

# PLEASURE AND THE GOOD LIFE: CONCERNING THE NATURE, VARIETIES, AND PLAUSIBILITY OF HEDONISM

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## ABSTRACT OF BOOK AS A WHOLE

Hedonism is the view that the Good Life is the pleasant life. The central aim of this book is to show that, when carefully and charitably interpreted, certain forms of hedonism yield plausible evaluations of human lives. The forms I defend understand pleasure as *intrinsic attitudinal pleasure*. I reject all forms of sensory hedonism. I defend my preferred forms of hedonism against a barrage of classic objections derived from Plato, Aristotle, Brentano, Moore, Ross, Rawls, and many others. I compare my forms of hedonism to the hedonistic views of Aristippus, Epicurus, Bentham, and Mill. Some views in value theory are typically thought to be anti-hedonistic. I show that some of these views are equivalent to forms of hedonism. I also defend the claim that all the allegedly hedonistic theories discussed in the book are properly classified as forms of “hedonism”. Near the end of the book I present my vision of the Good Life and I mention some remaining problems.

**KEYWORDS FOR BOOK AS A WHOLE:** hedonism, pleasure, sensory pleasure, attitudinal pleasure, pain, the good life, welfare, worthless pleasure, false pleasure, higher pleasures, lower pleasures, deserved pleasure, desert, the shape of a life, happiness, Epicurus, Aristippus, Bentham, G. E. Moore, J. S. Mill

## CHAPTER ONE – THE QUEST FOR THE GOOD LIFE

The chapter begins with an attempt to explain more exactly how I understand the question about “the Good Life”. As I interpret this, it means something like ‘the life that is good in itself for the one who lives it’ or ‘the life high in individual welfare’. So the question is: what feature (or features) ultimately make a person’s life go well for that person? Some popular views about the Good Life are discussed. These include eudaimonism, preferentism, perfectionism, and pluralism. I sketch these views and briefly indicate why I think they are unsatisfactory. This leaves hedonism.

**KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER ONE:** the Good Life, welfare, intrinsic value, happiness, preference, satisfaction, perfectionism, pleasure, pain, hedonism.

## CHAPTER TWO – HEDONISM: A PRELIMINARY FORMULATION

In Chapter Two I present some typical textbook formulations of hedonism. I show that they are unacceptable as formulations of the view – they fail to state the intended view in a coherent and consistent way. A simple form of sensory hedonism – ‘Default

Hedonism’ – is then presented. This formulation does not have the defects of typical textbook formulations. Default Hedonism provides a starting point for all the other forms of hedonism to be discussed in the book. Chapter Two concludes with a somewhat speculative discussion of the hedonism of Aristippus.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER TWO: Default hedonism, sensory hedonism, William Frankena, Richard Brandt, hedons, dolors, Jeremy Bentham, hedonic calculus, Aristippus.

#### APPENDIX A – ANOTHER DEFECTIVE FORMULATION

In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article ‘Hedonism’, Richard Brandt presents his official account of hedonism. I present and explain his account. I show that there are serious problems with his formulation. My aim here is not to show that hedonism is false, but rather to show that Brandt’s way of stating the view is defective. It fails to express the hedonistic intuition in a coherent and consistent way.

KEYWORDS FOR APPENDIX A: Richard Brandt, hedonism, pleasure, pleasant states of mind.

#### CHAPTER THREE – CLASSIC OBJECTIONS TO HEDONISM

Seven classic objections to hedonism are presented and explained. Each is carefully formulated as an objection to the Default Hedonism introduced in Chapter Two. The objections are based on (a) the idea that some pleasures are base, disgusting and worthless; (b) the concept of “false pleasures”; (c) the alleged worthlessness of pleasure without knowledge; (d) difficulties in the measurement of pleasure and pain; (e) the idea that we can imagine a good life in which there is no pleasure; (f) the idea that the value of some worlds might be directly affected by such things as beauty or ugliness even when these factors have no bearing on the amounts of pleasure and pain in those worlds; and (g) the idea that the value of a world might be affected by the justice or injustice of the distribution of pleasure and pain in that world even though the total amounts of pleasure and pain are not affected.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER THREE: G. E. Moore, base pleasure, false pleasure, Plato, Franz Brentano, Stoicus, Porky, W.D. Ross, the heap of filth, beauty, ugliness, justice, injustice.

#### CHAPTER FOUR – ATTITUDINAL HEDONISM

The distinction between sensory pleasure and attitudinal pleasure is drawn. Arguments are given to show that these are distinct kinds of pleasure. The concept of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure is introduced and explained. Making use of this concept, Intrinsic

Attitudinal Hedonism is formulated and compared to Default Hedonism. An argument is presented to show that Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism is not refuted by the objection (described earlier) based on the possibility of a good life without pleasure. The differences between attitudinal pleasure (“enjoying the things you get”) and mere satisfaction (“getting the things you want”) are explained. Mill’s distinction between higher and lower pleasures is introduced and criticized. A new form of hedonism – Altitude Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism – is formulated, explained, and compared to other forms of hedonism. This is said to express the core of Mill’s idea of “qualified hedonism”.

**KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER FOUR:** Attitudinal pleasure, sensory pleasure, attitudinal hedonism, Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism, preferentism, J. S. Mill, higher pleasure, quality of pleasure, altitude adjusted hedonism.

#### APPENDIX B -- REFLECTIONS ON THE ATTITUDINAL/SENSORY DISTINCTION

The distinction between attitudinal pleasure and sensory pleasure is further explored. I explain the nature of sensory pleasure by appeal to a definition making use of the concept of attitudinal pleasure. I explain what’s true (and what’s not true) about the familiar notion that pain is essentially, or necessarily “awful”. This gives rise to a discussion of that some pleasures might be painful, or that some pains might be pleasant. I conclude by considering the idea that certain facts about masochism imply that sensory pleasure cannot be defined (as I have defined it) by appeal to attitudinal pleasure.

**KEYWORDS FOR APPENDIX B:** attitudinal pleasure, sensory pleasure, awfulness, pleasant pains, painful pleasures, masochism.

#### APPENDIX C – THE HEDONISM OF EPICURUS

The relevant extant Epicurean texts are described. The concept of static pleasure is introduced. I claim that standard textbook accounts of static pleasure are implausible. In their place, I propose a novel account. I also discuss some apparently Epicurean views about the importance of duration in the evaluation of pleasure. I then formulate what I take to be a fairly plausible reconstruction of Epicurean hedonism. Several seemingly decisive objections are then presented and evaluated.

**KEYWORDS FOR APPENDIX C:** Epicurus, static pleasure, duration of pleasure.

#### CHAPTER FIVE – REPLIES TO SOME OBJECTIONS

The objection from false pleasures (introduced in Chapter 3) is reviewed. A version relevant to Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism is formulated and evaluated. A new form of

hedonism making use of an adjustment for truth is introduced and explained. It is alleged that this form of hedonism (“Truth Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism”) is not refuted by the objection from false pleasures. The Platonic objection based on pleasure without knowledge is reviewed. The objection seems ineffective against Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism. Finally, the objection from base or worthless pleasures is discussed. A new form of hedonism – Desert Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism – is introduced and defended. This is said to evade all the objections so far mentioned.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER FIVE: False pleasures, truth-adjusted hedonism, base pleasures, Plato, Porky, desert, deserved pleasure, desert-adjusted hedonism.

## CHAPTER SIX – THE SHAPE OF A LIFE

Many philosophers have claimed that the value of a life for the person who lives it is not simply a matter of *total amounts* of good and evil in that life; the *pattern* in which those goods are distributed within the life also matters. This objection, if it were sound, would refute any axiological theory that contained a purely additive principle for the evaluation of lives. The forms of hedonism that I discuss in the book are all understood to contain such additive principles. I attempt to explain why the forms of attitudinal hedonism defended here are not refuted by the “shape of a life” objection.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER SIX: attitudinal hedonism, the shape of a life, patterns of distribution, aggregative principles, Velleman.

## CHAPTER SEVEN – G.E. MOORE, HEDONIST?

Hedonism’s “plasticity” is a major theme of the book. By this I mean its capacity to take many forms. In Chapter Seven I pursue this theme by showing that it is possible to construct a form of hedonism that will generate life evaluations very similar to those generated by the non-hedonistic axiology defended by Moore in *Principia Ethica*. To this end, I formulate and explain a clear statement of the Moorean axiology. I discuss the claim that this axiology is in fact the one Moore intended to defend. I present two serious objections to this allegedly Moorean theory.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER SEVEN: G. E. Moore, plasticity, desert adjusted hedonism, pleasures of human affection, aesthetic pleasure.

## APPENDIX D – DARWALL ON VALUING ACTIVITY

I formulate a kind of hedonism that is nearly equivalent to Stephen Darwall’s so-called “Aristotelian Thesis”. According to this thesis, the good life is the life filled with activities (musical, intellectual, familial, athletic, etc.) that essentially involve the correct evaluation of people, art works, and other valuable things. I show how hedonism can be

extended to the point where it generates results equivalent those generated by a theory that emphasizes “virtuous activity” and “correct evaluative activity”. This is surprising, since such axiological views are typically thought to be inconsistent with hedonism.

KEYWORDS FOR APPENDIX D: Darwall, Aristotle, flourishing, virtuous activity, valuing.

## CHAPTER EIGHT – BUT IS IT REALLY HEDONISM?

Curious readers might wonder if some of the axiological theories discussed in this book have been stretched so far that it is no longer appropriate to categorize them as forms of hedonism. This raises a deeper question: what in general makes it correct to categorize an axiological theory as a form of hedonism? In Chapter Eight I attempt to answer this question. I attempt to answer it in such a way as to justify my classification of the alleged hedonisms in this book. This turns out to be a trickier problem than might at first be expected.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER EIGHT: Hedonism, axiology, taxonomy, basic intrinsic value states.

## CHAPTER NINE – PROBLEMS ABOUT BEAUTY AND JUSTICE

Chapter Nine contains my replies to the last remaining objections to hedonism – Moore’s objection concerning “the heap of filth” and Ross’s objection concerning worlds in which pleasure is enjoyed by the undeserving. I point out that, strictly speaking, these objections do not bear on the forms of hedonism already discussed in the book. I extend the theories so as to make the objections apply and then I tweak the forms of hedonism so that they evade the objections.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER NINE: G. E. Moore, beauty, ugliness, the heap of filth, desert, justice, injustice, possible worlds, lives, “atomism”, axiology.

## CHAPTER TEN – THEMES AND PUZZLES

Chapter Ten contains a review of the main themes of the book and a description of my vision of the Good Life. It also contains an admission of some of the puzzles left unsolved here. Among the main themes are: the importance of being clear about what an axiological theory is supposed to tell us; the importance of formulating one’s proposed axiological theory (hedonistic or not) in a coherent way; the importance of recognizing the distinction between forms of sensory hedonism and forms of attitudinal hedonism; the advantages of attitudinal hedonism and its capacity (especially in desert-adjusted forms) to avoid classic objections; the plasticity of attitudinal hedonism; the importance and

interest (and difficulty) of determining precisely what makes it correct to categorize an axiological theory as “hedonism”.

**KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER TEN:** hedonism, axiology, desert, the repugnant conclusion, totalism.