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## DESIRE SATISFACTIONISM AND HEDONISM

**ABSTRACT.** Hedonism and the desire-satisfaction theory of welfare (“desire satisfactionism”) are typically seen as archrivals in the contest over identifying what makes one’s life go best. It is surprising, then, that the most plausible form of hedonism just is the most plausible form of desire satisfactionism. How can a single theory of welfare be a version of both hedonism and desire satisfactionism? The answer lies in what pleasure is: pleasure is, in my view, the subjective satisfaction of desire. This thesis about pleasure is clarified and defended only after we proceed through the dialectics that get us to the most plausible forms of hedonism and desire satisfactionism.

Hedonism and the desire theory of welfare (or “desire satisfactionism”, as I will call it) are typically seen as archrivals in the contest over identifying what makes one’s life go best. Hedonism identifies the good life with the pleasurable life. Desire satisfactionism is supposed to be less paternalistic: you don’t need to get pleasure to be well off; you just need to get what you want, whatever it is. It is surprising, then, that the most plausible form of hedonism is extensionally equivalent to the most plausible form of desire satisfactionism. It is even more surprising that the most plausible form of hedonism *just is* the most plausible form of desire satisfactionism. I intend here to defend this surprising thesis. How can a single theory of welfare be a version of both hedonism and desire satisfactionism? The answer has to do with pleasure. But it’s no dubious psychological claim about how we humans ultimately desire only pleasure. The answer, rather, lies in what pleasure *is*: pleasure, I will argue, is the subjective satisfaction of desire.

So in this paper I am trying to accomplish three major tasks: (i) discover the most plausible form of the desire theory of welfare, (ii) discover the most plausible form of hedonism, and (iii) defend a theory about the nature of pleasure. Since each of these topics deserves at least its own paper, my treatments of

them will be overbrief. I will not be able to talk about every argument against each of the three main views under discussion. And the objections I do discuss I must discuss quickly. Nevertheless, I hope to make a decent preliminary case for the thesis that these two rival approaches to the nature of welfare come to the same thing.

### 1. DESIRE SATISFACTIONISM

If hedonism tells us that enjoying what we get makes our lives go well, desire satisfactionism tells us that getting what we want makes our lives go well. We might prefer a desire theory of welfare when we consider the fact that we value many things other than pleasure, such as friendship, love, truth, beauty, freedom, privacy, achievement, solitude – the list is long. If one’s life is filled with such things, and they are exactly the things one wants, and one therefore thinks that one’s life is pretty good, it seems arrogant and paternalistic of the hedonist to insist otherwise, just because the life lacks enough pleasurable experience.

The simplest form of the desire theory of welfare I call *Simple Desire Satisfactionism*. According to Simple Desire Satisfactionism, your life goes well to the extent that your desires are satisfied. Every time a subject S desires that some state of affairs p be the case, and p is the case, S’s desire that p be the case has been satisfied. And according to Simple Desire Satisfactionism, he is thereby better off. It is no part of Simple Desire Satisfactionism that, for a person’s desire to be satisfied, the person must experience feelings of satisfaction.

Everyone seems to agree on one restriction to Simple Desire Satisfactionism right off the bat: we should count only intrinsic desires. If I want to turn on my CD player only because I want to hear the Pixies, I’m made no better off if only the first desire is satisfied. That desire is extrinsic: I have it only because I desire something else, and I think the thing extrinsically desired will lead to that something else. Something goes well for me in

this situation only if my intrinsic desire to hear the Pixies is satisfied. Let *Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism* be the desire theory of welfare that counts only the satisfaction of intrinsic desire.

Now on to more interesting problems for the desire approach to welfare. I begin with two objections that I think are successful but that point to improved versions of the theory. I conclude this section with two popular objections that I think are unsuccessful.

### 1.1. *The Problem of Changing Desires*

Richard Brandt, a one-time (1979, ch. 6) defender of desire satisfactionism, became convinced later (1982, p.179) that any form of desire satisfactionism suffers from an irremediable defect: there is no satisfactory way to handle cases in which a desire for something is unstable. Suppose for my whole life I want rock and roll on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday; suppose a week before the birthday my tastes change and I want easy listening on my birthday (and will continue to want easy listening). Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism seems to imply that we make me better off by giving me rock and roll on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. But this seems mistaken – the theory suggests we force-feed people things they no longer want. But we can't focus exclusively on present desires either (as has been suggested). Suppose I want pushpin now but my desire for pushpin will last only another day, and then for the rest of my life I will want poetry. You don't make me better off by permanently giving me pushpin instead of permanently giving me poetry.

Some philosophers try to handle this problem by moving to *ideal desires* – that is, by counting only the satisfactions of the desires we *would* have if we were better informed, or were more rational. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that ideal desires are the *deus ex machina* of the desire satisfaction literature, dragged in at any moment to solve whatever objection is forthcoming. It is hoped that one's ideal desires are unchanging, and so The Problem of Changing Desires would not arise. But I don't think such a theory will get desires stable enough. Certainly there is

nothing incoherent in the idea of a fully informed person changing his intrinsic preferences.

Brandt abandoned the desire approach wholesale, but a desire theoretic solution can be had: say that a state of affairs is a desire satisfaction only if it is a case of a person wanting something and getting it *at the same time*. Call the resulting theory *Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism*. Such a theory generates the correct results in the two cases above. Since it ignores past preferences, it implies in the first case that we provide the most benefit by giving me easy listening. In the second case, the theory implies that we benefit me more by giving me poetry since, as the years go by, I will get what I am wanting at each time. This far outweighs the fact that I don't get what I want just for today.

I admit that at this stage the concept of concurrence may be less than perfectly clear. For instance, can present desires about the future or past (so-called now-for-then desires) ever be concurrently satisfied? Since Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism isn't the theory I like best anyway, I'll forgo clarifying the doctrine. Our intuitive and imperfect understanding of concurrence should be enough for the time being.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2. *The Objection from Remote Desires*

The name I give this objection derives from the remoteness of the *objects* of desire. Sometimes we desire certain remote (in time, place, importance, etc.) states of affairs to obtain. James Griffin presents this kind of objection in the following passage about desire satisfactionism (1986, pp. 16–17):

The breadth of the account, which is its attraction, is also its greatest flaw. ... It allows my utility to be determined by things that I am not aware of (that seems right: if you cheat me out of an inheritance that I never expected, I might not know but still be worse off for it), but also by things that do not affect my life in any way at all. The trouble is that one's desires spread themselves so widely over the world that their objects extend far outside the bound of what, with any plausibility, one could take as touching one's well-being.

Shelly Kagan (1998, p. 37) presents a similar line of thought:

... according to the preference theory, I am made better off by the satisfaction of my various desires, regardless of the subject matter of the given desire. Suppose, then, that I am a large fan of prime numbers, and so I hope and desire that the total number of atoms in the universe is prime. Imagine, furthermore, that the total number of atoms in the universe is, in point of fact, prime. Since this desire is satisfied, the preference theory must say that I am better off for it ... But this is absurd! The number of atoms in the universe has nothing at all to do with the quality of my life. ... So the preference theory must be false.

And Derek Parfit has made this objection in the form of the case of *The Stranger on the Train* (1984, p. 494):<sup>2</sup>

Suppose that I meet a stranger who has what is believed to be a fatal disease. My sympathy is aroused, and I strongly want this stranger to be cured. We never meet again. Later, unknown to me, this stranger is cured. On the Unrestricted Desire-Fulfillment Theory, this event is good for me, and makes my life go better. This is not plausible. We should reject this theory.

The solution Parfit offers the desire satisfactionist is to restrict the theory to count only desires “about our own lives”. Parfit admits, however (1984, p. 494), that “when this theory appeals only to desires that are about our own lives, it may be unclear what this excludes”. My own view is that even if it can be made clear what it means for a desire to be about one’s own life – and Mark Carl Overvold (1980, 10n) has offered a way – we are barking up the wrong tree, because many desires not about our own lives are important, too. So I propose an alternative solution to *The Objection from Remote Desires*: count a desire satisfaction only if the subject is aware that the desire is satisfied. The theory based on this restriction will be explained shortly.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3. *The Problem of Desiring Not To Be Well-Off*

Imagine a man who, ridden with guilt for past crimes, wants (intrinsically) to be badly off. In order to satisfy this desire, the man takes an arduous, boring, and insignificant job.<sup>4</sup> He’s pretty miserable. He seems to have succeeded in getting what he wants: being badly off. But since he is getting what he intrinsically wants while he wants it, Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism seems to imply, absurdly, that he is well-off.

I don’t think *The Problem of Desiring Not To Be Well-Off* works. I deny that Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism implies that the man described above is well-off. My reply depends in part upon some views about the nature of pleasure/happiness and pain/misery that will emerge later in the paper. The short answer is that it is impossible (conceptually, metaphysically) to experience things like misery, boredom, arduousness, etc. without having desires frustrated.

The example may help to clarify. Here is how the actual desire-satisfaction theorist should describe what goes on in the case. The man has a job that is arduous, boring, and insignificant. His daily life is thus jam-packed with desire frustration: to feel bored is, necessarily, to want (intrinsically) to be doing something other than what one is doing. For a person to find a task to be arduous is also, necessarily, for him to have certain desires frustrated. Does it make sense to say that someone found some stretch of time boring, or arduous, but that he was getting everything he wanted at every moment of that stretch of time?

So each day at this job, the man is miserable. His life is filled with desire frustration. But that’s not the whole story, for he does have at least one desire satisfaction on his plate: the desire that he be badly off. That’s one point in his favor against all the points against him. But the satisfaction of this desire to be badly off must, of necessity, count for less, in terms of welfare, than all the daily frustrations he racks up. If it were otherwise, then the man wouldn’t be badly off, and the desire to be badly off would no longer be satisfied.<sup>5</sup> So Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism implies, correctly, that the man is not well off, that he has succeeded in becoming badly off.

### 1.4. *The Problem of Defective Desires*

*The Problem of Defective Desires* attempts to shake desire satisfactionism at its foundations. The problem is that it seems that we can desire things that are bad for us – things such that, if we get them, we are made worse off because of it. Call a desire ‘defective’ if it would not be good for the subject to satisfy it.

The claim is that there are indeed defective desires, but that, according to an unrestricted theory like Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism, there are none because, on the theory, all desire satisfactions are good.

It is not hard to think of cases in which satisfying an desire is bad for us. We have, for example, *ill-informed desires*: we might have a desire to drink from the river not knowing that it will make us sick. The thought is that desire satisfactionism implies, absurdly, that it would be good for us to take the drink.<sup>6</sup> There are also *irrational desires*: a person might know that going to the dentist is in his interest, but still he prefers and chooses not to go, because he is weak-willed. The claim is that desire satisfactionism implies, incorrectly, that since he desires not to go, and all desire satisfactions are good for a person, it is good for him not to go to the dentist.<sup>7</sup>

The problem is brought out by the fact that it is very natural to evaluate and criticize desires and desire satisfactions themselves. But desire satisfactionism, according to which all desire satisfactions are good for the subject, doesn't seem to allow it.

Some desire satisfactionists accept the argument from defective desires, and, in response, develop a version of ideal desire satisfactionism. Richard Brandt's (1979) version of the theory counts not our actual desires, but of our "rational desires" – roughly, the desires we would have if we were fully informed. In my view, ideal desire satisfactionism is both ineffectual in solving The Problem of Defective Desires and fails in its own right. It is ineffectual in solving The Problem of Defective Desires because there is no guarantee that idealization will remove all the offensive desires (e.g., irrational desires (discussed above) and base desires (to be discussed below) can survive full information). The theory fails in its own right because (i) unwanted satisfactions of merely ideal desires are not, contrary to what the theory says, necessarily intrinsically good for a person,<sup>8</sup> and (ii) there are a host of problems surrounding the concept and process of idealization.<sup>9</sup> One could devote at least a paper to the development and defense of these claims; I must leave them undeveloped and undefended here.

In my view, the Problem of Defective Desires is soluble fairly straightforwardly. Standard "actualist" versions of desire satisfactionism *are* compatible with the criticism of desires, though all criticism must be "extrinsic". Extrinsic desires can be criticized for failing to be efficient means to the satisfaction of intrinsic desires. Intrinsic desires can be criticized for leading to a less favorable balance of satisfactions over frustrations than would have occurred had the intrinsic desire not been had, or not been satisfied. In both cases, criticism is "extrinsic": the desires, or their satisfactions, are criticized not in themselves, but for what they lead to, or for what they fail to lead to.

We can make this more clear and explicit by distinguishing *intrinsic goodness* (for a subject) from *all things considered goodness* (for a subject). A state of affairs *p* is *intrinsically good for a subject S* iff it is good in itself for S; iff given two lives exactly the same except with respect to *p*, the *p*-life is a better life for the person (i.e., contains more welfare) than the not-*p*-life. Standard actualist forms of desire satisfactionism (like Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism) entail that all (concurrent, intrinsic) desire satisfactions are intrinsically good for their subject.

A state of affairs *p* is *all things considered good for a subject S* iff the life *S* would lead were *p* to obtain is better than the life *S* would lead were *p* not to obtain. Since it can and does happen that a state of affairs that is intrinsically good for a subject leads to states of affairs that are intrinsically bad for the subject, *being intrinsically good* does not entail *being all things considered good*. Thus, standard actualist forms of desire satisfactionism (like Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism) do *not* entail that all (concurrent, intrinsic) desire satisfactions are all things considered good for their subject.

Armed with this distinction, we can see how an actualist desire satisfaction theory can accommodate the obvious fact that we can desire things that are bad for us. Recall the case of the polluted river. The desire satisfactionist should say that it was intrinsically good for the subject to quench his thirst by drinking from the polluted river, since an intrinsic desire (the thirst) was satisfied. But she can and should also say that that

desire was defective and should not have been satisfied since it was all things considered bad to drink from that river.<sup>10</sup> It was not in the subject's long-term self interest. And the desire satisfactionist can say this. She can say it because drinking from the river led to so many desire frustrations – those accompanying being sick.

A similar response is available with respect to irrational desire. We all agree, including even the irrational subject, that it would be good for him to go to the dentist, and that he should go. Even though doing so will frustrate one of the subject's intrinsic desires, actualist desire satisfaction theories still imply it would be good for him to go. It would be all things considered good, since the life the subject would lead were he to go to the dentist is better for him than the life he would lead were he not to go.

So critics of the desire theory of welfare do present cases of defective desires, but none so far is a convincing case in which an intrinsic desire is intrinsically bad to satisfy.

But there another kind of case that is clearly meant to be an intrinsic criticism of an intrinsic desire: the case of *base desires*. G.E. Moore's (1903, Section 56) famous example of base pleasures can be modified for our purposes: imagine a case in which a person's strongest desires would be satisfied by a perpetual indulgence in bestiality. So long as the imagined indulgence doesn't bring with it concomitant frustrations, a theory like Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism must deem the life a very good one. Since an analogous objection faces the hedonist, I save discussion of this objection for the upcoming section on hedonism.

For now, I conclude that at least the first two variants of the Problem of Defective Desires do not refute Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism.

## 2. SUBJECTIVE DESIRE SATISFACTIONISM

This dialectic leads us to a theory I will call *Subjective Desire Satisfactionism*. More standard versions of desire satisfactionism say, in a nutshell, that welfare consists in getting what one

wants. Subjective Desire Satisfactionism says, on the other hand, that welfare consists in believing one is getting what one wants.<sup>11</sup>

We can state the theory better as follows. An instance of "subjective desire satisfaction" is a state of affairs in which a subject (i) has an intrinsic desire at some time for some state of affairs and (ii) believes at that time that the state of affairs obtains. An instance of "subjective desire frustration" occurs when (i) above holds but the subject believes that the desired state of affairs does *not* obtain. The value for the subject of (or the amount of welfare in) a subjective desire satisfaction is equal to the intensity of the desire satisfied. Likewise for frustrations, except that the number is negative.<sup>12</sup> The theory is summative so that the total amount of welfare in a life is equal to the sum of the values of all the subjective desire satisfactions and frustrations in that life.

Officially, here is the theory:

Subjective Desire Satisfactionism

- (i) Every instance of subjective desire satisfaction is intrinsically good for its subject.
- (ii) Every instance of subjective desire frustration is intrinsically bad for its subject.
- (iii) The intrinsic value for its subject of an instance of subjective desire satisfaction = the intensity of the desire subjectively satisfied.
- (iv) The intrinsic value for its subject of an instance of subjective desire frustration = -(the intensity of the desire subjectively frustrated).
- (v) The intrinsic value of a life for the one who lives it = the sum of the values of all the instances of subjective desire satisfaction and frustration contained therein.

The phrase "the intrinsic value of a life for the one who lives it" means the same as "the total amount of welfare in a life" or "how good the life was for the one who lived it".

Subjective Desire Satisfactionism, or SDS for short, avoids The Problem of Changing Desires in a manner similar to the way in which Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism did.

According to SDS, a person's past desires have no direct impact on the person's welfare – we do not benefit a person simply in virtue of satisfying (subjectively or otherwise) a formerly held desire. (Incidentally, that a person's past desires have no direct impact on welfare does not mean that we should ignore a person's past desires. For they are often decent indicators of the desires she has now or will have in the future.) In the case discussed earlier, SDS implies that it would be best to give me easy listening on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. That is what I will want on the day, and actually giving it to me is the best way to ensure that I will think I am getting it. It was left unclear what Concurrent Intrinsic Desire Satisfactionism had to say about desires about the future and past (the now-for-then desires). On SDS the matter is clear. It is good for a subject to subjectively satisfy her desires about any time, past, present, and future. Now-for-then desires count. This has an interesting, and I think quite plausible, consequence for the case about the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Throughout my life, I want that I get rock and roll on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. SDS implies that it is good for me to believe, throughout my life, that that's what I will get. As the day nears and my preference changes to easy listening, SDS implies that it is good for me to believe that easy listening is what I will get. Optimistic anticipation is a good thing.

According to SDS, a person racks up welfare only by subjectively satisfying his present desires; it follows that posthumous satisfactions are worthless, at least with respect to their welfare value. But this is not because SDS ignores now-for-then desires. Now-for-then desires, as we saw above, do impact welfare according to SDS, so long as they are coupled with now-for-then beliefs. So *subjective* posthumous satisfaction (if we may call it that), *is* valuable. It is good for you to think your corpse will be treated the way you want it to be treated. The sense in which posthumous satisfactions don't count on SDS is that, after you are dead, there is nothing we can do to affect the welfare-value of your life. So given SDS, we don't benefit the dead by carrying out their wishes about their manner of burial. Since many people think we cannot be harmed or benefited after we are dead, SDS therefore avoids

another popular time-related objection to the desire approach. It should be noted that even though SDS deems posthumous satisfactions worthless, the theory does not imply that we ought not to carry out the wishes of the dead. It implies only that if we do have an obligation to carry out the wishes, the obligation derives from some factor other than the welfare-effect on the dead.

SDS avoids The Objection from Remote Desires because only non-remote satisfactions – i.e., cases in which the subject believes the object of his desire is true – count. When the stranger on Parfit's train eventually recovers from illness, Parfit is not made any better off, but not because the desire that the stranger recover isn't "about Parfit's own life"; rather it is because Parfit has no awareness of the stranger's recovery.<sup>13</sup>

SDS avoids The Problem of Desiring Not To Be Well-Off because it does not in fact imply that things are going well for the man desiring and getting the awful job. True, he does have at least one desire satisfied – that he be badly off. But he has many more and more intense subjective desire frustrations. In order for a job really to be arduous, boring, and unfulfilling, it has to involve much subjective desire frustration.

Subjective Desire Satisfactionism thus in my view avoids or solves the most important problems facing the desire satisfactionist.

Subjective Desire Satisfactionism is a "mental state theory": according to it, how well-off a person is depends solely upon her mental states. Thus, one aspect of traditional desire satisfaction theories that attracted some – that it is a "state of the world" theory rather than a mental state theory – has been abandoned. Though I am convinced that mental state theories are more defensible, I need not take a stand for the purposes of this paper. I'll explain why in the next section, on hedonism.

Subjective Desire Satisfactionism is an unusual form of desire satisfactionism in another respect. According to it, a state of affairs can be good for a subject even though no desire of the subject's is satisfied in it. The subject need only *believe* that the object of his desire obtains. But notice that typical versions of ideal desire satisfactionism – which count only the satisfaction

of some class of your hypothetical desires – share this feature as well. On ideal desire satisfactionism, a state of affairs can be good for a person even though no actual desire of the subject's has been satisfied in it.

### 3. HEDONISM

Simple versions of hedonism are implausible. Those that take pleasure to be a single, uniform sensation fail for two reasons: (1) pleasure is not a single, uniform sensation; and (2) even granting that it is, such a theory entails that people who want, say, peace and quiet instead of these sensations of pleasure, and get it, aren't very well off, despite the fact that they are perfectly satisfied with their lives and are at every moment getting exactly what they want.

A more plausible view about the nature of pleasure, according to which pleasure is, most fundamentally, a propositional attitude rather than a sensation, provides the basis for a more plausible hedonism. Pleasure, on this view, is had when a person "takes pleasure in" some state of affairs, or enjoys it, or is pleased that it is the case. This is the *Attitudinal Theory of Pleasure*. A version of hedonism that makes use of this theory of pleasure implies that the life of the desirer of peace and quiet over sensory pleasure very well may be filled with pleasure, though none of it sensory. It will be filled with pleasure so long as the person takes pleasure in the fact that she is getting the peace and quiet.<sup>14</sup>

The Attitudinal Theory of Pleasure should really be called the Attitudinal Theory of Pleasure and Pain, for it treats pain in the analogous way, as a propositional attitude. We might express this attitude when we say that a person is "pained by the fact that" or "doesn't like that" such-and-such is the case. It is important to emphasize that on the Attitudinal Theory, there can still be such things as sensations of pleasure and pain. A sensation gets to be a sensation of pleasure (or pain), according to the theory, when the person experiencing the sensation takes pleasure (or pain) in the fact that he is feeling it.<sup>15</sup> On this view, any sensation can be a sensation of pleasure, whether it is the

pressure sensation of a massage, the taste sensation of a fine wine, or even a sensation most people would find painful, such as a burning sensation caused by fire. It is a virtue of the Attitudinal Theory of Pleasure that it handles nicely the phenomenon of masochism: a person is a masochist (or at least one sort of masochist) if he takes pleasure in sensations that many of us would be pained by.

A hedonism that makes use of the Attitudinal Theory of Pleasure – "attitudinal hedonism"<sup>16</sup> – requires at least one additional complication: a restriction to *intrinsic* enjoyment (and disenjoyment). This is pleasure (or pain) taken in some state of affairs for its own sake, not for what it might lead to. A parallel restriction, recall, was made to the desire theory. Call the resulting theory *Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism*, or 'IAH' for short.<sup>17</sup> If we assume, as is very natural to do, that some instances of attitudinal pleasure are stronger, or more intense, than others and that these intensities are in principle quantifiable, we can formulate IAH as follows:

#### Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism

- (i) Every instance of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure is intrinsically good for its subject.
- (ii) Every instance of intrinsic attitudinal pain is intrinsically bad for its subject.
- (iii) The intrinsic value for its subject of an instance of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure = the intensity of the pleasure.
- (iv) The intrinsic value for its subject of an instance of intrinsic attitudinal pain = –(the intensity of the pain).
- (v) The intrinsic value of a life for the one who lives it = the sum of the values of all the instances of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure and pain contained therein.

In light of his rejection of the importance of sensory pleasure, it is not unreasonable to attribute something like attitudinal hedonism to Epicurus.<sup>18</sup> And some version of attitudinal hedonism is held by, or might be held by, or might be part of the theory held by, Parfit (1984, pp. 501–502), later Brandt (1991),<sup>19</sup> Adams (1999, ch. 3), and Feldman (2002).

Though IAH does not fall prey to objections (1) and (2) above, it does contain a controversial feature: it is a mental state theory.

Some philosophers do not like mental state theories, often for these two reasons: (i) a person can be radically deceived about his situation and still lead a good life according to such theories;<sup>20</sup> and (ii) a life filled with only “base pleasures” is still a good one (at least according to the mental state theory currently under consideration).<sup>21</sup> My own view is that such objections are misguided. The deceived life and the base life still rank high in terms of welfare, but we are inclined to judge them unfavorably because they rank poorly on other scales on which a life can be measured, such as the scales that measure dignity, or virtue, or achievement. Subjective Desire Satisfactionism and Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism, as theories of *welfare*, are therefore not damaged by these “anti-mental-statist” arguments.

But if you disagree, and insist that, say, a perpetual indulger has a lower level of *welfare* than an equally enjoyable but more dignified life, there is a way to revise hedonism (and hence, so say I, desire satisfactionism) to avoid the objection. This line has been suggested by Parfit (1984, pp. 501–502) and Adams (1999, ch. 3) and explicitly taken by Feldman (2002). Parfit (1984, p. 493) distinguishes “objective list” theories of welfare from hedonist and desire-satisfaction theories. According to objective list theories, there are some things – knowledge, engagement in rational activity, mutual love, and awareness of beauty might be contenders (Parfit 1984, p. 502) – that are just good for you to get no matter what your attitude towards them is. Standard hedonist and desire-satisfaction theories are at the other end of the spectrum; according to them, it doesn’t matter what you get, so long as you have the right attitude (pleasure or desire) towards it. Objective list theories may seem unsatisfactory because they make it possible for a person who hates his life through and through nevertheless to have a good one. Desire-satisfaction and hedonist theories seem unsatisfactory to some because they make it possible for a perpetual indulger in the base to have a great life. Parfit suggests a synthesis (1984, p. 502):

On this view, each side in this disagreement saw only half the truth. Each side put forward as sufficient something that was only necessary. Pleasure with many other kinds of object has no value. And, if they are entirely devoid of pleasure, there is no value in knowledge, rational activity, love, or awareness of beauty. What is of value, or is good for someone, is to have both; to be engaged in these activities, and to be strongly wanting to be so engaged.

Parfit’s remarks suggest the following kind of revision to both attitudinal hedonism and desire satisfactionism. Whereas according to the simpler versions of the theories, only the intensity of the pleasure or the desire plays a role in determining welfare value, according to a hybrid hedonist/objective list theory or desire satisfactionist/objective list theory, whether or not the object of the pleasure or the desire is on the objective list also plays a role. One natural way for the theory to go would be to assign a number to every state of affairs, one representing how *worthy of being desired* the state of affairs is, or how *appropriate it is to have pleasure taken in it*.<sup>22</sup> It could be held that the objects of base desires or pleasures have a negative level of pleasure- or desire-worthiness. The theory would then have the implication that satisfying a base pleasure or a base desire actually makes a life go worse. Thus, if one insists that a life of perpetual indulgence is indeed ineligible, one need not abandon the hedonist or desire approach wholesale.

Incidentally, I suspect that those who go in for ideal desire-satisfaction theories are really closet hybrid desire satisfactionist/objective list theorists. A forthright hybrid theorist of this sort would just come right out and say that it is possible to intrinsically desire the “wrong” things. But ideal desire satisfactionists shy away from such talk, presumably because their theory is not supposed to be so paternalistic.

The cases of radical deception are amenable to similar treatment. This time, it’s not pleasure-worthiness or desire-worthiness that counts, but *truth*. On the revised theory, pleasure taken in, or the subjective satisfaction of desires for, *true* states of affairs enhances the value of the pleasure or the subjective satisfaction. This way, a deluded life lived in the Matrix isn’t as good as the corresponding real life, even though the two



lives are indiscernible from the inside. Mental-statism is abandoned.

I am describing ways in which both hedonism and the desire theory could either incorporate or reject a truth requirement. Hedonism as it is normally understood can be strengthened into a state of the world theory, and desire satisfactionism as it is normally understood can be weakened into a mental state theory (like SDS). My aim in the paper is to establish a link between hedonism and desire satisfaction, but the mental-statism debate might be precisely the debate that divides the two camps. If it is, then perhaps what I am saying to each camp is something like the following. You desire theorists wedded to state-of-the-worldism: your best theory is in fact equivalent to a form of hedonism that you should like just as much. And you hedonists wedded to mental-statism: your best theory is in fact equivalent to a form of desire satisfactionism that you should like just as much.

We could go on modifying. Parfit (1984, p. 497) argues against summative theories (such as SDS and IAH) and in favor of “global” theories. Though I am not persuaded by Parfit’s argument (the drug-addiction argument), we need not settle the matter here. This is because the change Parfit suggests – viz., that the desire theory count only “global desires,” or desires about one’s life as whole – can likewise be made to the hedonist theory. Since, again, my principal aim in this paper is to demonstrate the link between hedonism and desire satisfactionism, and since parallel changes can be made to each type of theory, I will set aside both the mental-statism debate and the summative/global debate. Whatever the truth is in the matter, revise IAH and SDS accordingly. You’ll still be left with numerically identical theories.

In what follows, I will assume for simplicity’s sake that we have settled on IAH and SDS.

#### 4. THE MOTIVATIONAL THEORY OF PLEASURE

We have now, before us, what seem to be two rival theories of the good life: a form of hedonism (IAH) and a form of desire

satisfactionism (SDS). How do we choose between them? Luckily, we don’t have to. For we have only one theory on our hands: IAH *is* SDS. This claim rests upon the theory of pleasure that I favor, the *Motivational Theory of Pleasure*, which reduces pleasure to desire.

You might think that the reduction of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure to intrinsic desire should go something like this: S is intrinsically pleased at t that p is true iff S intrinsically desires at t that p be true, and p is true. But this won’t do. As a theory about the conditions under which a person is pleased that something is the case, whether or not the thing really is the case is irrelevant. I might strongly intrinsically desire that the stranger I met on the train get well, and he might in fact get well, but if I’m not aware of it, I certainly won’t be pleased about it. So the truth requirement in a motivational theory of attitudinal pleasure (in combination with the desire requirement) is not sufficient. The truth requirement is not necessary either. We can be pleased about false states of affairs, as when Al Gore, for a time, took delight in winning the election, even though he didn’t actually win.

Actually, this idea of false pleasures faces an annoying linguistic difficulty: “pleased that” is, or appears to be, “factive”: statements of the form ‘S is pleased that p’ appear to entail p. In other words, truth appears to be necessary for attitudinal pleasure after all. But the “factivity” of “pleased that” is not obvious. Suppose Smith believes he won the election and is ecstatic as a result. Suppose also that in fact he didn’t win and the rest of us know this. I concede that in this context there is something wrong with me saying to you, as we observe Smith, “Wow, Smith is really pleased that he won.” But I think it is not at all clear whether the defect in this sentence is semantic (in that the sentence is just false, no matter how pleased Smith is) or pragmatic (in that the sentence, while literally true, is, for some reason or other, pragmatically unassertable).

Either way, we’re ok. If the defect is merely pragmatic, then the claim that truth is not necessary for attitudinal pleasure stands. On the other hand, if attitudinal pleasure really does entail truth, then we must acknowledge that the attitude expressed in sen-

tences of the form “S is pleased that p” is not a “purely psychological” attitude (just as, e.g., knowledge is not a purely psychological attitude). But even if this is true, clearly there is a purely psychological attitude in the vicinity. Suppose Jones believes he won the election and is ecstatic as a result. Suppose also that Jones did win and we all know it. In this case we *can* say, “Jones is pleased that he won the election.” Now, clearly, there is some one psychological attitude that is shared by both Smith and Jones (or that is shared by both Smith and his counterpart in worlds doxastically indiscernible from Smith’s perspective but in which Smith wins). Call this attitude attitudinal pleasure\*. Since Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism means to recognize the possibility and even the value of false pleasures, it is actually attitudinal pleasure\* that the attitudinal hedonist has in mind. This purely psychological attitude is what the Motivational Theory of Pleasure is supposed to be about as well. I will henceforth drop the asterisk and simply use ‘is pleased that’ and its variants to mean the purely psychological kind of attitudinal pleasure.

Although truth is not necessary for attitudinal pleasure, it seems pretty clear that *belief* is. That is, in order for someone to take pleasure in some proposition, she must believe that the proposition is true. This suggests the following improvement upon the previous version and is indeed the theory I endorse, which I will call “MTP” for short:

MTP: S is intrinsically pleased at t that p iff S intrinsically desires at t that p and S believes at t that p.<sup>23</sup>

MTP takes desire and belief as basic psychological attitudes and reduces pleasure to them. But why think, between desire and pleasure, that desire is the basic attitude? Why not take pleasure as basic and hold that desire is reducible to it?<sup>24</sup>

This is because it can be shown that attitudinal pleasure is not a basic attitude. We know it’s not basic because, as noted above, having this attitude entails having another one: belief. But there can be no such necessary connections between distinct attitudes. Given MTP, the necessary connection between pleasure and belief is not one between distinct attitudes, so the

problem is avoided; the connection is no more mysterious than that between bachelorhood and maleness.

Now what about MTP itself? Is it plausible? Doesn’t it sometimes happen that we get what we want, are aware that we have gotten what we want, but fail to enjoy it? For example, I recently wanted Froot Loops, a sugary cereal I loved as a kid. Then I got some Froot Loops. But I hated them – way too sweet! Also, doesn’t it sometimes happen that I enjoy things I never desired? For example, as I was working on this paper, my wife approached me and unexpectedly began massaging my shoulders. This is something I wasn’t thinking at all about when it occurred, but I took great pleasure in it.

I think neither argument succeeds. In the Froot Loops case, I began with a desire for a certain taste, but once I got it, I lost my desire. Indeed, I didn’t take a second bite and even wanted to spit out the first. What explains this other than the fact that I no longer wanted to be tasting the Froot Loops. Since the belief and desire never did overlap, MTP does not imply that I enjoyed the Froot Loops. Yes, it can be that a person gets what she wants without enjoying it, so long as she loses the desire the instant she gets it.

In the surprise massage case, as soon as I became aware of the wonderful sensations, I instantly desired to be feeling them. Suppose my wife had asked, “Shall I keep it up?” I would have answered unhesitatingly in the affirmative. This, of course, is because I *wanted* to be feeling the sensations I was then feeling (even though I had no thoughts about such sensations one way or the other before she began). MTP therefore does imply, correctly, that I enjoyed the massage. Yes, it can be that a person enjoys something he didn’t have a desire for, so long he forms a desire for it the instant he starts getting it.

The two arguments just considered fail to appreciate the temporal index in MTP. Other arguments fail to appreciate the intrinsicality requirement. Last night I flossed my teeth. I did it because I wanted to do it. As I continued to floss I continued to want to be flossing; that explains my continued flossing. The whole time I flossed I also believed I was flossing. But I hereby testify to this: at no time during the process did I take any pleasure in the fact that I was flossing. So is this case of a desire and a belief without a

pleasure a counterexample to MTP? No, for my desire to floss was merely extrinsic – I had it only for the sake of the health of my teeth (the desire for which, incidentally, is probably also extrinsic). It is much harder to come up with a case of a person intrinsically wanting and (thinking he is) getting something while failing to enjoy it, and vice versa. If he is enjoying it, he must be liking it. If he is liking it, he must be “into it”. But this is just to say that he is for it, that he’s “pro” it. But this is just what it is to desire it.

### 5. TWO THEORIES OR ONE?

Two theories of welfare are genuinely distinct theories if they disagree about the value of some possible lives. Though the converse arguably does not hold – two distinct theories may be necessarily extensionally equivalent – no two theories are ever intensionally equivalent. If “they” were, “they” would be just one theory; for to be intensionally equivalent is to express the same proposition, and theories just are propositions.

IAH and SDS are not only necessarily extensionally equivalent, they are the same theory. IAH says that attitudinal pleasure constitutes welfare; SDS says that subjective desire satisfaction constitutes welfare. MTP tells us that attitudinal pleasure just is subjective desire satisfaction. Since MTP is supposed to be analytic, it follows that the above claims of IAH and SDS are in fact just one proposition. Hedonism and desire satisfactionism, once the kinks are worked out, turn out to be the same theory. That we have arrived at this theory via two independent avenues gives us added reason to think the theory is true.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Dick Arneson here.

<sup>2</sup> Actually, there is no train in Parfit’s original example, but the literature has since supplied one.

<sup>3</sup> James Griffin considers another way to restrict desire satisfactionism so as to handle The Objection from Remote Desires (1986, p. 17–23, *passim*). He suggests that we count a desire only if it is “one of [our] aims,” “one of [our] central ends” (p. 21). Perhaps these notions can be cashed out in terms of the *intensity* of the desire. Griffin here is assuming that the force of the objection comes from the remoteness of the importance of the desire – they are remote to what we most care about.

<sup>4</sup> This example is Richard Kraut’s (1994). See also Robert Merrihew Adams (1999, pp. 83–93).

<sup>5</sup> Which, lo and behold, could tilt the balance back again and make him badly off. But then the desire to be badly off *would* be satisfied, and the man would then fail once again to be badly off. But then once again the desire *wouldn’t* be satisfied. In short, we have a paradox. It is beyond my scope here to attempt to solve this paradox. But I will say that there is a paradox in the vicinity that is *everyone’s* paradox (whether he is a desire satisfactionist or not). It arises in cases in which a subject desires that his desires not be satisfied.

<sup>6</sup> The example is from Carson (2000, pp. 72–73).

<sup>7</sup> Schwartz (1982, p. 196) makes more or less this argument.

<sup>8</sup> This complaint is made in many places. See, e.g., Griffin (1986, pp. 11–12), Sobel (1994, pp. 792–793), Tännsjö (1988, pp. 87–88) and Feldman (2004, section 1.5). Railton (1986, p. 16) and Carson (2000, p. 226) attempt to solve the problem by counting not what one’s ideal self wants but rather what one’s ideal self wants one’s actual self to want. I find this reply unconvincing because nothing guarantees that one’s ideal self would be benevolently disposed towards one’s actual self – he might be indifferent (or worse) to his counterpart’s welfare.

<sup>9</sup> Such problems have been discussed in quite a few places. See Adams (1999, 86–87), Arneson (1999, pp. 127–130, 133–135), Carson (2000, p. 226–230), Gibbard (1990, pp. 18–22), Loeb (1995, pp. 19–20), Rosati (1995, pp. 307–324), Sobel (1994, pp. 794–807), and Velleman (1988, 365–371).

<sup>10</sup> Let me emphasize that to call a desire “defective” in this context is not to say that it is therefore appropriate to condemn the desirer for having it. It might have been a perfectly reasonable desire to satisfy given the desirers evidence.

<sup>11</sup> Earlier, I glossed the theory using the stronger concept of *being aware that* (rather than merely *believing that*, which I use here). The first and simplest formulation of the theory will use belief; it will require only that the subject believe that what he wants obtains (and will ignore the issue of whether it actually obtains). In the upcoming section on hedonism, I will consider adding a truth requirement to both subjective desire satisfactionism and the hedonist theory.

<sup>12</sup> One modification worthy of exploration includes the recognition of intensities of belief as well. I have in mind the common idea that belief is not an all or nothing affair – that there are degrees of belief. The modified theory would hold that the value of a subjective desire satisfaction is determined both by the intensity of the belief as well as by the intensity of the desire.

<sup>13</sup> Actually, Parfit’s particular case might be solved by the *concurrence* aspect of SDS: maybe the reason the subject is not made better off is that he no longer has the desire. But if we fill in the details of the case so that the subject still has the desire, the belief aspect of SDS will do the trick.

<sup>14</sup> This dialectical move is recently made by the hedonist Fred Feldman (2002).

<sup>15</sup> This thesis must be interpreted as about *intrinsic* attitudinal pleasure (and pain). More on this below.

<sup>16</sup> This is the name Feldman (2002) gives it.

<sup>17</sup> Again, following Feldman (2002).

<sup>18</sup> See Feldman (2004, Section 4.1).

<sup>19</sup> Brandt calls his theory the “gratification enhancement theory”. It is not unreasonable to suppose that gratification is attitudinal pleasure.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Nozick’s (1974, pp. 42–45) experience machine and Kagan’s (1998, pp. 34–37) deceived businessman each exemplify this objection.

<sup>21</sup> Moore’s (1903, Section 56) example of the perpetual indulgence in bestiality of course exemplifies this objection.

<sup>22</sup> This is more or less how Feldman (2002) does it. Adams (1999) requires the objects of enjoyment to have *excellence*. Parfit does not give criteria for inclusion on the objective list. The well-known views of J.S. Mill (about the enhanced value of “higher” pleasures) and of G.E. Moore (about the appreciation of the beautiful) also seem to belong in the same family.

<sup>23</sup> A more complete formulation of the theory would include variables representing *intensity* of pleasure and the way intensity of pleasure depends upon intensity of desire (or of desire and belief).

<sup>24</sup> An impressive catalog of alleged adherents of views along this line can be found in Fehige (2001); Fehige himself also defends a reduction of desire to pleasure.

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