

# An Argument for Hedonism

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Hedonism is the theory that pleasure is the only intrinsic value and pain the only intrinsic disvalue. Thus construed, hedonism is true if and only if the following two premises are true:

- P1: Pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable.  
P2: Nothing other than pleasure is intrinsically valuable and nothing other than pain is intrinsically disvaluable.

In this paper I make the case for hedonism by arguing first for P1, then for P2.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 P1

Let us start by observing, empirically, that a widely shared judgment about intrinsic value and disvalue is that pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable. On virtually any proposed list of intrinsic values and disvalues (we will look at some of them below), pleasure is included among the intrinsic values and pain among the intrinsic disvalues. This inclusion makes intuitive sense, moreover, for there is something undeniably *good* about the way pleasure feels and something undeniably *bad* about the way pain feels, and neither the goodness of pleasure nor

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<sup>1</sup> By “value” I mean prudential value. Presumably, however, those who believe that all value is value *simpliciter* will also find my argument useful. I do not discuss moral value.

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the badness of pain seems to be exhausted by the further effects that these experiences might have. “Pleasure” and “pain” are here understood inclusively, as encompassing anything hedonically positive and anything hedonically negative.<sup>2</sup>

The special value statuses of pleasure and pain are manifested in how we treat these experiences in our everyday reasoning about values. If you tell me that you are heading for the convenience store, I might ask: “What for?” This is a reasonable question, for when you go to the convenience store you usually do so, not merely for the sake of going to the convenience store, but for the sake of achieving something further that you deem to be valuable. You might answer, for example: “To buy soda.” This answer makes sense, for soda is a nice thing and you can get it at the convenience store. I might further inquire, however: “What is buying the soda good for?” This further question can also be a reasonable one, for it need not be obvious why you want the soda. You might answer: “Well, I want it for the pleasure of drinking it.” If I then proceed by asking “But what is the pleasure of drinking the soda good for?” the discussion is likely to reach an awkward end. The reason is that the pleasure is not good *for* anything further; it is simply that for which going to the convenience store and buying the soda is good.<sup>3</sup> As Aristotle observes: “We never ask [a man] what his end is in being pleased, because we assume that pleasure is choice worthy in itself.”<sup>4</sup> Presumably, a similar story can be told in the case of pains, for if someone says “This is painful!” we never respond by asking: “And why is that a problem?” We take for granted that if something is painful, we have a sufficient explanation of why it is bad.

If we are onto something in our everyday reasoning about values, it seems that pleasure and pain are both places where we reach the end of the line in matters of value.

Although pleasure and pain thus seem to be good candidates for intrinsic value and disvalue, several objections have been raised against this suggestion: (1) that pleasure and pain have instrumental but not intrinsic value/disvalue; (2) that pleasure and pain gain their value/disvalue derivatively, in virtue of satisfying/frustrating our desires; (3) that there is a subset of pleasures that are not intrinsically valuable (so-called “evil pleasures”) and a subset of pains that are not intrinsically disvaluable (so-called “noble pains”), and (4) that pain asymbolia, masochism, and practices such as wiggling a loose tooth render it implausible that pain is intrinsically disvaluable. I shall argue that these objections fail. Though it is, of course, an open question whether other objections to P1 might be more successful, I shall assume that if (1)–(4) fail, we are justified in believing that P1 is true.

<sup>2</sup> I shall take for granted a hedonic tone view of pleasure and pain. Presumably, however, those who hold other views on pleasure and pain will also find my argument useful. For a defense of my own view, see Ole Martin Moen, “The Unity and Commensurability of Pleasures and Pains,” *Philosophia* 41 (2013): 527–543.

<sup>3</sup> David Hume makes a similar point. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), Appendix 1, §18.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishers, 1999), 1172b21–24.

## 1.1 The Instrumental Value Objection

In “Against the Intrinsic Value of Pleasure,” Matthew Pianalto argues that “pleasure has value, but not intrinsic value.”<sup>5</sup> In Pianalto’s view, the value of pleasure is instrumental because of “the evolutionary role of pleasure as an experiential signal that both tracks individual well-being enhancing activity and motivates an individual to pursue things which contribute to his or her well-being.”<sup>6</sup> “Pleasant experiences,” Pianalto writes, “emerged as a way of tracking and signaling resources and behaviors which contribute to the organism’s fitness,” “fitness” understood as “reproductive fitness.” Since the value of pleasures thus seems to depend “on their stable relationship to things and activities that are conducive to [fitness]” it appears that “pleasure has only instrumental value.” Pianalto takes the same to be true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of pain.<sup>7</sup>

It is almost certainly true that our ability to experience pleasure (and pain) evolved in virtue of helping us act in ways that enhance our reproductive fitness. This, in turn, explains why pleasures track things that are conducive of reproductive fitness, such as eating, drinking, and having sex. Contrary to what Pianalto takes for granted, however, this need not be in conflict with the theory that pleasure is intrinsically valuable. The reason is that the view that  $X$  tracks reproductive fitness is compatible with the view that  $X$  is intrinsically valuable. These two views would be in conflict only on the premise that reproductive fitness exhausts the room of possible intrinsic values. Such a premise, however, is implausible.

To see why, imagine that you are given the option of entering a special deal with a rather peculiar man: The Sadistic Sperm Bank Owner. He offers to start using exclusively your sperm in his clinic, and accordingly, to make you the biological father of hundreds of children. In exchange for this, he demands that he can lock you in his basement for the rest of your life and torture you whenever he wants. Should you enter the deal? If Pianalto is right, it seems that you would have a very strong reason to do so, since entering this deal would best promote that which pleasure evolved to track: reproductive fitness. Claiming this, however, seems wrong, and it seems wrong for the reason that it ignores the value that pleasure has, and the disvalue that pain has, even in isolation from their effects on reproductive fitness. Indeed, Pianalto’s theory borders on the absurd, for experiencing excruciating pain is bad, and it is bad even in cases where it has no effect (or indeed, has a positive effect) on one’s reproductive fitness.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Pianalto, “Against the Intrinsic Value of Pleasure,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 43 (2009): 33–39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–36.

<sup>8</sup> It was recently revealed that the owner of a British fertility clinic has fathered up to 600 children. This clearly gave that man a great reproductive advantage. It seems odd, however, to claim that because of his reproductive success, this man’s life went more than a hundred times better than the lives of the rest of us. *Telegraph*, April 8, 2012.

## 1.2 The Desire Objection

A more popular way to argue against the intrinsic value of pleasure and the intrinsic disvalue of pain is offered by desire-satisfactionism. Desire-satisfactionism allows us to hold that it is best to reject the offer from the Sadistic Sperm Bank Owner, and that doing so is best (at least in part) for the reason that accepting the offer likely involves a lot more pain, and a lot less pleasure, than rejecting it. A desire-satisfactionist would explain this, however, not by reference to pleasure being intrinsically valuable and pain being intrinsically disvaluable, but by reference to our tendency to have our desires satisfied when we feel pleasure and frustrated when we feel pain. On this view, we reach the end of the line in matters of value when we reach desire satisfaction and desire frustration.

Desire theories sound plausible, but face a number of serious problems. One problem is that it is puzzling how a desire, in and of itself, could have the power to make anything valuable, be it experiences or anything else. To make this point, Shelly Kagan has presented the willfully bizarre example of someone who desires the number of atoms in the universe to be prime.<sup>9</sup> If someone had such a desire: Would it follow that for this person, life would be better if the universe did in fact have a prime number of atoms? It seems not. Or imagine a devout Muslim who has a strong desire never to eat pork, yet now and then accidentally gets small amounts of pork in her diet. She never finds out. Granted that the Islamic prohibition against eating pork is not (or at any rate: is no longer) well founded: Is this Muslim woman harmed by eating pork? It is hard to see how she could be harmed, even though it seems plain that her desire has not been fulfilled. If this is right, it seems that whether or not a desire has been fulfilled is not, in and of itself, of much value significance.

One way for desire theorists to respond to these challenges is to put restrictions on the theory, for example, a restriction stating that the subject in question must *know* whether or not the desire is fulfilled.<sup>10</sup> Such a restriction helps make desire-satisfactionism more in line with common sense, since both in the case of the man who wants the number of atoms in the universe to be prime and the Muslim woman who eats pork, the subject does not know whether or not the desire has been fulfilled.

The informed variant of desire-satisfactionism, however, also faces problems. To illustrate one problem, Derek Parfit asks us to imagine that we are offered a highly addictive drug. If we start taking the drug, we will have a strong desire for it every morning for the rest of our lives. We are guaranteed ample supplies of the drug for free and it has no adverse effects. Taking the drug will not, however, give us any pleasure. Would it be good to start taking the drug? It seems not, yet taking the drug would create a lot of desire satisfaction of which we would be aware.<sup>11</sup>

Another problem is that informed desire-satisfactionism loses out on some of the simplicity that makes desire-satisfactionism an attractive view in the first place. If it is

<sup>9</sup> Shelly Kagan, "The Limits of Well-Being," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9 (1992): 171. A famous parallel case is John Rawls' example of the mathematician desiring to count the grass blades on the Harvard lawn.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Chris Heathwood, "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism," *Philosophical Studies* 128 (2006): 540.

<sup>11</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 497.

desire satisfaction that has ultimate value significance, we would need an additional argument to add the knowledge clause. I would suggest, however, that the reason the informed version is more in line with common sense is that it lies closer to the view that *pleasure* is intrinsically valuable and *pain* is intrinsically disvaluable (i.e. P1). On that view, it might well be true that the Muslim woman is harmed by discovering that she had eaten pork, but this would be cashed out by reference to the painfulness of the anger, frustration, fear, and guilt that she would feel when she learned it, not by reference to the mere fact that she learned that her desire had not been fulfilled.

A third variant of desire-satisfactionism is *idealized* desire-satisfactionism, according to which things are valuable, not simply in virtue of being things that we desire, but in virtue of being things that we *would* desire if we were idealized (fully knowledgeable and fully rational, say) versions of ourselves. Adherents to idealized desire-satisfactionism can avoid the prime number of atoms challenge, the pork challenge, and the drug challenge by holding that these are things that we would not be averse to, or desire, if we were idealized.

Idealized desire-satisfactionism, however, runs into problems of its own. First, by disconnecting value from that which we actually desire, idealized desire-satisfactionism also loses out on one of the things that makes desire theories appealing: the fact we are intimately connected to our desires. Our desires give us a motivational pull, but if the desires in question are *idealized*, then they are the desires of a hypothetical person that is not ourselves, and in that case, the tie to motivation becomes much looser. This might not be a fatal objection, but it does undermine one of the reasons to look to desires in the first place.

When a desire theory becomes idealized, it also becomes less clear how it could provide us with normative guidance. Given that you and I are in fact not idealized, how could we know what we would have desired in case we were idealized? To know what we would have desired, it seems that we would often need just the knowledge and the rational capacities that we are presently lacking.

In response to this challenge, a defender of idealized desire-satisfactionism might claim that though the idealization requirement does in fact make the theory harder to apply, it is nonetheless the case that what is valuable *is* that which the idealized version of ourselves would desire, irrespective of how epistemically inconvenient this might be. I would like to suggest, however, that idealized desire-satisfactionism is not just hard to apply; it faces the deeper problem of not being able to explain why some things are valuable in the first place. To see why, we might confront idealized desire-satisfactionism with a Euthyphro question: Are valuable things valuable because we would desire them if we were idealized? Or would we, if we were idealized, desire these things because they are valuable? On the first alternative, it is the very fact that we would desire them if we were idealized that explains why they are valuable. Accordingly, our idealized self would have to be left without any normative guidance, because whatever it would decide upon would be made valuable in virtue of that very decision. This first variant of idealized desire-satisfactionism, therefore, is a form of divine command theory. Alternatively, it might be argued that our idealized self would value certain things because these things really are valuable independently, and in an idealized state, we would be able to respond adequately to these things' value. In that case, however, the value in question would have to be explained by some other fact,

and the ultimate explanation of why some things are valuable would no longer be idealized desire-satisfaction. Idealized desire-satisfactionism, therefore must either become a divine command theory or stop being a desire theory.

The underlying problem with desire theories, I believe, is that they get things backwards. What makes desire satisfaction good and desire frustration bad is the pleasure that tends to result from desire satisfaction and the pain that tends to result from desire frustration. In the absence of any hedonic impact, it is irrelevant whether a desire is fulfilled or frustrated, be it an ordinary desire, an informed desire, or an idealized desire. If this is right, it is wrong to cash out the value of pleasure and the disvalue of pain by reference to desire-satisfaction and desire frustration. Rather, we should cash out the value of desire-satisfaction in terms of pleasure and the disvalue of desire frustration in terms of pain.

### 1.3 Evil Pleasures and Noble Pains

Even if one concedes that pleasures and pains are valuable and disvaluable in virtue of themselves, not (solely) in virtue of something further to which they contribute—whether to evolutionary fitness or to desire-satisfaction or to anything else—one might still oppose the view that pleasures and pains *as such* are intrinsically valuable and disvaluable. One might argue that there is a subset of pleasures that are not intrinsically valuable and a subset of pains that are not intrinsically disvaluable. If this is correct, then pleasure and pain are not *as such* intrinsically valuable and disvaluable; only some of them are.

The examples traditionally used to make this point are so-called “evil pleasures” and “noble pains.” Evil pleasures are pleasures such as *Schadenfreude* and *malice*, and pleasure taken in cruel acts, such as the pleasure that a rapist might enjoy while raping. If pleasure is intrinsically valuable, it seems that these pleasures, in and of themselves, must be just as valuable as any other pleasures.

This seems to force those of us who believe in the intrinsic value of pleasure to accept a number of counterintuitive conclusions. To illustrate this, Irwin Goldstein asks us to “[t]hink of Austrian *Schutzstaffel* [SS] volunteers, who, after machine-gunning and mass-graving non-Aryan villagers in the ‘40 s go on, in anonymity, to enjoy lives rich in pleasure and happiness.”<sup>12</sup> It does not seem good that they have pleasant lives. Or, as is analogous, take sadistic torturers. Jonathan Dancy points out that it is very counterintuitive to see any value in sadistic torturing; indeed, if we hear that a torturer actually *enjoyed* causing pain in his victims, we do not typically respond by saying, “Oh, at least it’s good that *he* enjoyed it.” Contrary to what we should expect if pleasure were intrinsically valuable, the presence of pleasure in this scenario does not make it better. If anything, it makes it worse.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Irwin Goldstein, “Pleasure and Pain: Unconditional Intrinsic Values,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (1989): 256.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Dancy, “Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties,” *Mind* 268 (1983): 530–547. Aristotle makes the same point in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1175b27; See also Franz Brentano, *Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, trans. by Cecil Hauge (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1902), p. 90; Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Goodness and Advice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 12.

The inverse story can be told in the case of pains. Though most pains might be bad, some pains seem to be good. It might be good, for example, to suffer along with someone who is subject to unjust harm or to grieve in a funeral. In such contexts, pain is better than pleasure. Neglecting a victim of unjust harm for the sake of reading a comic book, or entertaining a sexual fantasy while in a funeral, might both be sources of pleasure, but it nonetheless seems that such things are bad, not good. Moreover, there are more trivial examples of pains being good, such as the pain that you feel when you touch a hot stove. This pain is good because it makes you withdraw your hand so that you avoid serious skin damage. Our ability to feel pain evolved, after all, because it helps us avoid certain harms.

How might one respond to these arguments? Some, such as Fred Feldman, respond by arguing that the value of pleasure is context dependent. In Feldman's view, pleasure is valuable only in cases where it is also *deserved*.<sup>14</sup> On this view, the value of pleasure is thus conditional on a relational property, namely desert. This is a more complex view than the one I defend, my view being that in and of itself, *any* fixed amount of pleasure is just as valuable as any other similarly fixed amount of pleasure, irrespective of where it occurs and how it is obtained. On a strict version of P1, it has to be, for as G. E. Moore points out, "To say that a kind of value is 'intrinsic' means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possess it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as David Lewis writes:

The intrinsic properties of something depend only on that one thing; whereas the extrinsic properties of something may depend, wholly or partly, on something else. If something has an intrinsic property [e.g. value], then so does any perfect duplicate of that thing; whereas duplicates situated in different surroundings will differ in their extrinsic properties.<sup>16</sup>

If pleasure really is *intrinsically* valuable, therefore, so is any duplicate, irrespective of the further causal or constitutive relationships in which it takes part.

This version of P1 is the most radical and most interesting one, and I believe it can be defended. To see how, it should first be pointed out that even if every pleasure is intrinsically valuable and every pain is intrinsically disvaluable, it does not follow that every pleasure is *overall* valuable and that every pain is *overall* disvaluable. Though every pleasure is valuable when seen in isolation from the context in which it occurs, a given pleasure might have further effects that make its occurrence overall disvaluable, and similarly, though every pain is disvaluable when seen in isolation, a given pain might be situated in a context that makes its occurrence overall valuable.

To take the simplest case first, someone who holds that pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable might well concede that it is good that

<sup>14</sup> Fred Feldman, "The Good Life: A Defense of Attitudinal Hedonism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 604–628.

<sup>15</sup> In this paper I use Moore's conception of intrinsic value. See G. E. Moore, "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," reprinted in *Principia Ethica*, Thomas Baldwin (ed.), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> David Lewis, "Extrinsic Properties," *Philosophical Studies* 44 (1983): 197.

we feel pain when our skin is burned—not because feeling this pain is good in and by itself, but because this helps us avoid skin damage. This, however, does not challenge the fact that when seen in isolation from the beneficial effect, the pain that we feel when burned is bad. Goldstein suggests that it is precisely because of its badness that pain is able to play its protective role.<sup>17</sup>

I think a strong case can be made that this explanatory model generalizes to other forms of good pains and bad pleasures. Take the case of entertaining a sexual fantasy while in a funeral. Someone who believes in the intrinsic value of pleasure would have to hold that when seen in isolation from the context in which it occurs, this pleasure is good. Importantly, however, she may also hold that it is bad in many other ways. It is bad, for example, in virtue of manifesting a serious lack in ability to value people and to deal with their deaths. It might also be bad in virtue of undermining the social function of funerals. Or take the sadistic torturer. Although someone who claims that pleasure is intrinsically good would have to maintain that when seen in isolation, this pleasure is good, she could also point out that the overall value of the occurrence of this pleasure is very bad. Most obviously, it is bad for the victim, since the pleasure motivates the torturer to continue torturing. Also, it manifests a psychological tendency of which those who believe in the intrinsic disvalue of pain have excellent reasons to be afraid. A similar explanation goes for the SS officers. If pleasure is intrinsically valuable, these officers' pleasure is also valuable (for them) when seen in isolation from the context in which it occurs. This, however, is not a problematic thing to concede, since it is precisely the *context* that is supposed to make it bad, and by appealing to this context, someone who believes in the intrinsic value of pleasure has ample resources to cash out the badness of war criminals escaping justice. For something to be *really* bad, it does not have to be to be intrinsically bad. It is sufficient that it is *overall* really bad.

Wanting intrinsic badness as well as overall badness is overkill, and upon reflection, it seems very implausible that the things that are otherwise intrinsically valuable lose their intrinsic value just in the contexts where they happen to be made overall disvaluable. It would be too lucky a coincidence, so the best explanation of our intuitions in such cases seems to be that in making the judgment that something is *really* bad, we conflate various forms of badness. Becoming aware of this, it is better to conclude that even in cases of great overall disvalue, pleasure retains its intrinsic value, and even in cases of great overall value, pain retains its intrinsic disvalue.

#### 1.4 Pain Asymbolia, Masochism, and Tooth Wiggling

Finally, let us consider three somewhat different cases that are sometimes taken to render it implausible that all pains are intrinsically disvaluable. One case is *pain asymbolia*: a rare medical condition, resulting from morphine analgesia and certain head injuries, under which patients are said to experience severe pain, yet fail to experience this pain as bad. They can get cut, and feel the pain from the cut (they are not under anesthesia), yet not be the least worried or distressed.<sup>18</sup> This presents

<sup>17</sup> Goldstein, 258. Goldstein assumes that badness can be causally efficient.

<sup>18</sup> See Colin Klein, "What Pain Asymbolia Really Shows," *Mind* 494 (2015): 493–516.



us with a class of pains that appears not to be intrinsically disvaluable. Second, there is masochism, which, arguably, poses an even greater challenge, for masochists do not just view certain pains as neutral (as pain asymbolia patients do), but actively seek out and value certain pains, seemingly for their very painfulness. Finally, there are more prosaic practices such as that of wiggling a loose tooth even though doing so is painful. These cases are potentially challenging, since if we can find just one single pain that is not intrinsically disvaluable, then P1 is false.

How might someone who believes in the intrinsic disvalue of pain reply? Of course, one reply—the stubborn one—is to insist that all of the above pains are in fact intrinsically disvaluable. On this view, pain asymbolia patients are worse off, even though they could not care less about their pains, and masochists and tooth wigglers should stop what they are doing right away. This reply is unacceptable, for rather than dealing with the counterexamples, it simply disregards them.

There are, however, ways to deal with the examples that can preserve the view that all pains are intrinsically disvaluable. First, concerning pain asymbolia, we should inquire into what is really meant by “pain” in these cases. Pain is an experience, and as such, it cannot (currently, at least) be directly measured, so it is inescapably a topic for introspection. Though I have never experienced pain asymbolia, a plausible explanation of what goes on seems to be that the sort of experiential content that is otherwise typical of pains—they are sharp, intense, burning, and tearing, say—is, on these rare occasions, not accompanied by a negative hedonic tone. If this is what goes on, then the “pain” in pain asymbolia is not actually pain, and in that case, it is not problematic to reconcile pain asymbolia with the view that all pain is intrinsically disvaluable.

To approach masochism, we should first observe that masochists do not appear to like pain in general. Masochists like specific pains in specific contexts. If the pain is of the wrong kind, if it is too intense, or if it occurs in the wrong context, the masochist reacts to the pain just like everyone else does. What, then, accounts for the apparent value of the limited range of pains that masochists pursue? The answer seems to lie in the role that these pains play in the sexual settings of which they are part. These settings seem to provide masochists with an adrenaline rush, with the excitement of pushing their boundaries, with intense sexual pleasure, with an endorphin high, and, for some, with a cathartic experience. Masochist pains, therefore, seem to be constitutive of larger wholes that, for masochists, can be quite enjoyable. If an explanation like this is the right one, then masochism is compatible with the view that all pains, when seen in isolation from the contexts in which they occur, are indeed disvaluable.

Admittedly, a critic might respond that my explanation captures many, but perhaps not all, masochists, since there are people who pursue pain in excess of what gives them joy or excitement of any kind. Some pursue outright torture. In these cases, however, it seems fine to conclude that the practice is in fact disvaluable and should probably be avoided. Indeed, this is the intuitive response to extreme pain infliction, and those who believe in the intrinsic disvalue of pain have a powerful explanation as to why such practices should trouble us.

What concerns tooth wiggling, this practice seems to admit of an evolutionary explanation that sheds light on what is going on. When a part of the body is

damaged, it is wise for an animal, or a human, to attend to and carefully explore that body part, to try to understand the damage, and to learn what it can and cannot do with the damaged area. If this is right, it seems that tooth wiggling is best explained, not as a pursuit of pain, but as a way of attending to and exploring a bodily abnormality. If it were best understood as a pursuit of pain, we could just as well have inflicted pain on a healthy body part, and if we really pursued pain for pain's own sake, then why would we suddenly stop wiggling when the pain becomes intense?

Since we are motivated to explore bodily abnormalities, a case could be made that we get satisfaction from wiggling loose teeth in a way analogous to how masochists get satisfaction from being, say, bitten or whipped. Notice, however, that the tooth wiggling need not be positively pleasurable for this explanatory model to work. It suffices that, at some point, the frustration that results from constantly resisting the temptation to wiggle grows stronger than the prospective pain of wiggling. For this reason, tooth wiggling seems to be compatible with the view that all pains—again, when seen in isolation from the context in which they occur—are always bad.

My aim here is not to provide an exhaustive account of tooth wiggling or masochism, or for that matter, joyful rapists or cheerful Nazis. My aim, rather, is to show that pleasures and pains sometimes take part in complex causal and constitutive relations, both in our own psychologies and in society, and that these relations have the power to explain why some pains are overall very valuable and some pleasures are overall very disvaluable. In order to make sense of how things appear, we do not—in addition to these causal and constitutive complexities—also need to posit *value theoretical* complexities, such as the complexity that the intrinsic value of pleasure, and the intrinsic disvalue of pain, disappear in just the contexts where the pleasure is overall disvaluable and the pain is overall valuable.

## 2 P2

Many philosophers would accept the conclusion from the previous section, that pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable. Most of them would add, however, that this is probably not the complete story of what is intrinsically valuable and disvaluable. They would suggest that there are intrinsic values besides pleasure and intrinsic disvalues besides pain, and thus endorse some form of pluralism rather than hedonism.

Pluralism has many defenders. W. D. Ross, for example, suggests that pleasure is indeed intrinsically valuable, but adds that so are knowledge and artistic activity.<sup>19</sup> Noah Lemos adds consciousness, morally good actions, beauty, and flourishing to the list of intrinsic values.<sup>20</sup> Martha Nussbaum suggests life, health, bodily integrity,

<sup>19</sup> W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 134; W. D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Noah Lemos, *Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 80–92.

emotional attachment, practical reason, affiliation, play, and more.<sup>21</sup> William Frankena has provided what is arguably the most extensive list of intrinsic values:

life, consciousness, and activity; health and strength; pleasures and satisfactions of all or certain kinds; happiness, beatitude, contentment, etc.; truth; knowledge and true opinions of various kinds, understanding, wisdom; beauty, harmony, proportion in objects contemplated; aesthetic experience; morally good dispositions or virtues; mutual affection, love, friendship, cooperation; just distribution of goods and evils; harmony and proportion in one's own life; power and experiences of achievement; self-expression; freedom; peace, security; adventure and novelty; and good reputation, honor, esteem.<sup>22</sup>

*Prima facie*, these all seem to be reasonable suggestions for things worth having, not just for the sake of other things, but for their own sake. So is it clear, as G. E. Moore asks, that a hedonist can show “that all other things but pleasure, whether conduct or virtue of knowledge, whether life or nature or beauty, are only good as a means to pleasure or for the sake of pleasure, never for their own sakes or as ends in themselves”?<sup>23</sup>

I think several things should be said in response to Moore's challenge to hedonists. First, I do not think the burden of proof lies on hedonists to explain why the additional values are *not* intrinsic values. If someone claims that *X* is intrinsically valuable, this is a substantive, positive claim, and it lies on him or her to explain why we should believe that *X* is in fact intrinsically valuable. Possibly, this could be done through thought experiments analogous to those employed in the previous section.

Second, there is something peculiar about the list of additional intrinsic values that counts in hedonism's favor: the listed values have a strong tendency to be well explained as things that help promote pleasure and avert pain. To go through Frankena's list, life and consciousness are necessary presuppositions for pleasure; activity, health, and strength bring about pleasure; and happiness, beatitude, and contentment are regarded by Frankena himself as “pleasures and satisfactions.” The same is arguably true of beauty, harmony, and “proportion in objects contemplated,” and also of affection, friendship, harmony, and proportion in life, experiences of achievement, adventure and novelty, self-expression, good reputation, honor and esteem. Other things on Frankena's list, such as understanding, wisdom, freedom, peace, and security, although they are perhaps not themselves pleasurable, are important means to achieve a happy life, and as such, they are things that hedonists would value highly. Morally good dispositions and virtues, cooperation, and just distribution of goods and evils, moreover, are things that, on a collective level, contribute a happy society, and thus the traits that would be promoted and cultivated if this were something sought after. To a very large extent, the intrinsic values suggested by pluralists tend to be hedonic instrumental values.

<sup>21</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 77–80.

<sup>22</sup> William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 87–88. Presumably, one could compile a corresponding list of disvalues.

<sup>23</sup> Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 115.

Indeed, pluralists' suggested intrinsic values all *point toward pleasure*, for while the other values are reasonably explainable as a means toward pleasure, pleasure itself is not reasonably explainable as a means toward the other values.

Some have noticed this. Moore himself, for example, writes that though his pluralistic theory of intrinsic value is opposed to hedonism, its application would, in practice, look very much like hedonism's: "Hedonists," he writes "do, in general, recommend a course of conduct which is very similar to that which I should recommend."<sup>24</sup> Ross writes that "[i]t is quite certain that by promoting virtue and knowledge we shall inevitably produce much more pleasant consciousness. These are, by general agreement, among the surest sources of happiness for their possessors."<sup>25</sup> Roger Crisp observes that "those goods cited by non-hedonists are goods we often, indeed usually, enjoy."<sup>26</sup>

What Moore and Ross do not seem to notice is that their observations give rise to two reasons to reject pluralism and endorse hedonism. The first reason is that if the suggested non-hedonic intrinsic values are potentially explainable by appeal to just pleasure and pain (which, following my argument in the previous chapter, we should accept as intrinsically valuable and disvaluable), then—by appeal to Occam's razor—we have at least a *pro tanto* reason to resist the introduction of any further intrinsic values and disvalues. It is ontologically more costly to posit a plurality of intrinsic values and disvalues, so in case all values admit of explanation by reference to a single intrinsic value and a single intrinsic disvalue, we have reason to reject more complicated accounts.

The fact that suggested non-hedonic intrinsic values tend to be hedonistic instrumental values does not, however, count in favor of hedonism solely in virtue of being most elegantly explained by hedonism; it also does so in virtue of creating an explanatory challenge for pluralists. The challenge can be phrased as the following question: If the non-hedonic values suggested by pluralists are truly intrinsic values in their own right, then *why* do they tend to point toward pleasure and away from pain?<sup>27</sup>

There seems to be two main ways for pluralists to reply to this question, neither of which is satisfactory. One reply is to claim that it is accidental that non-hedonic intrinsic values have a tendency to be hedonic instrumental values. This is a weak reply, for though we cannot rule out a priori the possibility that non-hedonic intrinsic values just happen to be values that are means toward pleasure, it seems like too convenient a coincidence to be believable. If values other than pleasure were really intrinsic in their own right, it is puzzling why they would tend to point toward pleasure and away from pain.

The other pluralist reply is to claim that the proposed intrinsic values point toward pleasure because our ability to feel pleasure tracks value. On this account,

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> Ross, *The Right and the Good*, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Crisp, *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Silverstein has made a similar observation. "Without hedonism," Silverstein writes, "we cannot explain *why* all of our desires are related to happiness in this way." Matthew Silverstein, "In Defense of Happiness: A Response to the Experience Machine," *Social Theory and Practice* 26 (2000): 297.

things are pleasurable because they are valuable, which is the hedonist view turned on its head, the hedonist view being that things are valuable because they are pleasurable. The problem with this response is that granted that we are the products of evolution, pleasure has presumably tracked reproduction-enhancing traits, not value. Unless value is just that which promotes reproduction (which I argued against in the previous section), it is very implausible that evolution tracked value. It seems that at every step in the evolutionary process, reproductive advantage provides an exhaustive explanation of why certain traits were selected; there seems to be no other force doing work in biology, especially not a value force strong enough to overrule reproductive advantage time and again. The only way to argue that pleasure tracks value and pain tracks disvalue would be to do as Thomas Aquinas does when arguing for a similar view: rely on an intelligent designer who designed our pleasure and pain mechanism so that it came to track value.<sup>28</sup> That, however, gives pluralism a shaky foundation indeed. It is unclear, moreover, what better explanations are available to pluralists.

Can hedonists explain why pluralists' suggested intrinsic values tend to be hedonic instrumental values? I think we can, and that we can do so in a way that adds further strength to the hedonist position. To see how, recall that in the previous section, we saw that in cases in which pleasures are instrumentally very disvaluable, it is easy to deny their intrinsic value, and in cases where pleasures are instrumentally very valuable, it is easy to deny their intrinsic disvalue—even though, upon reflection, we become aware of the fact that in making such judgments, we conflate instrumental and intrinsic value. Hedonists might suggest, moreover, that we conflate instrumental and intrinsic value in other cases as well. Perhaps, when something has a significant instrumental value, and we are constantly reminded of its value, we easily come to think that it is valuable in and of itself, not just valuable in virtue of its relations.<sup>29</sup>

If two things occur together repeatedly, we tend to lump them together mentally. If you see a certain person and, simultaneously, experience a certain feeling—and this happens again and again—you are likely to start associating the person with that feeling. This has an obvious learning benefit: In reacting to our surroundings, it helps us stay clear of dangers. The next time you see the man who once tried to harm you, you do not need to embark on an elaborate reasoning process about the ways in which he might harm you again; instead, you immediately think “Bad man!” and run away. Such a mechanism is also of help in reacting to inanimate objects. If you have gotten sick by eating a certain kind of mushroom, say, chances are that the next time you see, smell, or taste a mushroom of the same kind, you will feel aversion. Using a similar explanatory model, it might be suggested that we associate with intrinsic value and disvalue things that repeatedly have been vital in bringing about intrinsic value and disvalue.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Question 34, Article I–II, 65–70.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Brandt points to a similar explanation of how we come to form our desires. Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 100. So does Peter Railton, who writes that our desires “can be explained in part as tracing a path oriented towards the experience of happiness.” Peter Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1989): 167.

Hedonists might thus suggest that pluralists believe in the intrinsic values that they do because they conflate crucial instrumental values with intrinsic value. Interestingly, the explanatory model was already suggested in the early 18th century, by the hedonist John Gay. In *Preliminary Dissertation concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality*, Gay sets forth to attack a range of pluralistic positions, and to do so, he starts by considering the mindsets of people who mistakenly have come to believe that *money* is intrinsically valuable. He asks rhetorically:

Did not they at first perceive a great many Advantages from being possess'd of Money, and from thence conceive a Pleasure in having it, thence desire it, thence endeavor to obtain it, thence receive an actual Pleasure in obtaining it, thence desire to preserve the Possession of it?<sup>30</sup>

Gay's point is that people who value money as an end in itself have started by valuing it only as a means, but having done so repeatedly, and having thus gotten used to the idea that money is valuable, they have started valuing it also as an end. The same associative mechanism, Gay argues, operates when people believe that things such as "Knowledge, Fame & the delight in Reading, Building, Planting, and most of the various Exercises of Life" are not only means toward pleasure, but are also ends in themselves.<sup>31</sup> What we do in such cases, he explains, is that "we annex Pleasure or Pain to certain Things or Actions."<sup>32</sup>

In *Utilitarianism*, John Stuart Mill repeats Gay's point (without referring to Gay), and argues that many people treat money as a value in and of itself, even if, upon reflection, it is obvious that the value of money is wholly instrumental. This, Mill concludes, shows that we often slide from valuing something as a means to pleasure to valuing it as an end in itself.<sup>33</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge also touches on this point, and writes that we often engage in an "illusory projection on things at large of the sparkling or dreadful qualities which pertain most undeniably to pleasures and pains ..."<sup>34</sup>

Philosophers do not seem to be immune from making associative or projective value judgments of the kind that Gay, Mill, and Sprigge warn against. Joseph Raz, for example, suggests in *Engaging Reason* that

[p]laying tennis is intrinsically good. It can also be good instrumentally, as a way of keeping fit, making friends or money, or gaining prestige. But apart from any beneficial consequences playing tennis may or may not have it is a valuable activity; it is an activity with intrinsic value.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> John Gay, "Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality" in W. King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, Vol. 1, 2nd edition, edited by E. Law (London: 1732), p. xxxi.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., xxxiii.

<sup>33</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p 83. A similar argument, that appeals to projection rather than association, is presented in Ivar Labukt, *Hedonistic Egoism: A Theory of Normative Reasons for Action*, Doctoral Dissertation (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Rational Foundations of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 240.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Raz, *Engaging Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 296, quoted in Labukt, p. 140.

Admittedly, it is possible that adhering to the rules of a Western ball game has intrinsic value. It seems, however, rather unlikely. In fear of being condescending, it seems much more likely that Joseph Raz likes to play tennis and has come to associate playing tennis with good feelings, and that this has slipped over into a judgment that playing tennis is good in and of itself.

If this is the way our evaluative psychologies work, then hedonists have a model that can explain why pluralists' suggested non-hedonic intrinsic values tend to be hedonic instrumental values. They have this tendency since it is in virtue of being hedonic instrumental values that pluralists have come, erroneously, to think of them as intrinsic values.

### 3 Conclusion

In this paper I have provided an argument for a hedonistic theory of intrinsic value. In the first section (P1) I argued that pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable, and considered and rebutted a number of objections to this view. In the next section (P2) I argued that if we accept that pleasure is intrinsically valuable and pain is intrinsically disvaluable, then we should resist the introduction of any further intrinsic values and disvalues. The reason is that the additional intrinsic values and disvalues suggested by pluralists are explainable as instrumental hedonistic values and disvalues. Occam's razor thus gives us reason to favor hedonism over competing theories, and while hedonists can explain why pluralist values are explainable this way, pluralists face an explanatory challenge.

Of course, this argument is insufficient to settle the debate about hedonism. For one, there might be good arguments against P1 or P2 that I have overlooked. Second, there is, famously, a long line of more general objections to hedonism, such as the Open Question Argument and the Experience Machine thought experiment.<sup>36</sup> These general objections lie beyond the scope of this paper. My aim in this paper has been to bring to the table a simple, two-premise argument for hedonism, and to defend its two premises.

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<sup>36</sup> G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp. 89–110; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 42–45.