

## The Hedonist's Dilemma

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It is common to group theories of well-being into the following three categories: *hedonism* (the view that pleasure is the sole prudential good; pain the sole bad), *desire-satisfactionism* (a wide swath of views that claim, roughly speaking, that a person's welfare depends on the satisfaction of her desires), and the *objective-list* (the view that prudential value is independent of an agent's pro-attitudes toward purported goods).

This taxonomy, however, is imperfect (which is not to say that it is not useful). Importantly, it seems to miss tremendous amounts of logical space—not all non-hedonist, non-objective list views must fall into the category of desire satisfaction. (Importantly, *perfectionism* comes to mind, as do various hybrid views.<sup>1</sup>) I propose the following tripartite grouping. In a rough-and-ready way, the first category, *hedonism*, suggests that pleasure is the sole prudential good for humans. The second category, *subjectivism*, holds that in explaining why  $\phi$  is good for  $x$ , one must appeal to the  $x$ 's *agential endorsement* of  $\phi$ , most commonly some desire or preference. Finally, a third category is *objectivism*. Objective views insist that welfare goods need not be endorsed; objectivism denies that agential endorsement is a necessary condition on welfare. Objective theories can, in principle, evaluate lives by criteria independent of an agent's various pro-attitudes, whether desiderative or otherwise.

But this taxonomy is also a bit strange. One of these categories is not like the others. Logical space appears to be fully covered by the distinction between *subjective* theories, which suggest that a necessary condition for the prudential value of  $\phi$  is agential endorsement of  $\phi$ , and *objective* theories, which deny this. Where, then, does *hedonism* fall?

There are options for the hedonist; hedonism can be construed subjectively or objectively. However, as I shall try to show here, this choice creates

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, Robert Adams' "enjoyment of the excellent"; see *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 3.

a dilemma for hedonism. On a subjective interpretation, hedonism is open to the familiar objection that pleasure is not the only thing desired or the only thing for which we possess a pro-attitude. On an objective interpretation, hedonism lacks an independent rationale. In this paper, I do not claim that hedonism fails once and for all. However, this dilemma illustrates a serious problem for hedonism, the solution to which is not immediately obvious, and which must be addressed if hedonism is to be considered a serious competitor for the true theory of well-being.

### 1. A Closer Look

As stated above, the logical space of welfare is fully captured by the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism. If so, hedonism must be compatible with one of them. But the philosophical literature on well-being has not settled on one clear boundary between subjective and objective theories of well-being, so it is important to say a few words about what *I* mean by these terms. First, I do not mean a distinction that is commonly made between theories of well-being that hold that “components of a valuable life consist in or depend importantly on certain of an individual’s psychological states” and theories that “claim that what is intrinsically valuable neither consists in nor depends importantly on such psychological states.”<sup>2</sup> On this view all hedonist theories will turn out to be subjective. This distinction is useful—it is, however, not what I mean by subjective and objective theories of welfare. Rather, my distinction centers around whether a theory requires that prudentially valuable states be *endorsed* by the person for whom those states are valuable. Among others, this distinction is put to good use by Richard Arneson and L. W. Sumner.<sup>3</sup>

To get a better handle, let’s start with objectivism. For objectivism, that  $x$  takes a particular pro-attitude toward  $\phi$  is not a requirement for  $\phi$ ’s prudential value for  $x$ . Objectivism does not require that purported goods be ratified or endorsed from the evaluative perspective of the agent in question.<sup>4</sup> Rather, objective accounts insist that there is at least one genuine good that need not be so ratified.

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<sup>2</sup>David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 220-1.

<sup>3</sup>See Richard Arneson, ‘Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction’, *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16 (1999); L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 2. See also David Sobel, ‘On The Subjectivity of Welfare’, *Ethics* 107 (1997).

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Arneson, ‘Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction’, p. 116.

Subjectivism accepts what objectivism denies, namely that purported goods *must* satisfy a test of agential endorsement or ratification. Importantly, there are two versions of welfare subjectivism that I distinguish here. For *weak* subjectivism, though it is perhaps not a sufficient condition, it is a necessary condition for  $\phi$ 's prudential value for  $x$  that  $\phi$  be endorsed, perhaps under idealized conditions, by  $x$ . Strong subjectivism adds to weak subjectivism's necessary condition a sufficient condition:  $\phi$  is prudentially valuable for  $x$  if and only if  $\phi$  is endorsed, perhaps under idealized conditions, by  $x$ . A classical desire-satisfaction view is an instance of strong subjectivism: very roughly speaking, what is good for  $x$  is that which  $x$  desires. Sidgwick endorses a slightly different version of strong subjectivism: "A person's future good on the whole is what he would now desire and seek on the whole if all the consequences of all the different lines of conduct open to him were accurately foreseen and adequately realised in imagination at the present point of time."<sup>5</sup> Sidgwick identifies someone's "future good on the whole" as that particular event or set of events which, among those open to him, he endorses—where "endorsement" is characterized by "what he would now desire and seek on the whole" under conditions of full information and adequate imaginative realization. Railton writes: "an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality."<sup>6</sup> On Railton's view, some object or event is good for someone if and only if that object or event is endorsed, where this is characterized by an idealized second-order desire. Similar views are pushed by R. B. Perry,<sup>7</sup> David Lewis,<sup>8</sup> and others.

Though there are other versions of a weak subjectivism, Richard Kraut suggests a plausible and important version: "what makes one's life a good one is one's caring about something worth caring about."<sup>9</sup> For Kraut, some-

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<sup>5</sup>Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 7th ed., 1981 [1907]), pp. 111-12.

<sup>6</sup>Peter Railton, 'Facts and Values' in *Facts, Values, and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup>R. B. Perry, *The General Theory of Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 115-6.

<sup>8</sup>David Lewis, 'Dispositional Theories of Value' in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 71. It is worth noting that Perry and Lewis describe their views as theories of "value" *tout court* and not "prudential value".

<sup>9</sup>Richard Kraut, 'Desire and the Human Good', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 68 (1994), p. 44.

one cannot achieve welfare goods without having interests—but merely fulfilling one’s interests is not enough for prudential value. One must be interested in things that are independently worth caring about.

Some might object to my taxonomy.<sup>10</sup> Subjectivism as I define it yields that certain purported goods, such as objects, states, or events, are good because they possess a certain relational property: being desired or endorsed.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the desiderative views I note above suggest that  $x$  is good for an agent on the basis of its being desired under the proper conditions. However, others might characterize a desiderative view differently. One might say that the state or event that has prudential value is not the state or event *desired* or, to quote Perry, is the *object* “of any interest”, but rather the state of *having a desire satisfied*—viz., the state that consists of a conjunction: desiring that  $\phi$ , and  $\phi$ . (One might endorse this description if one believes that prudential value must depend only on the intrinsic properties of that which is prudentially valuable.) The value of this conjunctive state needn’t be endorsed, and hence this form of a desire satisfaction seems to end up, contrary to common understanding, as an objective view. Whether this result is plausible or not, for my money, is neither here nor there. As I note above, most major desire-satisfaction views identify value as residing in the desired state, object, or event, rather than in the conjunctive state of desiring that  $\phi$ , and  $\phi$ . However, *if* all desire satisfaction views must end up on the subjective side, one is free to recast “subjectivism” as the view that a necessary feature of any state’s prudential value is the *fulfillment* of a pro-attitude (whether the fulfillment is part of the prudentially valuable state, or whether the prudentially valuable state just is that state to which the agent takes a pro-attitude). Nothing in my argument here hinges on which of these two versions of the taxonomy one accepts.

I think there is much to be said when it comes to the usefulness of this taxonomy: this way of drawing the distinction between subjective and objective theories is useful in distinguishing between theories that insist on—as Richard Arneson has described it—“agent sovereignty” over welfare goods, and those theories that do not. But all this being said, a defense of the usefulness of my taxonomy is simply beside the point. Because objectivism is subjectivism’s denial, any account of welfare must choose to align itself with either subjectivism or objectivism—whether or not my account of the distinction is more or less useful, generally speaking.<sup>12</sup> And in deciding

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<sup>10</sup>Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this worry.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Railton’s “nutritiveness” analogy, Railton, ‘Facts and Values’, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup>See Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, pp. 38-9. According to Sumner, subjectivism and objectivism are “mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive.”

whether hedonism is an objective or subjective view, we uncover a significant problem for hedonism: neither option can plausibly sustain the claim that pleasure is the sole good.

## 2. Hedonism as Subjective

In this section I consider the subjective version of hedonism. For the sake of simplicity, I will characterize agential endorsement as *desiderative*, with the caveat that it need not be so characterized. One might replace the prudential authority of desire with the prudential authority of an agent's *value judgments* or *conception of the good*.<sup>13</sup> None of the arguments here will presume a desiderative approach to agential endorsement. (For those who prefer a different approach, one can simply translate the term “desired” as “endorsed.”) With that in mind, hedonism can be construed as a subjective view in one of two ways. The first way is to adopt a form of strong subjectivism and couple this view with the claim that pleasure and the absence of pain is the only thing that is desired (or endorsed) for its own sake. The second way is to adopt a weak subjectivism, which would couple an independent commitment to hedonism with the claim that all welfare goods are endorsed (this, in turn, can be done in two ways). Neither option is successful.

### 2.1. Hedonism and Strong Subjectivism

*Psychological hedonism* is the view that pleasure is the only thing desired for its own sake, it is the only ultimate, underived motivation. A common argument for hedonism takes psychological hedonism and runs with it. This view accepts strong subjectivism, but because we desire only pleasure for its own sake, pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the only contributors to the value of a life.

One might accept a “looser” or “wider” account of psychological hedonism. Rather than suggest that the object of all our desires or volitions is pleasure, one might accept that the object of all our *good-making desires* is pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Historically, this is an important argument for hedonism. Versions of it show up in Epicurus,<sup>14</sup> Gosling,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See, for instance, Dale Dorsey, ‘Subjectivism without Desire’, MS. In that paper, I defend a non-desiderative form of subjectivism.

<sup>14</sup>See especially his “Letter to Menoeceus”.

<sup>15</sup>J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire: The Case for Hedonism Reviewed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). Gosling rejects this argument for hedonism, but he takes

and others.<sup>16</sup> The views of these thinkers are not identical, however. Each restricts the range of good-making desires. Sidgwick, for instance, requires that welfare-relevant desires be formed under conditions of full information and full awareness. It is important to note, however, that on this version of subjective hedonism, good-making desires are picked out in a *value-neutral* way: the relevant desires are not chosen on the basis of antecedent value commitments (such as an antecedent commitment to hedonism). The relevant good-making desires, then, will take as their objects only pleasure and the absence of pain. Hence, hedonism is true but as a consequence of a strong subjectivism.

Whether wide or narrow, this strategy is flimsy indeed. After all, how can we possibly be sure that pleasure and only pleasure is picked out by (good-determining) desires? If anything, this question is surely to be settled *a posteriori*, as a matter of psychological fact. But even the results of armchair psychology appear problematic for either version of psychological hedonism. For instance, Robert Nozick's classic "experience machine" thought-experiment appears to be a conclusive refutation of psychological hedonism in either its narrow or loose formulation.<sup>17</sup> Though we do perhaps desire pleasure, we don't desire it exclusively. It thus seems to me that if one is identifying good-making desires value-neutrally, it is unlikely under any such account that pleasure will be the *sole* object of such desires. We appear to desire other things as well, including genuine achievement. Accepting this form of subjectivism appears to point to the claim that pleasure is only one aspect of well-being among others. This point also seems to generalize to other, non-desiderative forms of agential endorsement. Whatever the mental attitude one must take towards purported benefits (so long as this mental attitude is specified value-neutrally), it appears that this attitude can and will be taken toward states other than pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

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a subjectivist approach to be the most plausible argument available.

<sup>16</sup>David Hume appears to treat the importance of pleasure and pain as an outcome of our motivational sentiments—see *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3.3.1.1, although this is substantially controversial. Though the explanatory relationship is not quite clear, Jeremy Bentham appears to point to some form of subjectivist hedonism in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, I i.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 42-45.

<sup>18</sup>Roger Crisp has argued for a "two-level" solution to the experience machine argument. Cf. Roger Crisp, *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 120-1. Our desires point to genuine achievement rather than pleasure in this case because, as a general rule of thumb, seeking genuine achievement has a tendency to result in more pleasure than pursuing pleasure directly, for its own sake. Thus our desires, though they may be for things other than pleasure, are simply a mechanism used to produce more

But leaving aside Nozick’s argument for the moment, there is a deeper argument against this form of hedonism. If hedonism rests on a value-neutral subjectivism, it is counterfactually thin. Even if some form or other of psychological hedonism is plausible, we can certainly *imagine* a person who desires some object *x*, irrespective of facts about pleasure. Of course, total counterfactual stability need not be a feature of the most plausible account of welfare. We might imagine that creatures who are manifestly different creatures than humans in fact are would, plausibly, have a different account of well-being. But one need not stretch the imagination, nor would one need to imagine a creature that is *so* different from human beings as we know them to imagine a creature that desired (or endorsed), in addition to pleasure, genuine achievement for its own sake. Even if we do *actually* desire only pleasure for its own sake, this argument for hedonism is true only for a very narrow range of possible circumstances. The possible world in which agents desire achievement in addition to pleasure for its own sake is not *distant* (if, in fact, it is not the actual world).

## 2.2. Hedonic Subjectivism

One might respond to the failure of psychological hedonism by endorsing weak subjectivism rather than strong subjectivism. Call this view “hedonic subjectivism”. On this view, we approach subjectivism with an antecedent commitment to hedonism, and tailor our subjectivism to deliver the verdict that pleasure and the absence of pain are the sole welfare goods.<sup>19</sup> There are two versions of hedonic subjectivism I will consider here. The first (HS1) holds that not all desires are authoritative for prudential value, rather only desires for *mental states*. This view is explored in Derek Parfit and Richard Kraut.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, HS1 requires an *account* of pleasure that defines plea-

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pleasure rather than less. This is an interesting proposal, but one that clearly runs afoul of *subjective* hedonism, at least of the sort under consideration here. Subjective hedonism takes our desires (or some relevant subset thereof) seriously as good-making. Few seriously dispute that our actual (even actual *ultimate*) desires sometimes point away from pleasure.

<sup>19</sup>There are actually two ways to understand this claim. One might in fact hold that hedonic subjectivism is a version of strong subjectivism, and claim that all and only good-making desires are desires for pleasure. Alternatively, one might hold that hedonic subjectivism is a form of weak subjectivism, insisting that any welfare-good must have two properties: being desired, and being a pleasure. These views are equivalent and share the same problems. For the sake of clarity, however, I interpret hedonic subjectivism as a weak subjectivist view here.

<sup>20</sup>Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), app. I; Kraut, ‘Desire and the Human Good’, pp. 46-7.

sure as, say, desired mental states. If pleasure is brain activation state  $\alpha$ , then HS1 would be unable to support hedonism because an agent could desire, for instance, brain activation state  $\beta$ . However, this is a common tactic (as explored by Parfit and Kraut, among others) deployed in response to a standard critique of hedonism, the “no such thing” argument. Though pleasure is not one identifiable phenomenological experience, so the response goes, this does not mean we cannot be hedonists: rather, we identify pleasure by desired experiences or desired mental states.<sup>21</sup> On this assumption, HS1 yields hedonism.

This definition of pleasure, however, has come under fire; it is not clear that the best account of pleasure is one that identifies pleasure with desired experiences.<sup>22</sup> I will leave this discussion aside here. However, even if HS1 fails for this reason, we might simply restate the version of hedonic subjectivism on offer. Consider, now, HS2: good-determining desires are those desires that take pleasure and the absence of pain as their objects. This view would accommodate hedonism whatever one’s definition of pleasure, and would be a hedonic version of the weak subjectivism suggested by Kraut in §1 (on this view, the only thing “worth caring about” is pleasure and the absence of pain).

In order for any version of HS2 to succeed, hedonism must be an antecedent commitment. As opposed to value-neutral subjectivisms, for HS2 the standard explanatory direction is reversed. Rather than claiming that the value of some purported good is explained by the value-conferring properties of a desire (or other form of agential endorsement), the welfare-relevance of a desire is explained by the independent value of the desired good (viz., pleasure). (This holds also for HS1. If pleasure just is desired mental states, and one wishes to narrow welfare-relevant desires to only those desires *for mental states*, one must be antecedently committed to the value of desired mental states, i.e., pleasure.) In this case, we appear to be committed to hedonism independently of any appeal to desire. Pleasure appears to be valuable not *because* it is the object of desire; rather, desires for pleasure are picked out as welfare-relevant on the basis of the objective value of their objects, viz., pleasure. However, the resulting view is not equivalent

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<sup>21</sup>A hedonist view that identified pleasure with desired mental states would not be equivalent to a hedonist view that identified pleasure with desired experiences; there are some non-experiential mental states (such as the state of dreamless sleep). I will leave aside this complication here, however, and treat these views as identical; the problems with these views, in any event, are identical.

<sup>22</sup>See, for instance, Ingmar Persson, *The Retreat of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chs. 1-2; Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, ch. 4.

to objective hedonism. As noted above, one can be a (weak) subjectivist while rejecting the claim that agential endorsement is a necessary and sufficient condition for welfare goods. We might suggest that because we are committed to the sole value of pleasure, and because we are committed to a weak form of subjectivism, we marry these commitments by insisting that all welfare goods must be both pleasure, and desired.

The first thing to note is that hedonic subjectivism of either variety yields an unstable marriage. Take HS2. In order to support some form or other of hedonic subjectivism, there must be two constraints on an agent's overall welfare. Not only must all welfare-relevant desires be desires for pleasure, it must be the case that all *welfare-relevant pleasure* is *desired*. However, this violates a range of intuitions that are likely to appeal to hedonists. Consider a person who has loads of pleasure, except that this person never forms the relevant pro-attitude toward pleasure. The pleasure is simply a by-product of a life spent successfully pursuing activities that she finds extremely valuable. She simply never takes any pro-attitude toward the pleasure itself. On this view, this person's life would fail to maintain any welfare at all. But (a) this appears to be too narrow a vision of the good life; leaving aside hedonism, it appears that there are several good reasons for believing that this agent maintains at least some well-being; (b) this is decidedly *unhedonist*. It seems to run counter to the guiding intuitions behind hedonism to describe the life of a person who has so much pleasure as lacking any welfare at all.

An analog of this argument can also be run for HS1: assume that a person never develops any pro-attitudes toward experiences. This person is simply indifferent to experiencing  $\phi$  rather than  $\psi$ , and instead desires only states of affairs that are external to her own experience. This person would achieve no welfare whatsoever, no matter *what* she experienced during her life. (As an aside, this might be reason for adopting HS2: for HS1, we would be committed to saying that this person had no pleasurable experiences merely because she had no desires for experiences or mental states.) Suppose that two people live lives composed of identical experiences, but one lacks a desire for any of those experiences, the other desires all the experiences he obtains. According to HS1, the former person would maintain no welfare at all, the second would live among the best lives possible—even if their non-desiderative mental states are identical. Again, this appears decidedly *unhedonist*. For either view to work, the independent commitment to pleasure as the sole good has to be strong enough to radically narrow the range of desires that are relevant to well-being. But it has to be weak enough to support the claim that a life of undesired pleasure (or undesired mental states) is at best

neutral. This is a strong internal tension and, it seems to me, a result no hedonist should be happy with.

I have so far been leaving aside what is surely the most problematic feature of hedonic subjectivism. This view faces an as-yet undischarged argumentative burden. In particular, the hedonic subjectivist must argue that the *hedonic* interpretation of weak subjectivism is more plausible than alternative interpretations of weak subjectivism. For instance, one might have an alternate dual commitment: a commitment to weak subjectivism and a commitment to *perfectionism*. Such a view would hold that what makes something worth wanting is its being an excellent example of the development of human nature. In order to decide between these views, we must investigate the *prior* commitment to hedonism rather than perfectionism, or any other range of competitor views of that which is “worth caring about”. But this places before the hedonic subjectivist the same burden as those who are committed to an objective version of hedonism: why should we believe that the sole welfare good, the sole thing worth caring about, is pleasure and the absence of pain and not, say, knowledge, achievement, and excellent activity? Given that this burden is borne by hedonic subjectivism, if an objective version of hedonism fails, so fails hedonic subjectivism. Hence I will return to hedonic subjectivism in §3.4.

### 3. Hedonism as Objective

A subjective hedonism stands on shaky ground. The natural response is to adopt an objective strategy. This view would entail that pleasure and only pleasure is a good-making property in a way independent of desires or agential endorsement. This strategy has been followed in the main by many of the recent defenders of hedonism, including Fred Feldman,<sup>23</sup> Roger Crisp,<sup>24</sup> and others.

But it should be noted that giving up on subjectivism is not costless. Though the objective hedonist need no longer argue that we desire pleasure and pleasure only, she must now meet a new argumentative burden. She must now argue that hedonism is the best *objective* view. Consider, for instance, the so-called “objective list” view. This view suggests that the good is given by a list of things that need not be recognized or endorsed by the agent in question. As a theory of well-being, objective hedonism is

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<sup>23</sup> *Pleasure and the Good Life: On the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Roger Crisp, ‘Hedonism Reconsidered’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73 (2006).

a *version* of the objective list. In particular, hedonism is an objective list view with *only one element*: pleasure (and the avoidance of pain). Many objective list theorists accept the value of pleasure as a good among others.<sup>25</sup> The objective hedonist's argumentative burden is to argue that pleasure and no other purported goods genuinely belong on the objective list.

But in going objective, hedonism deprives itself of perhaps the most natural argument in its favor and against other objective views. Consider, for instance, Feldman's discussion of a non-hedonist objective list:

Suppose some pluralist tells me that knowledge and virtue will make my life better. Suppose I dutifully go on about gaining knowledge and virtue. After a tedious and exhausting period of training, I become knowledgeable. I behave virtuously. I find the whole thing utterly unsatisfying. The pluralist tells me that my life is going well for me. I dispute it. I think I might be better off *intellectually* or *morally*, but my welfare is, if anything, going downhill. Surely a man might have lots of knowledge and virtue and yet have a life that is not good in itself for him.<sup>26</sup>

How Feldman's point should be read here is open to dispute; he might simply be insisting that no life is intuitively good unless it contains pleasure (an intuition to which I will return in §3.3). However, Feldman appears to note the implausibility of any account of well-being that is met with *consistent dispute* by the agent in question. Feldman's argument here makes use of an intuitive constraint on well-being, alternatively called "existence internalism" or a "resonance" or "non-alienation" constraint<sup>27</sup>—the suggestion that in order for something to be good for an agent, it "must be a possible object of her concern."<sup>28</sup> And, indeed, this appeal might succeed in motivating hedonism. After all, who could seriously dispute the value of their own pleasurable mental states? But the problem here should be relatively obvious. *If hedonism is construed as an objective theory*, the hedonist must be prepared to accept that the good can fail to resonate with, or can alienate, the agent whose good it is. Consider, for instance, an agent who lives a life of extreme pleasure, but who *desires* a life of knowledge and valued achievement. This

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Richard Arneson on "cheap thrills,"; Arneson, 'Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction', pp. 119-20.

<sup>26</sup>Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup>See Railton, 'Facts and Values', p. 47; David Brink, 'The Significance of Desire' in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* v. III, ed. Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>Connie Rosati, 'Internalism and the Good for a Person', *Ethics* 106 (1996), p. 302.

agent *knows* that he will obtain significantly less pleasure by such a life, but regards pleasure as simply one good among many, and is willing to make trade-offs of pleasure for achievement. The objective hedonist's suggestion that his life is actually going better if he fails in his preference for knowledge and achievement (but achieves pleasure instead) than if he were to fulfill his preference for knowledge and achievement is no less likely to be met with "dispute", is no less likely to be "alienating".<sup>29</sup> Thus Feldman's argument appeals to a rationale that is available only to the *subjective* hedonist.

In going objective, the hedonist is barred from the natural appeal to resonance, non-alienation, or "non-dispute" rationales. But, I argue, this move is fatal. In going objective rather than subjective, hedonism gives up on its best chance for an independently plausible rationale. Though I make no claim to comprehensiveness, I will discuss four possible rationales here. Even at their most plausible, none of them can succeed without a prior *de facto* commitment to hedonism.

### 3.1. Resonance Reconsidered: Attitudinal Hedonism

Feldman might protest. He accepts a non-standard hedonism, which holds that the valuable mental state should not be understood as some form of sensory pleasure. On the contrary, that which benefits an agent is the state of "taking pleasure in" something or other.<sup>30</sup> Feldman calls this mental state "attitudinal pleasure," and refers to his view as "attitudinal hedonism". This view might be thought to have substantial advantages. In particular, couldn't attitudinal pleasure be conceived as a *form* of resonance? And if this propositional attitude is properly conceived as resonating, why couldn't objective hedonism succeed on the basis of resonance?<sup>31</sup>

Four thoughts. First, I am compelled by recent critiques of attitudinal hedonism to the effect that Feldman's view does not adequately capture what is plausible about hedonism if the first place.<sup>32</sup> However, I shall leave this aside for the purposes of this discussion. Second, if the value of a resonance constraint is in part reflected in the implausibility of a good life being met with consistent dispute, attitudinal hedonism seems no particular help. I might take pleasure in many things, and yet think that doing so is

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<sup>29</sup>For an interesting example to this effect, see Daniel Haybron, 'Happiness, the Self, and Human Flourishing', *Utilitas* 20 (2008), pp. 24-5.

<sup>30</sup>Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, ch. 4.

<sup>31</sup>This response is suggested to me by an anonymous reviewer.

<sup>32</sup>See, for instance, Elinor Mason, 'The Nature of Pleasure: A Critique of Feldman', *Utilitas* 19 (2007).

depraved and unworthy of a human life; I might want to live any other sort of life than the one in which I take great pleasure. I can, for instance, *dispute* the value of the attitudinal pleasure. Hence it would seem that in seeking a proper account of the resonance constraint, attitudinal pleasure does not appear to measure up.

Third, it is unclear what is meant by the suggestion that attitudinal pleasure is a form of resonance, or can be conceived of as resonating. One possibility might be that this propositional attitude is a *way* of “caring about” something or a *way* of being non-alienated from something. But this is insufficient to allow hedonism to gain traction on the basis of a resonance constraint. If attitudinal pleasure is conceived as a form of resonance constraint, on this view, my taking pleasure in world peace entails that world peace resonates, not my *taking pleasure in world peace*.<sup>33</sup> In order for attitudinal pleasure to satisfy the resonance constraint—and be the only thing that satisfies the resonance constraint—it must be that the only thing that we take pleasure in is attitudinal pleasure, or the state of “taking pleasure in” something. But this move, in addition to being a reversion to subjective hedonism, is absurd. First, as with subjective hedonism, it is wrong to think that we only take pleasure in our own mental states. Second, such a position would require an infinite regress of states of attitudinal pleasure: I can only take pleasure in my taking pleasure in other states of taking pleasure in other states of taking pleasure in. . .

Fourth, the attitudinal hedonist might seek to revise the resonance constraint to insist on the value of *caring about* things, rather than on the value of that which is cared *about*. But even if we adopt this (to my mind implausible) strategy, this appeal cannot work for hedonism. Most importantly, even if the appeal to non-alienation can work for objective hedonism, it is unclear why *other* resonating states (beyond “taking pleasure in”, such as desiring, or believing good, or “taking life satisfaction in”) don’t *also* contribute to well-being. Even if we admit that taking pleasure in things is prudentially good on the basis of fulfilling the resonance constraint, *many other things* will also be of prudential value because *they* resonate. To argue for hedonism, one requires a further argument that resonance is necessary but not sufficient for well-being, and that there is something particular to hedonism that allows only *its* interpretation of resonance to succeed in satisfying plausible constraints on welfare. In other words, what has to be shown is that the only resonating state that contributes to well-being is the state of “taking pleasure in” something. But the problem for this view mirrors

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<sup>33</sup>See Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 56.

the problem for hedonic subjectivism. It appears that the only reason we would be motivated to believe that “taking pleasure in” is the only form of resonance that matters is *a priori commitment to hedonism*. If so, the resonance constraint can do no work for hedonism: there appear to be a variety of states that satisfy a plausible non-alienation constraint. In order to narrow the proper form of resonance, we have to know already what is special about hedonism; in other words, we need an independent argument for hedonism beyond the simple appeal to a resonance constraint.

### 3.2. Theoretic Unity

One further possibility is that hedonism, as a monist view, has a distinct advantage over other objective list views: theoretic unity.<sup>34</sup> Offhand, my description of hedonism as an objective list view might have seemed inapt. Objective list views are known for their lack of a commitment to a unifying theoretic strand: the elements of the list need not be related to each other *via* some further, more fundamental good-maker. But hedonism is not like this. Hedonism is a monist view. Insofar as it admits of only one good-making property, it is perfectly unified.

This might itself be an important asset for hedonism. The lack of theoretic unification for the objective list view has been thought a cost of these views. If there is no additional good-making property that links, say, knowledge, virtue, and pleasure together on a single list, the wider objective list view becomes, in the words of David Brink, a “disorganized heap of goods”.<sup>35</sup> Of course, appeals to the unifying power of a given philosophical theory are notoriously tricky. In order for a theory to unify our considered judgments in a given area, that theory must have explanatory power. It must be able to offer a plausible explanation for the value of goods to which we are committed. For instance, I might record a list of all and only those goods that are intuitively prudentially good backwards on a heavy metal album and subsequently declare that the “backmasking theory of welfare” succeeds on grounds of theoretical unification. But this would be an absurd suggestion. Appearing together on a heavy metal record is not enough to *explain* why these purported elements of value are good.<sup>36</sup>

But hedonism appears to have tremendous power when it comes to unifying our evaluative judgments. Take, for instance, a sophisticated rational

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 406-7.

<sup>35</sup>Brink, ‘The Significance of Desire’, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup>For a similar argument against perfectionism, see Dale Dorsey, ‘Three Arguments for Perfectionism’ forthcoming, *Noûs*.

achievement such as *knowledge*, a commonly supported addition to a wider objective list. It might be suggested that one reason we find such achievement valuable derives from its instrumental effects: we have a tendency to take pleasure in activities that engage our higher capacities.<sup>37</sup> This might be true for a significant range of purported elements of a wide objective list. Consider Rawls’s *Aristotelian Principle*.<sup>38</sup> According to the Aristotelian Principle, in most cases, we find enjoyable the exercise of our higher capacities; significant sophisticated achievement is (nearly) always enjoyed by agents. This might be one way in which hedonism can unify these disparate putative items of value: on the strength of the Aristotelian Principle, hedonism can explain the wide appeal of not just knowledge, but also achievement that exercises our particular capacities in sophisticated ways. Of course, hedonism cannot support the pursuit of such achievements for their own sake. Hedonism thus *appears* to require some revision of our considered judgments. Even so, hedonism appears to have the broad power of ecumenicalism: it can accept the robust value, if robust *instrumental* value, of a wide range of prospective additions to the objective list.

So, with certain refinements of the original evaluative intuitions (in particular, substituting the non-instrumental value of, say, achievement for the robust, if instrumental, value of achievement), hedonism appears to have broad unifying power. But I think we can and should wonder the *extent* to which an appeal to theoretic unity should count in favor of hedonism. In particular, it seems to me, the appeal to theoretic unity is only convincing if we are already convinced by the hedonist’s set of considered judgments. In other words, the appeal to theoretic unity offers no additional, non-table-pounding reason to accept a narrower, rather than a wider, objective list.

Consider, for instance, Quine’s desiderata for pursuing values like theoretic unity, elegance, or simplicity. He writes: “Elegance, conceptual economy. . . enters as an end in itself—and quite properly so as long as it remains secondary in another respect; namely, as long as it is appealed to in choices where the pragmatic standard prescribes no contrary decision. Where elegance doesn’t matter, we may and shall, as poets, pursue elegance for elegance’s sake.”<sup>39</sup> Though Quine appears quite conservative when it comes to the cases in which theoretical virtues will properly guide theory choice, he

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<sup>37</sup>For a detailed examination of claims like this, see Roger Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, ch. 4.

<sup>38</sup>John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), §65.

<sup>39</sup>W. V. Quine, ‘Identity, Ostention, and Hypostatis’ in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2nd ed., 1981), p. 79.

is certainly correct to this extent. Theoretical unity is a secondary virtue. Where theoretic unity *does no harm*—in this case when it comes to our considered judgments of value—we should side with the more unified theory. But an open question remains: does the theoretic unity of hedonism versus other forms of the objective list do harm, or is it benign?

Many people will subscribe to the former view: hedonism’s unification cannot capture our considered evaluative judgments. One way to generate these judgments is by using what might be called a *thought-experiment schema*. Imagine two lives that are precisely equal in pleasure. Imagine now, however, that the first life contains a greater degree of  $x$  than the second. Use  $x$  to mean whatever the purported non-pleasure good might be. For instance, let  $x$  be *achieved goals*. Intuitive judgment of two lives, identical in terms of pleasure, appears to lend weight to the suggestion that the *successful* life, rather than the unsuccessful life, is of greater welfare value. This appears to be true for a wide range of potential values of  $x$ .<sup>40</sup> Thus, if this intuition is compelling, even if objective hedonism has wide unifying power, it appears to miss out on a range of intuitions concerning prudential value.

Of course, there are intuitions and intuitions.<sup>41</sup> The thought-experiment schema will compel anti-hedonists, and likely leave hedonists cold. If none of the instantiations of my thought-experiment schema can convince hedonists, aren’t we simply at an impasse? Perhaps so. But the following point is absolutely crucial. *I am not seeking to argue that hedonism fails for being unable to accommodate all of our considered judgments*. Rather, I am arguing that the appeal to theoretic unity does no work *unless we are already convinced hedonists*. The argument from theoretic unity appears to offer no *independent* reason to prefer hedonism. The argument from theoretic unity appears to work *only* if our intuitions diverge from the intuitions of those who would reject hedonism in favor of a more diverse objective list on the basis, say, of the thought-experiment schema. As noted above, theoretic unity is only a virtue, rather than a vice, if it does no damage to one’s overall evaluative commitments. But hedonism will do no damage to one’s overall evaluative commitments if and only if one shares the overall set of considered judgments that lead one to accept hedonism in the first place. If one already accepts hedonism, the appeal to theoretic unity is moot. But if one doesn’t already accept that hedonism adequately captures our considered judgments, the appeal to theoretic unity is a non-starter:

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<sup>40</sup> Aristotle mentions a similar argument (and attributes it to Plato, cf. *Philebus*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1072b 27-35.

<sup>41</sup>Nicole Hassoun was a helpful interlocutor on this point.

hedonism, as a theoretic unifier, is not benign (as might be illustrated by the thought-experiment schema). Thus the appeal to theoretic unity does no independent work—it relies totally on the prior acceptance of hedonism, or, rather, on the acceptance of considered judgments that would rule out anti-hedonist views.

It might be argued by the hedonist that this is not a fair fight. Few proponents of an objective list view have actually proposed anything resembling an actual theory! An objective list theory ought to include not only a putative list of goods, but also, and importantly, the variable *weight* of those goods.<sup>42</sup> Only when we have a full theory ready at hand can we consider the differential costs and benefits. It might very well be that any wider list has objectionable implications, which would then motivate the appeal to theoretic unity on behalf of hedonism—if neither view is benign, why not accept the more unified? However, there is an easy reply. We can specify a view that differs from hedonism only insofar as it accepts the verdicts of the thought-experiment schema given above. Consider, for instance, a view that holds that there are two good things, pleasure and *x*—say, the achievement of goals. Now assume that these two goods are *lexically ordered*. In other words, assume that an increase in pleasure is always better than goal-achievement, but that goal-achievement adds *pro tanto* prudential value, and adds *all-things-considered* prudential value when pleasure is not at issue. Call this view “View A”. View A appears to generate no *additional* implications over and above simply delivering the right verdicts (according to the anti-hedonist) when it comes to the thought-experiment schema. Of course, hedonism is more unified than View A. But one should accept this as a reason to abandon View A in favor of hedonism if and only if hedonism does not violate any considered judgments that would lead one to accept View A. But one will accept this if and only if one already rejects the intuitions that would lead one to accept View A rather than hedonism. Hence, I maintain, theoretic unity provides no independent rationale for hedonism.

### 3.3. *The Anhedonic Life*

Recently, Roger Crisp has argued that though the time may come for hedonism’s bell to be tolled, that time is not now. Crisp’s argument involves a number of interesting “considerations” offered in favor of an objective version of hedonism. One bears mention here: the *anhedonic life*.<sup>43</sup> With

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<sup>42</sup>Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on these points.

<sup>43</sup>See Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, pp. 119-125.

this argument, Crisp seeks to do more than simply argue that hedonism is intuitive. He insists, rather, that our intuitions in favor of, say, the prudential value of goal achievement are actually misleading: we would not have such intuitions if we did not believe that goal achievement was productive of pleasure. Crisp insists that goal-achievement can only be intuitively good if we are already assuming that this achievement is accompanied by significant pleasure; if so, non-pleasure goods are valuable only to the extent that they promote that which is itself valuable, viz., pleasure: “Consider now the life of R. R’s life is as far as is possible like P’s[, who obtains not only pleasure but also significant achievement], with all the enjoyment—and suffering—stripped out. . . . Is it plausible to think that R’s life is of any value for her?”<sup>44</sup>

Crisp’s response is “no”. I argue below that even if we agree, we need not support objective hedonism. But it is worth noting, first, that Crisp’s presentation of these cases is misleading. The culprit is the phrase “of any value”. Take two possible lives. They are both anhedonic in the way Crisp describes: no suffering, no pleasure. However, life A contains the achievement of at least one goal—an achievement that B lacks. Put bluntly, life A is anhedonic and successful, life B is anhedonic and unsuccessful.<sup>45</sup> (Importantly, this contrast differs from the one between P, who is hedonic and successful, and R, who is anhedonic and successful.) No other features of the lives are different. Rather than asking whether A’s life is “of any value for A” (which could mean a variety of things), we ask the *relevant* question: *is A’s life better for A than B’s is for B?* And I think the answer to this question is a resounding “yes”. On reflection, it seems to me life A is clearly better: there is a feature of prudential value A possesses and B lacks, viz., the achievement of a valued goal. (Incidentally, I think you could replace “achievement of a goal” with many other non-pleasure objective goods, such as knowledge, development of one’s rational capacities, etc.) But if A’s life is better for A than B’s life is for B, hedonism is false: A’s life is better in a way that is not explained by the presence or absence of additional episodes of pleasure. (This claim might be captured by View A, noted in the previous section.)

One might respond that, in lacking any pleasure at all, we would describe neither life as worth living. But this is of course compatible with the denial of hedonism. For instance, one might suggest that a necessary condition on

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<sup>44</sup>Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, p. 122.

<sup>45</sup>For a series of thought experiments that take a converse approach, see Simon Keller, ‘Welfare and the Achievement of Goals’, *Philosophical Studies* 121 (2004), pp. 29-32.

a life's *being worth living* is enjoyment, perhaps up to a threshold level. But this is compatible with suggesting that a life is *more* worth living when it contains achievement and no pleasure, and *less* worth living when it contains *no* achievement and no pleasure, whether or not the life is ultimately worth living. To deny hedonism, one need not be committed to the claim that life A is significantly better than life B. Nor need we claim that A's life is worth living in a way that B's is not. The only thing that need distinguish hedonism from a wider view is the betterness relation: A is better than B (though perhaps better to a very small degree). If this is true, hedonism is false.

Of course, this is just intuition mashing. But even if one holds that A is *not* better than B, and agrees with Crisp about the source of the worthlessness the anhedonic but successful life, this does not entail hedonism. To say so would be to confuse that which is intrinsically valuable for a life—in the sense of non-instrumental, genuine prudential value—and that which is unconditionally valuable for a life. Goods can be intrinsically valuable—they can non-instrumentally improve the value of life—but this value can be *conditioned* on the presence of other goods, for instance, pleasure. More precisely, intrinsic (in the sense of non-instrumental) value need not depend simply on the *intrinsic properties* of a given object, but on (some of) its relational properties, including its conjunction with states of pleasure.<sup>46</sup> Achievement alone may not improve the value of states of affairs, but achievement when *combined* with pleasure may do so. If so, the value of the achievement of goals is conditional on one's taking pleasure in them. (Importantly, though I think doing so is well-motivated, I need not commit myself to rejecting the claim that *all* non-instrumental value supervenes on intrinsic properties. I could, like contemporary Mooreans,<sup>47</sup> declare that intrinsic value is borne by states of affairs, and that the state of affairs in which I achieve some goal is good for me *only if* that state of affairs also includes some amount of pleasure.)

One could specify such a view in a variety of ways. One might hold that only a *small threshold amount* of pleasure is required for a good life; above that point, the excellence of one's activities fully determines one's well-being. More than a small threshold amount of pleasure does nothing to increase the value of that life. Call this "View B". This view is not a version of hedonism—above a certain threshold amount of pleasure, the

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<sup>46</sup>That intrinsic value can depend on relational properties is not only plausible, but appears to be required for several important claims about value. See, for instance, Shelly Kagan, 'Rethinking Intrinsic Value, *The Journal of Ethics* 2 (1998).

<sup>47</sup>See Ben Bradley, 'Is Intrinsic Value Conditional?', *Philosophical Studies* 107 (2002).

value of one's life is *fully* determined by the objective value of the activities one engages in, or the successful achievement of one's goals (or whatever other non-pleasure good). Alternatively, one could argue that, like View A, pleasure is lexically prior to the achievement of goals, the *pro tanto* value of which is in turn conditioned on the presence of at least some pleasure or other. (In other words, the achievement of goals without any pleasure is not even *pro tanto* valuable, but the achievement of goals when combined with a life of at least some pleasure is *pro tanto* valuable, but lexically dominated by pleasure.) This view might be compelling to those who are attracted to the anti-hedonist result of the thought-experiment schema *and* Crisp's intuition here. Call this view "View C". Hence, one can agree with Crisp's view—though I demur—and reject hedonism if one accepts either Views B or C (or a range of further anti-hedonisms, depending on the specified weighting).

Crisp seems to understand that one could maintain that pleasure is only a necessary condition for well-being, rather than well-being's only constituent. Crisp writes: "Perhaps well-being consists wholly or partly in terms of an 'organic whole', comprising genuine accomplishment on the one hand, and enjoyment of that accomplishment on the other." But Crisp argues against this position in the following way:

Now I have to accept that this is a logically available view. But, ... the idea of an organic whole involves a mystery. Accomplishing something, and the enjoyment of accomplishment, seem conceptually quite distinct, and the case of R shows that they can come apart in cases that may at least be imagined without too much difficulty. The question that remains to be answered by an advocate of this kind of organic whole view is this: If accomplishment can make a contribution to well-being when it is enjoyed, why do we find that it cannot do the same in the absence of enjoyment? After all, its intrinsic good-making features appear to be present in both kinds of case.<sup>48</sup>

However, the proposal on offer is not as mysterious as Crisp would have us believe. According to Crisp, Views B and C leave unexplained why the value of achievement should not improve lives in cases in which that achievement grants no pleasure. After all, it is still an achievement—its "intrinsic good-making features" are present in both cases. But this is a misunderstanding of the suggestion on offer. In the case of the anhedonic life, the "intrinsic good-making features" of achievement *are not* present: the intrinsic value

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<sup>48</sup>Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, p. 123.

of achievement depends on the presence of certain relational properties, including being achieved in conjunction with (at least a minimal threshold of) pleasure. Hence the intrinsic good-making features of achievements are absent in the case of the anhedonic life. Achievement and pleasure are surely conceptually distinct. But it might be that the prudential value of each is conditioned on the presence of the other. While I do not regard such a view as required for the anti-hedonist, it is available even if we agree with Crisp's intuitions.

The diagnosis of Crisp's argument is similar to the diagnoses offered for the previous appeals to resonance and theoretic unity. Crisp offers a debunking argument: if we look closely at our intuitions, they appear to suggest that genuine achievement is not valuable absent pleasure. But this debunking argument works for hedonism if and only if one already has a firm commitment to hedonism against alternatives such as Views B and C. If the alternatives I present here are viable, they capture Crisp's intuition concerning the anhedonic life no less than hedonism. Furthermore, these views will be more plausible for those who are inclined to accept the conclusions of my thought-experiment schema given in the previous section. Hence in order for the anhedonic life to defend hedonism, one must already have ready at hand an *independent* rationale for hedonism.

### 3.4. *Intuitive Accommodation*

I have so far considered and rejected three rationales for accepting an objective hedonism versus other versions of objectivism about well-being. I have found that these rationales, in their most plausible forms, presuppose a prior commitment to hedonism. But this does not yet settle the case against hedonism. One might simply argue that hedonism provides better accommodation of our first-order intuitions about the comparative prudential value of lives.

I obviously cannot address all possible intuitions in favor of a hedonist view against various other views. So I will make a few general skeptical points about this strategy. First, though I have noted various unintuitive implications of hedonism so far, none of my arguments have rested on them. However, given the structure of the argument from intuitive accommodation, these first-order intuitions are now front-and-center. Consider, for instance, the thought-experiment schema. It seems plausible to say that, holding pleasure fixed, at least one non-pleasure good will improve lives. The hedonist might respond that this does not settle the case against hedonism in favor of an alternative view—the relevant test is not *total* intuitive accommodation,

but rather *overall* intuitive accommodation. This response might be plausible when comparing hedonism to views that give short shrift to pleasure. But given the availability of views that differ with hedonism only to the extent that they accept the verdicts of the thought-experiment schema, viz., View A and View C, it begins to seem implausible that hedonism will be able to defend itself on grounds of first-order intuitive accommodation. It seems that anything hedonism can do, Views A and C can do better. This is especially true given that Views A and C can make use of an independent rationale in defending the prudential value of other, non-pleasure goods. Importantly, these views can make use of a *perfectionist* rationale, viz., that goods like knowledge and achievement are excellent manifestations of human nature and are hence valuable,<sup>49</sup> even while claiming that the value of these goods is tempered by the value of pleasure in significant ways. Whatever the merits of various independent arguments for perfectionism, it seems clear that hedonism is hard pressed to offer any comparative rationale.

Without an independent rationale for hedonism against Views A and C, the argument from intuitive accommodation must show that there is something *per se* unintuitive about these views in comparison with hedonism. But consider only the weakest such view, View C. This view holds that non-pleasure goods are genuinely valuable, but only when a person maintains a threshold level of pleasure, and even under these conditions, non-pleasure goods are lexically dominated by pleasure. The only way to tell against View C and in favor of hedonism is to consider the thought-experiment schema at pleasure levels that are already sufficiently high. But, as we have seen, the prudential value of at least *some* value of  $x$  in the thought-experiment schema is plausible. Thus the departure of View C from hedonism is minute, but philosophically significant.

One could, of course, reject the intuition that there is some  $x$  that improves lives when considering the thought-experiment schema. There are two difficulties for this approach. First, to reject the value of  $x$  (for all possible values of  $x$ ) on intuitive grounds is simply swimming upstream. Second, and more importantly, this appears to reduce the argument for hedonism to simple head-butting. Such a move would cut little ice with any other theorist who holds that the thought-experiment schema provides good reason for rejecting hedonism and accepting, at the very least, View C. This is an unenviable situation for any theory of well-being to be in: it appears

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<sup>49</sup>For instances of perfectionist arguments for objective goods, see David Brink, 'The Significance of Desire', and Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). I remain neutral on the plausibility of a perfectionist rationale for the purposes of this paper.

that there is no substantial argument for it against those who are motivated to reject it on the basis of widespread intuition.

It might be objected that anti-hedonist objective views face a similar problem: what non-table-pounding argument can they offer hedonists? I claimed above that fans of a wider objective list could, in principle, offer a perfectionist rationale for admitting non-pleasure goods onto the objective list. However, let's assume for the sake of argument that the perfectionist rationale is implausible or should be rejected. It seems to me that if there *is* a symmetrical problem for all objective views, this should be no solace for hedonism. The fact that this is a problem for all objective views does not mean that it is not a problem for hedonism. In fact, this appears to illustrate the distinctive danger for hedonism in characterizing itself as objective rather than subjective: when intuitions clash, there appears to be little to offer by way of an independent rationale for one view rather than another. (The argument from theoretic unity, as we have seen, works only if we already agree with the intuitions in support of hedonism.) In a nutshell, we have found the hedonist's dilemma. Hedonism can be construed subjectively or objectively. If construed subjectively, it succumbs to well-known arguments against psychological hedonism in its strong or loose formulations. If construed objectively, it lacks an independent rationale (whether or not any other objective view maintains an independent rationale).

The failure of objective hedonism also dooms hedonic subjectivism. Because there is no independently plausible rationale for hedonism as opposed to any other construal of the objective list, there is no plausible reason to believe that hedonism should be an independent value commitment used to understand that which is "worth caring about". The plausibility of hedonic subjectivism depended on the existence of a rationale for a commitment to hedonism rather than, say, perfectionism or a wider objective list (which could also be combined with a weak subjectivism).

Before I conclude, I should note a limitation of my argument in §3. I have considered only four rationales for objective hedonism. Perhaps there are others. But the failure of these arguments share a common source. The arguments for objective hedonism, whether theoretic or intuitive, appear to presuppose a prior commitment to hedonism against alternatives (§§3.1, 3.3), or a prior commitment to the intuitive responses that tell in favor of hedonism, and which will be rejected by anyone not already convinced of objective hedonism (§§3.2, 3.4). Though I'm skeptical, I leave open the possibility that an argument without this common defect can be found.

#### *4. Conclusion*

Neither objectivism nor subjectivism appear able to sustain the claim that pleasure is the sole welfare good. Objective hedonism appears unable to offer any plausible rationale for restricting the range of objective goods to pleasure and pleasure only, and with objective hedonism goes hedonic subjectivism, or a hedonism defended on weak subjectivist grounds. Hedonism defended on strong subjectivist grounds falls victim to the plausible suggestion that, in this world, or at the very least in nearby possible worlds, some agents will maintain welfare-relevant desires for non-pleasure goods. This is a dilemma for hedonism. As I have indicated, there may be ways for the hedonist to respond to the dilemma. But this is a serious dilemma, and it must be addressed.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>This paper has had the invaluable assistance of Ben Bradley, Ben Eggleston, Nicole Hassoun, Dan Haybron, Chris Heathwood, Doug Portmore, and other discussants of these issues at PEA Soup, <http://peasoup.typepad.com>, and various anonymous reviewers.