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A HEDONIC SUBJECTIVISM

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According to a standard kind of *subjectivism about well-being*, some things are good for us because of our attitudes towards them. For example, most subjectivists can agree that having a cat is good for me because I love cats. But there is less agreement about what to say if you hate cats. According to one proposal, if you hate cats, then *not* having a cat is good for you. But in recent years, subjectivists have advanced a different proposal: if you hate cats, then having a cat is *bad* for you.[1] The idea is that all theories of well-being, subjectivism included, need to explain not just what is good for us but also what is positively bad for us.[2] A subjectivist can explain what is good for us by appealing to attitudes like my love of cats and can explain what is bad for us by appealing to attitudes like your hatred of cats.[3]

Given the need to distinguish between these two kinds of attitudes—those that make their objects good for us and those that make their objects bad for us—we need an account of how the two kinds differ psychologically. What is it about my love of cats that makes it the kind of attitude whose object is good for me? What is it about your hatred of cats that makes it the kind of attitude whose object is bad for you? I argue that the difference between the two kinds of attitudes should be explained in terms of hedonic feelings. If one's attitude towards cat ownership is partly a matter of taking pleasure in having a cat, then having a cat is good for one. If one's attitude towards cat ownership is partly a matter of taking displeasure in having a cat, then one's attitude makes cat ownership bad for one. I call this view *hedonic subjectivism*. The view is hedonic insofar as it gives a central role to pleasure and displeasure in the theory of well-being. But it is not a form of *hedonism*: it does not tell us that only pleasure and displeasure are good or bad for us. Rather, it is a kind of *subjectivism*: it tells us that *the things*

1 Note that these proposals are not mutually exclusive; one could accept both.

2 For arguments in support of the general point that theories of well-being should cover the good and the bad, see Kagan, "An Introduction to Ill-Being." For more specific arguments about how and why subjectivists should cover both the good and the bad, see Ayars, "Attraction, Aversion, and Meaning in Life"; Heathwood, "Ill-Being for Desire Satisfactionists"; and Pallies, "Attraction, Aversion, and Asymmetrical Desires."

3 I apologize if you do not hate cats.

in which we take pleasure or displeasure are good and bad for us, respectively. So if one takes pleasure in cat ownership, then cat ownership itself is good for one, independently of the goodness of the pleasure itself.[4]

I start in section 1 by making the case for distinguishing between a kind of attitude that is essentially connected to well-being and another kind of attitude that is essentially connected to ill-being. Then in section 2, I introduce hedonic subjectivism as an account of the psychological difference between these two kinds of attitudes. In section 3, I offer some preliminary motivations for this view; in section 4, I defend hedonic subjectivism from a battery of objections; and in section 5, I take stock of my conclusions.

1. WELFARE AND ILLFARE ATTITUDES

Many theories of well-being are broadly subjectivist, in the sense of entailing that our attitudes can make a difference to what is nonderivatively good or bad for us. The most obvious example is desire satisfactionism, according to which the objects of only a particular attitude—desire—are nonderivatively good or bad for us.[5] Desire satisfactionism entails that if I desire to have a cat, then having a cat increases my well-being, and does so in virtue of my having this desire. In other words, cat ownership benefits me in a way that goes beyond the beneficial *effects* of having a cat—the free pest control, for example. So it would not be just as good for me to get these same effects without actually satisfying my desire to have a cat. Going forward, whenever I say that something is good or bad for us, I mean *nonderivatively* good or bad for us, but I leave the qualifier unstated except as an occasional reminder.

Desire satisfactionism is by no means the only theory that tells us our attitudes have this kind of nonderivative significance for well-being. Hybrid

4 In defending hedonic subjectivism, I build upon a recent suggestion by Declan Smithies in "A Hedonic Theory of Desire." Smithies contends that our desires are relevant to well-being in virtue of their being reducible to pleasure and displeasure. At bottom, then, pleasure and displeasure are the subjective states most fundamentally related to well-being. This leads him to conclude, "We should prefer attitudinal theories of welfare that include all hedonically valanced attitudes, including pleasure as well as desire, within the class of attitudes that determines welfare" (22). I do not take a stand on the nature of desire, but I entirely agree that all pleasant or unpleasant attitudes are directly relevant to well-being. My goal is to develop hedonic subjectivism as the best version of this view.

5 Alternatively, a subjectivist might hold that what is good or bad for us is the *combination* of our attitudes and their objects (wanting-a-cat-and-having-one, for example). This is the so-called *combo view*, as opposed to the *object view*, on which it is only the objects of our attitudes and not the attitudes themselves that are good and bad for us (Lin, "Two Kinds of Desire Theory of Well-Being"). I find the object view more natural and continue to write in a way that assumes it, but the assumption is not doing any heavy lifting here.

theories of well-being allow that our attitudes can make things good or bad for us while retaining a place for more "objective" goods.[6] And there are versions of the objective list theory on which some objective goods involve our attitudes.[7] These theories can accommodate the claim that some of our attitudes have nonderivative significance for well-being in the relevant sense. All such views are broadly subjectivist.

Given the truth of some broadly subjectivist view, we can distinguish between those attitudes with *positive* significance and those with *negative* significance: the former make their objects good for us; the latter make their objects bad for us. I call these two kinds of attitudes *welfare attitudes* and *illfare attitudes*, respectively.

> *Welfare Attitude*: A subject bears a welfare attitude towards *p* iff they bear an attitude towards *p* in virtue of which it is good for them that *p*.
>
> *Illfare Attitude*: A subject bears an illfare attitude towards *p* iff they bear an attitude towards *p* in virtue of which it is bad for them that *p*.

I argue that welfare and illfare attitudes are reducible to pleasure and displeasure, respectively.[8]

First, it needs to be shown that welfare and illfare attitudes really are distinct *kinds* of attitude, as opposed to being different ways of describing the same kind of attitude. The latter view is exemplified by a simple version of desire satisfactionism.

> *Desire Theory of Welfare Attitudes*: A subject bears a welfare attitude with strength *s* towards *p* iff they *desire* that *p* with strength *s*.
>
> *Desire Theory of Illfare Attitudes*: A subject has an illfare attitude of strength *s* towards *p* iff they *desire* that ~*p* with strength *s*.

6 Lovett and Riedener, "The Good Life as the Life in Touch with the Good"; and Wall and Sobel, "A Robust Hybrid Theory of Well-Being."

7 Fletcher, "A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being"; and Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*.

8 Why use the terms 'welfare attitude' and 'illfare attitude', as opposed to the more natural 'positive attitude' and 'negative attitude'? The problem with the latter terminology is that 'positive attitude' and 'negative attitude' have psychological meanings in natural language. I do not want to assume that to have an attitude towards something in virtue of which it is good for us, it is necessary or sufficient to bear a *positive attitude* towards it, where 'positive attitude' is used in the ordinary psychological sense.

On this view, the distinction between welfare and illfare attitudes comes down to a distinction between two ways in which a single psychological attitude—desire—is relevant to well-being.

The way to see that this kind of view is mistaken is to notice that welfare and illfare attitudes can diverge: one can have a stronger welfare attitude towards *p* than one's illfare attitude towards ~*p*, and vice versa.[9] So it cannot be that welfare attitudes and illfare attitudes are really the same attitude described in different ways.

To see how and why welfare and illfare attitudes can diverge, we can start with the following case.

> *Three Performers*: Three violinists, Newbie, Diva, and Paycheck, are invited to perform at a party. Newbie is earnest and grateful; she is excited simply to have been invited. Diva is grumpy and arrogant; she considers this sort of work beneath her talents. Paycheck just wants her paycheck. Newbie does not expect to have a captive audience, though she delights at the idea of being the center of attention. Diva does expect to have a captive audience, though she hates the idea of *not* being the center of attention. Paycheck has no expectations and does not care much either way. As it happens, the three musicians are so engrossed in their performance that they do not notice and never learn whether the partygoers pay any attention.

Newbie and Diva share a preference to have the partygoers' attention, but their attitudes nevertheless differ in ways that are relevant to what is good or bad for them. To see this, we can start by comparing their levels of well-being on the assumption that the partygoers are in fact paying attention to the performance. If the partygoers are paying attention, then that is very good for Newbie. Having a captive audience is a dream come true for her; it is the culmination of her ambition as an aspiring performer. By contrast, it is not at all a dream come true for Paycheck or Diva. Paycheck does not care whether she has a captive audience, and Diva more or less takes it for granted that everyone pays attention to her. Neither Paycheck nor Diva would feel gratified or appreciative if they were to learn that the partygoers are enthralled. So while it is plausible that having the partygoers' attention is very good for Newbie, the same cannot be said for Diva or Paycheck.

9 For more detailed defenses of this claim, see, for example, Kelley, "Well-Being and Alienation"; Ayars, "Attraction, Aversion, and Meaning in Life"; Heathwood, "Ill-Being for Desire Satisfactionists"; Mathison, "Asymmetries and Ill-Being"; and Pallies, "Attraction, Aversion, and Asymmetrical Desires."

Now consider the possibility that the audience members are not paying attention to the performance. If the partygoers are not paying attention, then that is very bad for Diva. She hates the idea of her music being ignored or overlooked; she considers it a total tragedy to be ignored while she is performing. By contrast, being ignored is not a tragedy for Paycheck or Newbie. Paycheck does not care whether she is ignored, and Newbie more or less takes it for granted that she will be ignored. Neither Paycheck nor Newbie would feel at all upset or insulted if they were to learn that the partygoers are not enthralled by the performance. So while it is plausible that lacking the partygoers' attention is very bad for Diva, the same cannot be said for Newbie or Paycheck.

Putting all these comparisons together, we arrive at the following set of judgments:

	Significance for Newbie's well-being	Significance for Diva's well-being	Significance for Paycheck's well-being
Captive audience	High positive significance	Little or no significance	Little or no significance
No captive audience	Little or no significance	High negative significance	Little or no significance

This pattern in the violinists' levels of well-being can be easily explained if we allow that welfare and illfare attitudes can diverge. Newbie bears a strong welfare attitude towards having a captive audience but lacks a strong illfare attitude towards lacking a captive audience. The reverse is true for Diva. Thus, welfare and illfare attitudes must be different kinds of attitudes; they are not merely desires or preferences described in different ways.

Given that welfare and illfare attitudes differ in kind, we need a theory of the difference. The case of the three violinists is helpful insofar as it provides some initial *paradigms* of welfare and illfare attitudes, but it would be better to have a general theory. This is what hedonic subjectivism promises.

2. HEDONIC SUBJECTIVISM

On the view I defend, all welfare attitudes involve pleasure, and illfare attitudes involve displeasure. The theory is simple:

> *Welfare Attitudes to Pleasure*: A subject bears a welfare attitude towards *p* iff they are disposed to take pleasure in *p*.
>
> *Illfare Attitudes to Displeasure*: A subject bears an illfare attitude towards *p* iff they are disposed to take displeasure in *p*.

Recall that by definition, welfare and illfare attitudes are all and only those attitudes that make their objects nonderivatively good and bad for us, respectively. So the hedonic view has the following implications for well-being.

> *Pleasure-Welfare*: It is good for a subject that *p*, in virtue of that subject's attitude towards *p*, iff that subject is disposed to take pleasure in *p*.
>
> *Displeasure-Welfare*: It is bad for a subject that *p*, in virtue of that subject's attitude towards *p*, iff that subject is disposed to take displeasure in *p*.

To see the general idea here, consider the Three Performers case. Newbie's attitude towards being the center of attention can be described in various ways: she loves the idea, she regards it as a dream come true, and so on. According to hedonic subjectivism, what matters most fundamentally from the standpoint of well-being is that in having these attitudes, she *takes pleasure* in being the center of attention. That is why being the center of attention is good for her. The same goes for Diva. She hates the idea of being ignored, she regards it as a tragedy, and so on, but what matters most fundamentally from the standpoint of well-being is that these are ways of *taking displeasure* in being ignored. That is why it is bad for her to be ignored.

That is the gist of hedonic subjectivism. But there are a number of details to be clear about before we can start to assess the view.

2.1. Pleasure and Displeasure

By 'pleasure' and 'displeasure', I mean nothing more than *pleasant experience* and *unpleasant experience*, respectively.[10] Some philosophers and scientists suggest that there can be pleasures and displeasures that are not experiences; if so, they are not my concern here.[11] The nature of pleasant and unpleasant experience is a large subject, but paradigm instances are sensory experiences like the pleasure of smelling baking bread or the displeasure of smelling garbage. In addition to these straightforwardly sensory cases, there are also more intellectual and emotional pleasures and displeasures—the pleasures of daydreaming about fame and fortune, of meeting important goals, and of receiving compliments, as well as the displeasures of ruminating about possible disasters, of failing to meet one's goals, and of being insulted. Many of the pleasures and displeasures most clearly implicated in welfare and illfare attitudes are cognitive or emotional.

10 Here and elsewhere, I prefer the term 'displeasure' to the less inclusive 'pain'. Displeasure covers many unpleasant experiences that are not painful (for example, itchiness, vertigo, and nausea).

11 See, for example, Berridge and Winkielman, "What Is an Unconscious Emotion?"; and Peciña et al., "Hedonic Hot Spots in the Brain."

2.2. Taking Pleasure or Displeasure in Something

When we say that someone *takes pleasure in p*, we are not merely saying that *p* caused them to feel pleasure. It may be that due to some strange causal chain, solar flares cause me to feel pleasure. Even so, it would not follow that I take pleasure in solar flares. A better proposal is that to take pleasure in something is to have a pleasant experience that *represents* that something.[12] So to take pleasure in the fact that a solar flare is occurring, I would have to have a pleasant experience *as of* a solar flare occurring.

Since our experiences can represent things that do not exist, it follows that we can take pleasure in things that do not exist. For example, suppose I am daydreaming about having a flying car. My imaginative experience is pleasant, and the experience represents my having a flying car. It follows that I am taking pleasure in *having a flying car*. But of course I do not have a flying car. In this sort of case, we might ordinarily say that I take pleasure in *the thought* of having a flying car, thereby avoiding the implication that the car really exists. I sometimes use this expression when it is more natural to do so, but I also stipulate that as I understand the "taking pleasure" relation, there is no implication that our pleasures represent things that really exist.[13] The important point is that if a subject is disposed to have pleasant experiences as of *p*, then *p* is good for them. All the same considerations apply equally to displeasure, so if a subject is disposed to have unpleasant experiences as of *p*, then *p* is bad for them.

2.3. Intrinsic and Instrumental Attitudes

If I desire something, we can ask whether I desire it *instrumentally* (as a means to an end) or *intrinsically* (as an end in itself). Among proponents of desire-based subjectivism, it is typical to claim that the objects of only our *intrinsic* desires are nonderivatively good for us. It is not clear that hedonic subjectivists can make the same claim because it is not clear that it makes sense to ask whether I take pleasure in something *instrumentally* or *intrinsically*.[14]

In any case, I do not think that hedonic subjectivists need to avail themselves of this distinction. Proponents of desire-based subjectivism need the distinction—or typically take themselves to need the distinction—because they hold that the objects of only our intrinsic desires are good for us.[15] This restriction is motivated by the following sort of case: I desire a ticket to the carnival, purely as a means to attending the carnival, and although I do get a ticket,

12 Smithies uses a similar case to argue for a similar point ("A Hedonic Theory of Desire," 18).

13 See also Feldman, "Two Questions About Pleasure," 72.

14 Cf. Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 57–58.

15 For a counterexample to this general trend, see Heathwood, "Desire-Fulfillment Theory," 139.

I am nevertheless prevented from attending the carnival. It is easy to get the intuition that I did not benefit at all—I got nothing I really wanted. Proponents of desire-based subjectivism tell us that I did not benefit because the objects of only intrinsic desires are nonderivatively good for us.

The case of the carnival ticket should not motivate hedonic subjectivists to restrict their theory in the same way. For the hedonic subjectivist, the question is whether I take pleasure in having a ticket. If I do, then I benefit from having a ticket; otherwise, I do not. And these predictions seem to be correct. Suppose I take pleasure in the simple fact of having a ticket to the carnival: thinking about or imagining having a ticket is itself pleasant, quite independently of thinking about or imagining going to the carnival. Then it is plausible that I benefit from having a ticket, even if I do not end up going to the carnival. If, on the other hand, I merely take pleasure in the thought of attending the carnival and take no pleasure in having a ticket, then I do not seem to benefit from having a ticket. So hedonic subjectivism gets the right results without needing to appeal to a distinction between intrinsic and instrumental versions of the relevant attitude.

2.4. Instrumental Versus Noninstrumental Value

Turning from instrumental attitudes to instrumental value, note that hedonic subjectivism is not a view about what is instrumentally valuable. It is easy to misread hedonic subjectivism as the view that some things are instrumentally good for us because we take pleasure in them, and some things are instrumentally bad for us because we take displeasure in them. But in fact, the view tells us that the objects of pleasure and displeasure are noninstrumentally good and bad for us, respectively, *because* we take pleasure or displeasure in them. Thus, when Newbie takes pleasure in the thought of being the center of attention, *being the center of attention* is noninstrumentally good for her. If she is the center of attention, then her life includes one more welfare good than it would if she were not the center of attention, even if she would feel the same amount of pleasure either way.

This point is particularly worth noting because it marks the central difference between hedonic subjectivism and hedonism, including versions of hedonism that attempt to accommodate the thought that, for example, it is better for Newbie to be the center of attention even if she feels the same amount of pleasure either way. For example, Fred Feldman describes a view on which pleasure is the only thing that is good for us, but pleasures directed at "true objects" are better than those directed towards "false objects."[16] This *truth-adjusted hedonism* allows us to say that it is better for Newbie to be the center of attention since in that case, her pleasure has a "true object" and is therefore better for

16 Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 111.

her. But truth-adjusted hedonism does not allow us to say what nonhedonists typically want to say about cases like this—namely, that something *other than pleasure* (in this case, being the center of attention) is noninstrumentally good for the subject. There are other important differences between Feldman's hedonism and hedonic subjectivism, but this is the central difference.[17] Feldman's hedonism is still a version of *hedonism*. Hedonic subjectivism is not, because it affirms that things other than pleasures are noninstrumentally good for us.[18]

2.5. *Subjective and Objective Well-Being*

Hedonic subjectivism tells us that the objects of our pleasant and unpleasant attitudes are good and bad for us, respectively, but it does not tell us that *only* the objects of these attitudes are good or bad for us. In other words, hedonic subjectivism is not a complete theory of well-being. Rather, it is a theory about the subjective component of well-being; it describes how and why our subjective attitudes make their objects good or bad for us. I leave open the possibility that there may also be an objective component to well-being; it may be that some things are good or bad for us independently of our attitudes towards them. Perhaps knowledge and achievement are objectively good, whereas ignorance and failure are objectively bad.

This leaves open an important question regarding the goodness and badness of pleasure and displeasure themselves. Like most philosophers of well-being, I am confident that pleasure itself is nonderivatively good for us and that

17 For example, Feldman's attitudinal hedonism tells us that "you can take pleasure in something at a time when you don't *feel* any pleasure" (*Pleasure and the Good Life*, 56, emphasis original). And the truth-adjusted version of the view tells us that all else being equal, pleasures taken in true objects are ten times better than pleasures taken in false objects (112–13).

18 One might hold that the only important differences between theories of well-being are differences in their implications regarding subjects' levels of well-being. If so, then there might not be any important difference between hedonic subjectivism and truth-adjusted hedonism. For it could be that "true pleasures" are noninstrumentally better than "false pleasures" (according to truth-adjusted hedonism) to exactly the same degree that the objects of our pleasures are good for us (according to hedonic subjectivism). Then the two views would always issue the same verdicts regarding subjects' levels of well-being. But it would be a mistake to conclude that there is no important difference between them. To see why, consider that Feldman could go further: he could hold that although pleasure is all that is good for us, its degree of goodness is determined by the balance of knowledge, achievement, and friendship in one's life. By design, this view might never diverge from a certain kind objective list theory with respect to its verdicts about subjects' levels of well-being. But objective list theorists nevertheless prefer their own view. They insist that pleasure is not all that is good for us and that other goods do not make a difference to how good our pleasures are for us. Similarly, subjectivists may insist on the same points: pleasure is not all that is good for us, and other goods do not make a difference to how good our pleasures are for us.

displeasure itself is nonderivatively bad for us. I am less confident about whether their goodness and badness belong to the subjective side of well-being or to the objective side. In support of the view that they belong to the subjective side, I am inclined to think that all pleasures and displeasures represent themselves in some sense—either because all experiences involve a kind of primitive self-awareness or because pleasure and displeasure specifically are directed towards themselves.[19] If so, it turns out that whenever we experience pleasure or displeasure, we count as taking pleasure or displeasure in the experience itself. Hedonic subjectivism could then capture the goodness and badness of pleasure and displeasure as part of the subjective side of well-being. But I admit that this proposal is highly speculative, and I cannot defend it in any detail here. Suffice it to say that if I cannot capture the goodness and badness of pleasure and displeasure with hedonic subjectivism, then I would accept that their goodness and badness belong to the objective side of well-being. Either way, I accept that pleasure and displeasure are nonderivatively good and bad for us, respectively.

3. Preliminary Motivations

The preliminary case for hedonic subjectivism is that it builds upon the appealing features of both hedonism and traditional forms of subjectivism. Starting with traditional forms of subjectivism, we have already seen one way in which hedonic subjectivism builds upon this view. All subjectivists need to distinguish between welfare and illfare attitudes, and hedonic subjectivism allows them to do so in a straightforward way.

Hedonic subjectivism also fleshes out a claim that a number of subjectivists have defended in recent years—namely, that the attitudes relevant to well-being must be *affective*.[20] The thought is that if one merely desires something in the sense that one is motivated to bring it about, then the satisfaction of the desire is not necessarily good for one, nor is its frustration necessarily bad for one. For example, suppose I am motivated to visit a depressed friend out of a sense of duty, or suppose I have a strange disposition to turn on radios in my vicinity.[21] In both cases, I may or may not successfully do what I am motivated to do, but either way, there does not appear to be any immediate

19 For defenses of the view that experience essentially involves self-awareness, see Kriegel, *Subjective Consciousness*; and Strawson, "Self-Intimation." For defenses of the view that affective experiences specifically are self-directed, see Barlassina and Hayward, "More of Me!"; and Pallies, "An Honest Look at Hybrid Theories of Pleasure."

20 Fanciullo, "Alienation, Engagement, and Welfare"; and Heathwood, "Which Desires Are Relevant to Well-Being?"

21 Quinn, "Putting Rationality in Its Place," 32; and Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire*, 86.

impact on my well-being. Some subjectivists argue that this is because I am not *affectively engaged* in my activity. And what is it to be affectively engaged? Here, subjectivists tend to rely on lists of examples of affective engagement or on stereotypical features of affective engagement.[22] But if the relevant notion is to do so much heavy lifting in the theory of well-being—distinguishing those attitudes that are directly relevant to well-being from those that are not—then it would be better to have a more contentful description. Hedonic subjectivism fills the lacuna: being affectively engaged with something, in the relevant sense, is nothing more than taking pleasure or displeasure in it.

Hedonic subjectivism also builds on the appeal of hedonism. Part of the appeal of hedonism is its explanation of how and why things are good or bad for us. Hedonists tell us that whenever anything is good or bad for us, its goodness or badness derives from the goodness or badness of pleasure or displeasure. This explanation captures a heterogenous assortment of goods and bads—pasta dinners, walks in the park, broken bones, bad breakups, etc.—and it does so in an appealingly simple and unified way. Moreover, the explanation has an appealingly solid foundation because the well-being significance of pleasure and displeasure is nigh indubitable. This is presumably why pleasure and displeasure are the *only* candidate goods and bads whose well-being significance is recognized by almost all philosophers of well-being. All told, then, it seems to me that hedonists have a highly appealing explanation of why various things are good or bad for us. The explanation is simple and unified, it captures many heterogenous goods and bads, and it has an epistemically secure foundation.

Hedonic subjectivism shares in these virtues. Like hedonists, a hedonic subjectivist explains why things are good or bad for us by appealing to the ways in which those things are related to our experiences of pleasure or displeasure. There are differences: while a hedonist says that things are (derivatively) good or bad for us because they *cause* pleasure or displeasure, a hedonic subjectivist says that things are (nonderivatively) good or bad for us because we *take pleasure or displeasure in them*. But the hedonic subjectivist explanation has many of the same virtues as the hedonist explanation. It is simple and unified, it captures many heterogenous goods and bads, and it has an epistemically secure foundation. Hardly anyone doubts that pleasure and displeasure have important roles in well-being. Hedonic subjectivism merely gives them more expansive roles.

At the same time, hedonic subjectivism also avoids hedonism's most serious problem: the experience machine objection. Hedonism implies that it is

22 For lists of examples, see Chang, "Can Desires Provide Reasons for Action?" 80–81; and Fanciullo, "Alienation, Engagement, and Welfare," 16–17. For descriptions of stereotypical features, see Chang, "Can Desires Provide Reasons for Action?" 68–69; and Heathwood, "Which Desires Are Relevant to Well-Being?" 674–75.

no better to lead a rich and fulfilling life than it is to have all the experiences as of leading a rich and fulfilling life.[23] My sense is that this is the most damaging implication of hedonism—the implication that most often motivates nonhedonists in their rejection of hedonism. But hedonic subjectivism does not share this damaging implication because it allows that a rich and fulfilling life includes many welfare goods that are absent from life in the experience machine. In a rich and fulfilling life outside the experience machine, one takes pleasure in many things; the objects of those pleasures really exist, and they are good for one. In the experience machine, the objects of one's pleasures do not exist, so one's life is missing many goods that are present in a life outside the machine.

All this leads me to think that hedonic subjectivism is worth investigating. But ultimately, the true test of a theory is whether it can withstand the objections leveled against it. With that in mind, the goal of the next section is to answer the objections.

4. Objections to Hedonic Subjectivism

4.1. Objections to Subjectivism

Some general objections to subjectivism can be modified to target hedonic subjectivism specifically. For example, consider John Rawls's case of the person who strongly desires to do nothing but count grass in Harvard Yard.[24] Or consider Derek Parfit's case of meeting a stranger on a train and desiring years later that the stranger is in good health.[25] Finally, consider Bernard Willliams's case in which a man named Sam desires to drink the glass of clear liquid on the table because he believes that it is gin when it is in fact petrol.[26] There are many other objections in this vein, alleging that a subject's desire is *too trivial*, *too remote*, or *too ill-informed* to count towards the subject's well-being. The objections can be easily modified to target hedonic subjectivism. We can imagine that the grass counter takes pleasure in counting grass, that you take pleasure in the thought of the distant stranger's health, and that Sam takes pleasure in the thought of drinking the glass of clear liquid. The point of the objections remains the same—the objector alleges that the desires are too trivial, too remote, or too ill-informed to count towards the subject's well-being.

23 Lin, "How to Use the Experience Machine"; and Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 73–74.

24 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 432.

25 Parfit, Derek, *Reasons and Persons*, 151.

26 Williams, "Internal and External Reasons."

I want to set these objections aside. They are important objections to subjectivism, but they have nothing to do with hedonic subjectivism specifically. In the face of the objections, a hedonic subjectivist's options are the same as those of any other subjectivist. A hedonic subjectivist might try to explain away our intuition that the subjects do not benefit from satisfying their desires.[27] Or they might concede that the subjects do not benefit, and modify their subjectivism so as to explicitly exclude trivial, distant, or ill-informed desires. I think that subjectivists should do without these modifications, but this is not the place to engage in that particular debate. The important point is that a hedonic subjectivist could modify their theory in the same ways.[28] They could say that we do not benefit from the objects of our pleasures when those objects are trivial, as in the case of grass counting. They could say that we do not benefit from taking pleasure in something for someone else's sake, as in the case of the distant stranger. And they could say that we do not benefit from the objects of our pleasures when we are ill-informed about those objects, as in the case of the glass of petrol.

More important for my purposes are objections that do target hedonic subjectivism specifically—namely, objections alleging that some welfare attitudes do not involve pleasure, or some illfare attitudes do not involve displeasure. It is to these arguments I now turn.

4.2. Desire

We can start with a straightforward argument that a desire-based subjectivist might give against hedonic subjectivism.

Desire Objection:
P1. Some desires do not involve pleasure but are welfare attitudes.
P2. If P1, then hedonic subjectivism is false.
C. Hedonic subjectivism is false.

As straightforward as this argument seems, I believe it is actually something of a red herring. The argument cannot be evaluated on its own; it needs to be paired with a theory of desire. There are, after all, many different theories of

27 For a useful catalog of various attempts along these lines, see Heathwood, "Desire-Fulfillment Theory."

28 A reviewer worries that this move is unavailable to hedonic subjectivists. While it is obvious that I can desire something for someone else's sake, it is less obvious that I can take pleasure in something for someone else's sake. In response, I agree the latter expression is extremely awkward, but even so, I am inclined to think we can indeed take pleasure in something for another's sake. After all, it is natural to say that I am pleased for your sake that you were promoted. And I am inclined to think that this is merely a less awkward way of saying that *for your sake*, I take pleasure in the fact that you were promoted.

desire.[29] And once we have a theory of desire at hand, we can use it to formulate an argument that makes no appeal to desire. To illustrate, suppose the objector tells us that they have in mind an *evaluative* theory of desire: they think that desires are evaluative beliefs, and at least some of these desires are welfare attitudes despite not involving pleasure. Now we can evaluate the argument, but we can also see there was no need to state the argument in terms of desire in the first place. The objector could have simply stated the objection in terms of evaluative beliefs. After all, if some evaluative beliefs are welfare attitudes despite not involving pleasure, then hedonic subjectivism is false, whether or not these evaluative beliefs are *desires*.

With that in mind, I set aside questions about the nature of desire. I instead deal directly with what I take to be the most plausible proposals for welfare attitudes that do not essentially involve pleasure, and illfare attitudes that do not essentially involve displeasure. I argue that these proposals fail, but I make no claims about the nature of desire.

4.3. Evaluations

Start with the proposal that positive evaluations are welfare attitudes. This proposal comes in a number of different varieties. One might hold that a subject bears a welfare attitude towards some object if they *believe that the object is good for them* or if they *value* that object or if they *see it as noncomparatively good*. To streamline the discussion, I say that a subject *comprehensively endorses* some object just in case they positively evaluate it in *all* of these ways. And I assume that we can comprehensively endorse some object without taking pleasure in it.[30] The question then is whether the objects of our comprehensive endorsements are good for us in virtue of their being positively evaluated in these ways. If they are, then hedonic subjectivism is false. I contend that they are not.

29 Theories of desire are highly heterogenous. Some hold that desires are representations of goodness. See, for example, Gregory, *Desire as Belief*; Oddie, *Value, Reality, and Desire*, ch. 3; and Stampe, "The Authority of Desire," 359–62. Others hold that they are functional states. See Lewis, "Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications"; Millikan, *Language*, 171–73; and Papineau, "Representation and Explanation," 562–65. Others understand desires in terms of attention. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 38–42; and Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*, ch. 8. Still others understand them in terms of learning. See Schroeder, *Three Faces of Desire*. Yet others in terms of hedonic feelings. See Smithies, "A Hedonic Theory of Desire."

30 For evaluative belief, see Dorsey, "Subjectivism Without Desire." For valuing, see Raibley, "Values, Agency, and Welfare"; and Tiberius, *Well-Being as Value Fulfillment*. For seeing as noncomparatively good, see Ayars, "Attraction, Aversion, and Meaning in Life."

To see this, we need to imagine a case in which someone comprehensively endorses something without being at all disposed to take pleasure in it.[31] To avoid a possible source of confusion, we should imagine that the object of the comprehensive endorsement is not the sort of thing that might be good for them independently of their attitudes towards it. (We should not imagine that the subject comprehensively endorses knowledge or achievement, for example.) So if it is nevertheless good for the subject, it is good for them in virtue of their attitudes towards it.

With that in mind, consider the case of Eva. When Eva walks to work, she has a choice of whether to walk through the city or walk through the park. Her parents always told her that walking through the park is better than walking through the city, and as a child, she unreflectively accepted their claims. Now, as an adult, Eva comprehensively endorses her walks through the park: she believes they are good, she values them, and she sees them as good for her. But she takes no pleasure in these walks. Indeed, she feels no pleasure in connection with the park at all. She does not enjoy the sights or sounds of the park, nor does she feel pleasant emotions in connection with the park—she does not look forward to her walks with pleasure, nor does she feel pleasantly gratified about having completed them. Although she comprehensively endorses her walks through the park, these evaluations are untouched by any pleasant feelings.

Eva's case is unusual. Usually, if someone comprehensively endorses some activity, they also take some pleasure in the activity. If a painter comprehensively endorses painting, then she probably takes some pleasure in painting, and if she ceases to endorse it, then she will also cease to take pleasure in it. This is a real loss; it is the sort of loss that is familiar from cases of depression. But no such loss would occur if Eva were to stop comprehensively endorsing her walks through the park. Suppose that the process is gradual, and by the time she loses those attitudes entirely, she does not remember ever having them. She does not enjoy her walks through the park, but she never enjoyed them; she merely saw them as good—and good for her—and so on. It does not seem to me that there is any loss of well-being here.

I conclude that positive evaluations, in the absence of pleasure, are not welfare attitudes. It is true that the objects of these evaluations may be good for

31 In principle, one could claim that it is not possible to evaluate something in any of these ways unless one is disposed to take pleasure in it. Valerie Tiberius comes closest to making this claim: she suggests that if someone is not emotionally invested in what they claim to value, then we have cause to be skeptical that they value it (*Well-Being as Value Fulfillment*, 59). On the other hand, Dale Dorsey ("Subjectivism Without Desire," 412), Jason Raibley ("Values, Agency, and Welfare"), and Alisabeth Ayars ("Attraction, Aversion, and Meaning in Life") are all clear that relevant evaluations need not involve pleasure.

us in an attitude-independent way. It is also true that we often take pleasure in the thought of things that we regard as good (or good for us). But merely regarding something as good (or good for us) does not make it the case that it is good for us.

4.4. Mixed Hedonic Feelings

Among philosophers who distinguish between attraction and aversion, some have claimed that *both* attraction and aversion are associated with *both* pleasure and displeasure. They say that attraction is associated with the unpleasant *disappointment* that we feel when we are attracted to some prospect and discover that it has not come to pass, and aversion is associated with the pleasant *relief* that we feel when we are averse to some prospect, and we discover that it has not come to pass.[32] Relatedly, Declan Smithies and Jeremy Weiss claim that attraction is distinct from pleasure on the grounds that "feelings of attraction themselves are not always pleasurable; for example, bodily cravings and feelings of unrequited love can be intensely painful."[33]

If attraction is a welfare attitude and if it is possible to be attracted to something in virtue of one's *unpleasant* feelings towards it, then hedonic subjectivism is false. Similarly, if aversion is a welfare attitude and if it is possible to be averse to something in virtue of one's *pleasant* feelings towards it, then hedonic subjectivism is false. So these are the possibilities that hedonic subjectivists must reject.

To make things concrete, imagine that Romeo is pining away for Juliet. His yearning is painful; he finds it painful to be without her. He would be unpleasantly disappointed if he were to learn that they will not be together and would be pleasantly relieved if he learned that they will. Clearly, Romeo bears welfare attitudes towards the prospect of being with Juliet—it would be very good for him to be with her, in virtue of his attitudes towards her. The first question to ask is whether Romeo's welfare attitudes are partly a matter of his having the *unpleasant* experiences. If his welfare attitudes are reducible to displeasure in this way, then hedonic subjectivism is false. But fortunately for hedonic subjectivists, there is a better interpretation of the case. We should say that Romeo has both welfare *and* illfare attitudes: he has welfare attitudes towards the thought of being with Juliet and illfare attitudes towards the thought of *not* being with Juliet. The pleasant relief he would feel at being together with Juliet is a welfare attitude towards being with her, but his unpleasant experiences—his

32 Ayars, "Attraction, Aversion, and Meaning in Life," 20; Schroeder, *Three Faces of Desire*, 132; and Sinhababu, *Humean Nature*, 48.

33 Smithies and Weiss, "Affective Experience, Desire, and Reasons for Action," 44.

unpleasant pangs of longing and his unpleasant disappointment—are instances of illfare attitudes, not welfare attitudes. Those attitudes make it the case that being *without* Juliet is nonderivatively *bad* for him.

It is also unlikely that Romeo's pangs of longing are purely unpleasant. Lovestruck longing, like many desires, is accompanied by both pleasure and displeasure. Sometimes one has pleasant thoughts ("It would be so nice to be with them again!"), and sometimes one has unpleasant thoughts ("It's so hard to be without them!"). So while it can be unpleasant for Romeo to think about Juliet, it is not *uniformly* unpleasant—it is unpleasant insofar as he thinks about her absence, and pleasant insofar as he thinks about being with her again. The experience is paradigmatically *bittersweet*, and bittersweet emotions are not hedonically neutral but rather hedonically ambivalent. So hedonic subjectivism delivers a plausible result: it is good for Romeo to be with Juliet and bad for him to be without Juliet.

Roughly the same story is true of bodily cravings such as hunger and thirst. Suppose you are sitting down to eat at a restaurant, and you are ravenously hungry. You see someone else being served a delicious meal, and you have a strong craving to get the same meal yourself. Under such conditions, you are likely to oscillate between unpleasant thoughts ("I'm so hungry!") and pleasant thoughts ("The food is going to be so good!"). Again, hedonic subjectivism delivers a plausible result: it is good for you to get the delicious meal and bad for you to be without it. Cases of mixed hedonic feelings do not pose a problem for hedonic subjectivism.

4.5. Pure "Wanting"

An opponent of hedonic subjectivism might argue that the view is undermined by results in modern neuroscience, particularly work on "wanting" and "liking." Kent Berridge argues that "wanting" and "liking" are distinct modules in the brain: very broadly, "wanting" motivates pursuit of reward, whereas "liking" is associated with enjoyment of a reward once attained. And in experimental settings, these modules can be dissociated from one another so that a test subject doggedly pursues a reward despite failing to appreciate it once it has been attained, or fails to pursue a reward despite appreciating it greatly once it is attained.[34] These experimental results might move us to draw some quick conclusions: "wanting" is a welfare attitude; "liking" is pleasure; and since "wanting" and "liking" are doubly dissociable, there are welfare attitudes that do not involve pleasure.[35]

34 Berridge, "Wanting and Liking"; and Kringelbach and Kent, "The Joyful Mind."

35 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to address this point.

In fact, however, it is far from obvious that "liking" is pleasure or that "wanting" is a propositional attitude at all. Berridge himself rejects the tempting identification of "wanting" with *desire* in the ordinary sense. He writes:

> Incentive salience [another term for "wanting"] as a module is only one type of wanting. It is not the one we are most aware of in daily life nor the type of desire that has been the greatest focus of philosophers.[36]

And he speculates:

> Perhaps a reason for the difference is that incentive salience is mediated chiefly by subcortical brain mechanisms, whereas cognitive forms of desire are more dependent on higher cortex-based brain systems. [37]

My own view is that "wanting" and "liking" are best understood as *subpersonal* modules whose relations to the more familiar, person-level categories of desire and pleasure are uncertain.[38] In any case, it is not necessary to get into the weeds here. For my purposes, it is enough to argue that "wanting" by itself is insufficient for having a welfare attitude. So whether or not "wanting" is desire or any other kind of propositional attitude, there is no problem here for hedonic subjectivism.

To see why "wanting" is not a welfare attitude, it is helpful to note that part of what the distinction between "wanting" and "liking" is supposed to explain is a certain prototypical pattern of behavior in drug addicts: an addict is increasingly motivated to seek out the drug as they become more and more sensitized to it, but the pleasure they get from the drug does not increase accordingly. According to the *incentive-sensitization theory* of addiction, this pattern is the result of a breakdown in the normal cooperation in the "wanting" and "liking" systems: the drug causes increased "wanting" even as "liking" remains constant or decreases. The implication is that if we want to get a sense of what pure "wanting" is like for the subject, then we can imagine the cravings or urges of a drug addict who takes no pleasure in the thought of getting the drug. The question is whether it is noninstrumentally good for this addict to get the drug. Of course, it may be *better* for them to get the drug than to go without the drug (at least in the short term). In all likelihood, they will feel unpleasantly frustrated and anxious about lacking the drug, so it can be noninstrumentally bad for

36 Berridge, "Wanting and Liking," 379 (clarification added).

37 Berridge, "Wanting and Liking," 379.

38 Berridge seems more sanguine about the identification of pleasure with "liking." But since he contends that liking need not be experienced, it is not clear that this is the same sense of pleasure that is most important to philosophers. See Berridge and Winkielman, "What Is an Unconscious Emotion?"

them to lack the drug. There may also be a noninstrumental good associated with taking the drug—namely, the pleasure it causes. All of this can explain why the addict is better-off getting rather than lacking the drug (at least in the short term). But none of it is germane to the question of whether *taking the drug* is noninstrumentally good for the addict.

Imagine a nearby variant of a case considered by Parfit.[39] A drug addict is given an unlimited supply of their drug of choice, so they will never feel unpleasantly frustrated or anxious about lacking it. And for whatever reason, they do not get any pleasure from the drug—they get no pleasure from taking it, and they take no pleasure in thinking about it. They simply have an urge or craving to take the drug, recurring at regular intervals, that quickly goes away when they take it. Perhaps they have a device on their wrist that allows them to diffuse the drug into their bloodstream at the press of a button, so they can immediately act on the urges and cravings they feel. Even so, it is not at all plausible that this addict benefits from regularly satisfying their urges and cravings.[40] They are not better-off than an otherwise similar person who lacks the urges, cravings, and drugs. So I conclude that pure "wanting" is not a welfare attitude.

4.6. Philosophical Vulcans

David Chalmers employs an argument that threatens hedonic subjectivism in an indirect way. The objection does not tell us that some *particular* attitude is not pleasant, despite being a welfare attitude. Nor does it tell us that some *particular* attitude is not unpleasant, despite being an illfare attitude. Instead, the argument alleges that there must be *some or other* attitudes that meet these descriptions, though the argument does not tell us much about them.

Chalmers's argument appeals to creatures that he calls *philosophical Vulcans*. Unlike philosophical zombies, Vulcans do have phenomenal experience. But they are entirely devoid of *hedonic experience*; they are incapable of having any sort of pleasant or unpleasant experiences at all. Chalmers tells us:

39 Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 479.

40 In a recent discussion of objections to desire satisfactionism, Chris Heathwood offers a related treatment of the case. He contends that taking the drug is in fact good for the addict, provided that the addict is *genuinely attracted* to taking the drug. And he tells us that a person experiences genuine attraction if that person "finds the occurrence of the event attractive or appealing, is enthusiastic about it (at least to some extent), and tends to view it with pleasure or gusto" ("Which Desires Are Relevant to Well-Being?" 674). Heathwood implicitly distinguishes *pleasure* from *gusto, enthusiasm*, and *finding things attractive or appealing*. I tend to think the distinction is somewhat misleading because all these states are often pleasant. Insofar as they are not—insofar as "gusto" is experienced as a pure "urge," for example—I contend that they are not constitutive of welfare attitudes.

> Vulcans' lives may be literally joyless, without the pursuit of pleasure or happiness to motivate them. They won't eat at fine restaurants to enjoy the food. But they may nevertheless have serious intellectual and moral goals. They may want to advance science, for example, and to help those around them. They might even want to build a family or make money. They experience no pleasure when anticipating or achieving these goals, but they value and pursue the goals all the same.[41]

Chalmers clearly thinks that Vulcans have welfare and illfare attitudes, in my sense. But hedonic subjectivists are committed to denying this.

The first thing to note is that we need to be careful in interpreting Chalmers's claim that Vulcans want things and value their goals. For as Chalmers himself writes, mental terms are often ambiguous.[42] Vulcans can certainly want things and value their goals in a *functional* sense. Vulcans can designate certain states of affairs as their goals, and they can behave in complex and ingenious ways to bring it about that those state of affairs obtain. But that alone is not enough for a Vulcan to have welfare or illfare attitudes. After all, philosophical zombies can want things and value their goals in this purely functional sense, but few philosophers accept that zombies have welfare or illfare attitudes.[43]

It is true that Vulcans, unlike zombies, have phenomenology. But this is not enough for them to have welfare or illfare attitudes. It is not enough to have *some phenomenology or other* in addition to having desires and values in the purely functional sense. For if we imagine beings that want and value things in a purely functional sense, while having phenomenology that is mismatched with their behavior, then it is clear that these beings do not have welfare or illfare attitudes either. To make the issue more concrete, imagine three subjects are collecting rare flowers. All of the subjects make sophisticated plans to collect the flowers, and all pursue those plans with roughly the same level of determination. They differ only with respect to their phenomenology: the first subject is an ordinary person, the second subject has mismatched phenomenology, and the third person is a Vulcan. As an ordinary person, the first subject tends to have the sorts of hedonic feelings that are characteristic of purposeful planning and action. For example:

1. They tend to feel mildly excited or hopeful at the thought of finding the flowers.

41 Chalmers, *Reality+*, 327.

42 Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 11–22.

43 For discussions of zombie well-being or lack thereof, see Siewert, "Consciousness"; and Kriegel, "The Value of Consciousness to the One Who Has It."

2. They tend to feel mildly worried or gloomy at the thought of failing to find the flowers.
3. They tend to feel mild annoyance or frustration when their goals are thwarted.
4. They tend to feel mild excitement and enthusiasm when they advance their goals.
5. They tend to feel moderately gratified or proud when their plans come to fruition.

I am not imagining the search for the flowers is an emotional rollercoaster; I only suppose that this person cares about advancing their goals in an ordinary sort of way. Of course, to the extent that she succeeds in finding rare flowers, this is good for her.

The second of the subjects has phenomenology that is mismatched from their behavior. Perhaps they have only visual and auditory phenomenology: it is as if they are placidly watching a movie about collecting rare flowers, filmed from the perspective of the flower collector. They have no emotional investment in the events of the internal movie; they are merely a passive recipient of sensation. Since this subject behaves just like an ordinary person, they may smile when they succeed in finding a rare flower and frown when they fail, but this behavior is never indicative of their underlying feelings. They get excited about success to exactly the same degree that my toaster gets excited about toasting bread. They get worried about failure to exactly the same degree that my toaster gets worried about being unplugged. It appears as though the mismatched subject is genuinely invested in their project of finding rare flowers, but this is merely an appearance.

The third subject, the Vulcan, is supposed to occupy some sort of middle ground between the ordinary person and the mismatched subject. Like the mismatched subject, their planning and behavior does not involve any sort of hedonic ups and downs, but like the ordinary subject, their phenomenology is sufficient for their having welfare and illfare attitudes. So we have a kind of negative description of Vulcan phenomenology (no hedonic ups and downs) plus a description of the phenomenology in terms of its normative-theoretical role (it suffices for welfare and illfare attitudes). But this leaves the crucial question unanswered: What *is* the relevant phenomenology? Why should we think that any such phenomenology exists?[44]

44 In a recent discussion, Luke Roelofs goes further in characterizing the nonhedonic but welfare-relevant phenomenology that Vulcans might have. They write that Vulcans may have *motivating consciousness*, which they describe as follows: "Motivating consciousness refers specifically to conscious states which participate on the conative side, by making

Chalmers might simply say that Vulcans have the phenomenology of desire, minus any feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness. But I have already considered much of what might be thought to be the phenomenology of desire: the phenomenology of seeing something as good, the phenomenology of pure "wanting," and various forms of mixed hedonic phenomenology. I argue that none of these kinds of phenomenology pose a problem for hedonic subjectivism. So if there is some other phenomenology that does not fall under any of these headings, then the onus is on Chalmers and other friends of Vulcans to identify it. Until then, we ought to doubt that Vulcans have welfare and illfare attitudes. We should think that they are like a mismatched subject. They have phenomenology, they may plan and act as though they genuinely care about things, but they do not genuinely care.

5. The Importance of Pleasure and Displeasure

The hedonic view accounts for the distinction between welfare and illfare attitudes in a highly straightforward way. It avoids important problems for hedonism and desire-based versions of subjectivism, and it is not defeated by the counterexamples I have considered here. I conclude that it ought to be taken seriously as an account of the subjective component of well-being.[45]

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some option, outcome, or action appear good or attractive" ("Sentientism, Motivation, and Philosophical Vulcans," 316). The question for Roelofs is essentially the same as the question for Chalmers: *What is* this phenomenology? Once we have a positive conception of it, we can then evaluate the proposal that having this phenomenology is sufficient for having welfare attitudes.

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