that pleasure is an intrinsic value would make one a hedonist; we would have to consider as hedonists such authors as Plato²⁹ Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, or Ross, Scheler at least some of whom (e.g. Ross)³⁰ directly rejected hedonism.

²⁷ This is one of two important differences between our view and that of Pianalto. To him, pleasure is just of instrumental value, while we allow it to be a sufficient reason motivating human action. The other important difference is that Pianalto strongly binds pleasure with evolution and the goal of survival. We do not exclude such an interpretation, however, we want to be open to other cognitive approaches to pleasure that do not limit the goods tracked down by pleasure to survival. See M. Pianalto, *Against the intrinsic value of pleasure*.

²⁸ E.g. G. Graham, *Eight theories of ethics*, London 2004, pp. 43–47. For the same reason, it is difficult to accept Feldman's position as hedonistic. Accepting all the conditions that pleasures must meet to be morally acceptable (such as pleasure being taken in objects that are true or worthy, see F. Feldman, *Pleasure and the good life*, p. 112; 121), Feldman seems to admit there are other goods (or values) than pleasure that can limit the set of acceptable pleasures.

²⁹ Plato's recipe for the good life in *Philebus* consists of pleasure, although it is given the last place in the mixture. The holistic nature of Plato's virtue requires pleasure to be a part of it, and a virtuous life is the equivalent of the good life. See Plato, *Philebus*, transl. J. C. B. Gosling, Oxford 1975; D. Russell, *Plato on pleasure and the good life*, Oxford 2005, pp. 199–204.

³⁰ See W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Oxford 1930, ch. 5.

Pleasure is the necessary and sufficient condition of a human well-being

In this formulation, hedonism is based on the intuition that pleasure or enjoyment seems worth having in one's life, regardless of whether it is accompanied by any objective good.³¹ What is evaluated here is not one's life in separation from how this life is to the person living it. We could imagine the life of an inventor who invented something of great value to humanity or all living beings, something that, for example, reversed ecological disaster, but whose life was deprived of positive experiences. The advocate of the above formulation of hedonism would not have to deny that such an inventor's life was meaningful or good in some objective way, or at least to a huge number of people other than the inventor. However, such a life would not contribute to the inventor's well-being if he did not enjoy it. According to this form of hedonism, pleasure is a necessary condition for one's well-being, i.e., a condition for a given life to be good to the person who lives it. How would we evaluate this form of hedonism through the conceptual lenses of taking pleasure as a form of consciousness, perception or acquaintance with an objective good?

To answer this question, let us first look at three scenarios of the inventor's life. Let us name him John and imagine his life in three similar worlds differing in the following way. In the first world, W_1 , John saves the world from ecological disasters; his private life is good (e.g., he finds true love, has genuine friends, etc.), and he feels great joy because of it. In the second world, W_2 , John has achieved all these good things apart from the joy. He does not appreciate his life by feeling joy, even if, maybe, on some anhedonic level, he might be convinced that his life is good. Finally, in the third world, W_3 , John experiences great joy because of his life; however, the facts do not justify his joy. He did not save the world, and his private life is poor (no true love, no real friends, etc.), but he just imagines he has all this or simply feels joy without bothering to understand why.

Now, taking pleasure as a form of consciousness of goodness, how would we classify the three scenarios as instantiating John's well-being? It seems

³¹ Cf. R. Crisp, *Hedonism reconsidered*.

intuitive that W_1 is an uncontroversial example of well-being. John in W_1 feels joy that is not an illusion, as it is justified by objective goods in his life. We would also agree with the well-being hedonist that W_2 lacks an important element of a good life. What value does life have to a person if the person is not able to be aware of the goods around her? We might compare John's situation in W_2 to that of a person who bought a fancy car but forgot about it and lost the ability to perceive the car. In a way, she would be the car's owner; however, she cannot benefit from this ownership. Similarly, having real achievements in life or being surrounded by true goods would have no impact on one's life unless one enjoys them, i.e. is aware of them.

Nevertheless, admitting that enjoyment is essential to one's well-being cannot yet be called accepting a hedonist view. Hedonists do not only claim that enjoyment is a necessary condition of well-being but, at the same time, that enjoyment alone suffices for well-being. For this reason, the hedonist in question would count W_3 as an example of a good life. From our perspective, with pleasure interpreted as awareness (perceptual) representation of something good, W_3 is not an example of desirable well-being. John's joy in W_3 rests on an illusion.

In response to this, a hedonist in question might offer us one more scenario of W_4 in which John's life is a failure, and he is aware of it, i.e., he feels dissatisfaction with his life (understood as the opposite of pleasure or enjoyment). The advocate of hedonism might then argue that having false beliefs about one's life, which prevent one from dissatisfaction, would be better for this person's well-being than in W_4 . If so, then the fact of enjoyment adds something in terms of value to John's life.³²

We would argue, however, that life in W_3 is not desirable, at least in ordinary circumstances. Correct awareness of what is good or bad gives John a chance and motivation to change his life, while getting stuck in an illusion is a dead end. Usually, if the situation is not hopeless, W_4 might be seen as a better situation than W_3 . John in W_4 can at least see what is wrong with his life and thus make some decisions to improve it.

³² See e.g. I. Tully, *Is pleasure merely an instrumental good? Reply to Pianalto*, "Journal of Value Inquiry" 52 (2018) no 1, pp. 135–138.

The truth about the goodness of pain (dissatisfaction or suffering) — with the exclusion of hopeless cases — is even more obvious in the context of physical pain. If we did not feel physical pain, we would not avoid putting our limbs into fire, cutting them, or hitting them against hard surfaces, etc. Of course, in cases of terminal diseases, when the evil represented by pain cannot be eliminated, removing pain might be necessary for elevating one's well-being. We are not sure, however, whether such cases constitute sufficient support for the claim that pleasant experiences are enough to call a given life good to someone. In such scenarios, the removal of pain might be more aptly described as a mitigation of harm rather than an embodiment of intrinsic good.

Of course, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which a demon is setting the world for John, and the demon may guarantee that John's life will never change. However, this scenario is much further away from real life and hangs on a very improbable assumption. In normal circumstances, the illusion of goodness via pleasant experiences would not deserve the name of intrinsic goodness.

Pleasure as a legitimate goal of actions

Before we close this paper with a conclusion, we need to explain further one thread we have mentioned earlier. We signalled that by pointing to the instrumental dimension of pleasure, we do not think pleasure should never be a proper goal of our actions. Listening to music, dancing, watching a movie, or having an ice cream just for fun or pleasure would not require special justification. We often do it and rightly count such experiences as important elements of a good life, even if such experiences are usually based on some illusion of goodness. When reading a book or watching a movie, we let the authors lead us into pretending that, for example, we witness a heroic act, while in fact, no such act is taking place.

However, by allowing pleasure to be a legitimate goal of some of our actions, we do not necessarily take a hedonistic position. First of all, treating pleasure as an intrinsic good does not mean that such a position is hedonistic. Secondly, even these cases of being motivated by pleasure from a higher

level could be considered useful for realizing other goods. Dancing, listening to music, or watching a movie could be valued through their consequences. They could be viewed as forms of recreation or appreciation of some other goods, such as health (as would be the case in dancing or doing sports), beauty (listening to music), or moral goodness (reading a heroic story). Suppose we tried to separate pleasure by assuring that it would not be playing the role of any appreciation of other goods. In that case, such separation might undermine the value of the achieved pleasure. A good example would be provoking vomits at parties in Roman times, only to enable one to enjoy the taste of food. Nevertheless, even if one could point to examples of pure pleasure as the only goal of one's actions that is fully reasonable, it still would not suffice to support any of the hedonistic claims analyzed in this paper.³³

Conclusions

In the conclusion, we can say three things. Firstly, there are good reasons to treat pleasure as a form of consciousness of the good. Secondly, adopting the perceptual concept of pleasure allows us to reject classical hedonism regardless of whether it claims pleasure is the only intrinsic good or the highest one. Thirdly, adopting this view undermines the modified hedonism about well-being, according to which pleasure or enjoyment is a necessary and sufficient condition of human well-being. We do not claim that the advocates of this last form of hedonism cannot defend their view against our objection. We may say, however, that now the burden of argument is on their side.

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³³ The only exception would be claim c. **Pleasure (enjoyment), along with some other goods, is an intrinsic good**, however, as we have pointed out, it is not sufficient for hedonism.

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