

PLEASURE AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF VALUE*

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The topic of this paper is how to *explain value*. It outlines a hedonistic theory about value. I propose to draw this outline by investigating how value and pleasure are related. The suggestion, of course, being a hedonistic one, is that value and pleasure are very intimately related. By turning to explanatory matters, the suggestion also involves a shift of attention when it comes to the philosophy of value.

Hedonism as traditionally understood is a theory in substantive (as opposed to formal) axiology. As such it is supposed to tell you that pleasures are what have positive value intrinsically. The intrinsic value of an event (like a life or sitting through a concert), according to hedonism, is a matter of the pleasures and pains involved only¹. The discipline known as *axiology* is mostly concerned either with formal matters as in *analysing* ‘value’, working out a formal framework for it and for understanding committing claims involving evaluative terms in general, *or* with the substantial matter of assigning value to objects, to properties or to states of affairs. Typically, formal and substantial theories have an impact on each other: a formal account that is not compatible with any plausible substantial account would be ruled out as implausible. The thesis defended in this paper is that hedonism need not necessarily be understood primarily as a theory in substantial axiology. It could instead be understood as an *explanation* of value. It is important to note that not all value theory is about explanation. Indeed, this seems to be the exception². While the projects of axiology proper,

* This paper is a thoroughly revised version of a speech I gave at a workshop in Uppsala in April 2004. I am deeply indebted to the participants of that workshop for their comments. I also wish to express my gratitude to Leonard D Katz for discussing some of these matters with me in correspondence.

¹ The “value” depicted here is first and foremost the good of sentient beings, *prudential* good, or well-being.

² Interestingly enough, this approach seems to be particularly attractive to hedonists. The one account most closely related to the one given here is Leonard Katz’s *Hedonism as the*

then, are surely worth-while, carrying them out is not the only philosophically interesting task about value. If the suggestion in this paper is taken seriously, even the distinction between formal and substantial axiology involves a substantial claim *about* axiology.

What is it then that should be explained? Even though conceptual analysis is a necessary ingredient in any explanation, I do not think that too much should be taken to depend on what the term ‘value’ actually *means*. The explanandum, this notoriously elusive property (if a property it is), is simply *that* allegedly evaluative property the fitting of which into the natural world is such a strange event, philosophically speaking. A theory of value, I believe, should be a theory about *that* property. Down-playing the importance of conceptual analysis is based on the belief that it would be surprising if a term as vague and inconsistently used as “value” would pick out anything coherent enough to fit neatly into a philosophical theory. Some mode of analysis is necessary in order to get an explanation underway, but explanation, I believe, is the more important project. The tension between explanation and analysis about value is a sub-theme throughout the text.

The generic philosophical problem addressed here is the “explanatory gap” believed to hold between natural fact and value or between the normative and the descriptive domain more generally. No important implications, it has been argued, hold from one domain to the other. What does this *explanatory* gap show? The answer presented here is the naturalist one: there is no *factual* gap between value and fact: value is, or can be successfully reduced to, one or several natural properties of natural objects. To close the *explanatory* gap we need just find what property, or properties, this is. The naturalistically inclined *hedonist*, in turn, claims, as I will claim (being such a naturalistically inclined hedonist), that this property is hedonic in nature.

Now, value is obviously a rather peculiar notion (hence the perceived explanatory obstacles) and a naturalist theory must account for the apparent peculiar features of it. But the naturalist does not have to claim that all peculiar properties of the concept are mirrored in the nature of the property that explains it. They need only be *accountable for* in a way that is not inconsistent with the naturalization of value.

It is important for the issue at hand that *pleasure* be understood properly. A non-naturalist hedonist can settle for picking out pleasure in any preferred way and then claim it to be the valuable thing, but a *naturalist* hedonist must explain how pleasure can do what *value* is supposed to do. Naturalistic hedonism, in order to gain leverage, must therefore also be a theory of pleasure. Part of the

paper will thus have to be about explicating pleasure's *good-making characteristics*.

A central question in this paper is how to deal with *intuitions* when doing axiology. I take it for granted that evaluative intuitions are our main source of evidence in this domain. In addition to the fact that hedonism is a mental-state theory, the importance of intuitions is a further reason for considering the philosophy of mind approach to value. Philosophy of mind has for some time been concerned with the problem of the epistemic status, and the proper use, of intuitions and phenomenological reports as evidence when doing science³. My suggestion is that this approach can shed light on value theory as well. Hedonism from its very beginning has been a theory with mixed theoretical loyalties: axiological and psychological. There are surely reasons to keep them apart: invalid implications from the one to the other have been carried out in the past. But perhaps they should not be kept too far apart. If intuitions are to be trusted, we should be able to provide arguments for how and why they are likely to get things right. How far apart axiology and (moral) psychology should be kept is also a substantial value-theoretical question.

I will begin with investigating how we could approach the subject of value. I then turn towards some issues concerning the difference between value explanation and value analysis. The section after that investigates how the philosophy of mind approach to value in general and to hedonism in particular suggests how value could be explained hedonistically. In the concluding section, I consider what has been argued for and what can be said about its further implications.

1. Approaching Value

How should we do axiology? There is no obviously suitable methodology for this discipline, but a way to start in all matters philosophical is with a preliminary conceptual analysis. How should value be analysed? Moore⁴ stated that value, or “the good”, *can* not be analysed, being a simple notion. Be that as it may: we *know* at least approximately what value is. What is it that we already know about value? Whatever it is that we know puts restrictions on what could be recognized as a theory of *value* at all. This is then our first question. The second, a not unrelated question, is this: What can we *require* from a theory of value? Reasonably, we can require from it that it makes sense of exactly those things that we already know about value.

A theory of value must be about what we take ourselves to be talking about when we talk about value. This is a *minimal* condition, only designed to rule out far-fetched suggestions like “Value is the swim technique of the electric eel” or

³ For example, Jack&Ropstorff (2003)

⁴ In Moore (1993) p 58 “...good is good, and that is the end of the matter.”

“Value is the third word on page 36 in any French nineteenth-century novel”. A theory of value needs further to make sense of our *valuations*, of our evaluative *justifications*, and, at least to some extent, of *motivation*. Whatever value is, it must be made sensible why people tend to seek it. We want to know what is *responsible* for these things, because they are our reasons for believing that there is such a thing as value in the first place. A theory of value need not, of course, contain a theory of justification, motivation or even valuation (even if it would be nice if it did), but it needs to make sense of them: value must be shown to have some non-trivial impact on these things. Why do we value the things that we do value? Why do we evaluate at all? Ideally, and an easy way for value theory to make the kind of sense it is supposed to do, we value things/states of affairs because they are valuable, and their being valuable is what makes us value them. Ideally, this would be so, but we cannot presuppose that it is so.

Our pre-theoretical knowledge about value consists in part of our candidates for what *has* value. If making sense of our valuations is a reasonable requirement on a theory of value, these candidates are an important source of evidence for what could constitute a plausible theory of value. We seem to be more certain that some of the things we value have value, than we are about the force of any reason to doubt it. This line of reasoning is generally acknowledged to hold true about more typically *objective* matters, like, for instance, the existence of physical objects. The interesting thing is that people *differ* in what they recognise as knowledge about value in a way that they do not about physical objects. This leaves us with some theoretical elbow-room, but also with the challenge to explain this divergence.

The way to deal with evaluative knowledge-claims that do not sit well with your favourite theory of value, or that conflict with your own claims, is to scrutinize them. Begin with putting them to the Instrumental/Intrinsic test: is your adversary *really sure* that their candidate is good *in itself*? This is advisable when doing self-criticism as well. We should question our convictions, try to stretch our intuitions and see what they could actually be made to support. Hedonism is based on the conviction that our “knowledge” about what has value could be stretched far enough to be compatible with hedonism. Anti-hedonism, on the other hand, is fuelled by the conviction that hedonism violates this knowledge, and that some other theory could make a better job accounting for it.

It follows from the first requirement that it is *inconceivable* that we would be *totally* wrong about value. Even so, it obviously is possible for us to be mistaken about these matters. Indeed, it seems obvious that we do not know *exactly* what we mean when we speak about value; and that is what makes axiology such an intriguing philosophical discipline. That is: we know *approximately* what value is, we know about its *frame*, as it were, but it should be possible for us to be mistaken both about what value *is*, *and* about what it is that has it. That we

sometimes are mistaken about these things is part of our pre-theoretical knowledge about it, too.

1.1 Finding the valuable: a methodological note

The oldest trick in the book (actually: the oldest trick in the oldest *books*) about goodness, is to ask where evaluative and motivational justification ends. What is that which you desire *good for*? Is the object of your desire something that would be valuable no matter what (even if you did not desire it and even if it did not have the consequences it has), or does it matter only as a means to something else? A distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values seems to square with our intuitions about value⁵. Let's consider Mills version of this line of reasoning in *Utilitarianism*. According to Mill, following justifications from instrumental to ultimate ends is a method to identify the ultimately good. Mill believes that we are likely to get things right this way, because he believes that this method will track *pleasure*, and if you are a hedonist, this is precisely getting things right.

Now, for a hedonist, this is a risky method indeed: It is quite possible that we would end up with something else than pleasure in such an introspective endeavour. Most anti-hedonists say that they do, and most present-day hedonists tend to admit it, too⁶. If this method was fool-proof, then, *pluralism* would probably be correct. But how good is this method? Are we likely to get things right in this way? What is it that we detect when we follow a chain of justification? Chains of justification, being psychological, tend to end in *experienced* and *acknowledged* goals⁷, but why should this be the relevant end-point? There are, of course, practical reasons for this: moral responsibility, for one thing. If action *begins* with recognising something to be intrinsically valuable, we, ourselves, must be aware of what it is if we are to be responsible for the action. If value is, essentially, part of practical reasoning, and practical reasoning is what goes on in conscious deliberation, then we must be aware of what value is. But is this Millian picture a correct view of practical reasoning?

In Mills "desire-proof", being the end of a chain of justification in this way is the only possible argument for something being intrinsically valuable. The only proper proof possible in practical matters is *instrumental* proof: leading to

⁵ There are some who claim that instrumental should be contrasted with *final* value, but the reasons why are all taken from examples I happen to disagree with. I admit that these are substantial questions. I believe that all "final" values are "intrinsic" values, but I will not argue this point here.

⁶ At least since Sidgwick (1930)

⁷ See Daniel Wegner's *the Illusion of conscious will* (2002) for a psychological investigation concerning the problems with this kind of reasoning.

something believed to be good without proof. It is not so much a proof as it is a necessary condition for proof⁸.

If we find reasons to doubt that our self-knowledge is ideal (and we do), we might question the result of this method. Perhaps we should not always trust it, but rather see if there are any candidates that reliably keep turning up, and to keep looking for other sources of evidence. The argument for hedonism presented in this paper relies only in part on the old Millian reasoning. There are other considerations that can be “capable of determining the intellect either to give or withhold its assent to the doctrine”⁹.

This leads us to the third and final basic question about axiology: what is the evidence that we appeal to? It seems to be fittingly characterised as *intuitive*. So how do we deal with intuitions in this field? What *are* evaluative intuitions anyway? How do they earn their status as evidence? Intuitions seem to involve some kind of *judgement*. More specifically: intuitions are a kind of *non-inferred* judgment. Intuitions, one could say, are what we believe without being able to motivate further exactly why we believe it. So: what about value are we likely to get immediately right? As we have seen above, we have to suppose that we are likely to get something right. If we deny it, we have no reason to believe that there is such a thing as value.

Even if a theory of value could account for *most* of the things we value, it often will not be subjectively acceptable lest it accounts directly for our favourite values, those to which we are most closely committed. This is one of the most peculiar features of valuations: our commitment to them. To refute an axiological theory, it seems to be sufficient to point towards something that apparently has intrinsic value and which the theory is unable to account for. This matter of subjective acceptableness as criteria should be explained. It is part of the intuitive evidence the value theoretician needs to deal with.

1.2 Supervenience?

Is value a supervenient property? Many value theoreticians (since Moore) have believed so. The supervenience thesis says that value is a property that a thing has *in virtue of* its other properties. The beauty of a painting holds in virtue of the colours and shapes relating to one another in the way they do. But beauty is not a relation between colours; it is a presumably an un-analyzable and non-reducible property that holds in virtue of these relations. Many have found this convincing, fitting as nicely with how we reason about evaluative matters as does the intrinsic/instrumental distinction. We are likely to say that a dinner was good in virtue of how it tasted, but not that its goodness *consisted in* the taste.

⁸ Mill (1993) p 5 “Whatever can be proved to be good, must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof”.

⁹ Mill (1993) p 5

Goodness is not a seasoning, after all. This “in virtue of” character of value would explain how it is able to qualify such diverse things. The supervenience thesis does have the ring of truth about it. In the section concerning hedonism, I will describe a way in which we can account for the apparent diversity of value-bearers without accepting the supervenience thesis. Suffice for now to note that, on my view, supervenience of value is not a *requirement* of a theory of value.

2. Explaining value, analysing ‘value’

Let’s not be naïve. We need to make some assumptions in order to arrive at an explanation of value. Naturalism and non-naturalism about value are to some extent articles of faith. The only thing that can convince some-one to make the requisite assumptions is to demonstrate the explanatory force of the resulting theory. Naturalism, I believe, does bear the burden of evidence, but it also holds a privileged position in that it, if successful, erases the annoying explanatory gap between fact and value. If naturalism fails miserably, non-naturalism, error theory or some non-cognitivist theory seem to be the alternatives. But if naturalism fails only in part, we must ask ourselves if the residue is something that we really need to explain directly.

Axiology and moral psychology, it is often heard, should be kept apart. But does this mean that moral psychology should be completely disregarded when considering axiological questions? Probably not. Whether value is mind-dependent or not is a substantial value-theoretical question, but this much is clear: in *any* enterprise of this sort, we begin with mental phenomena, whether the *target* is mind-dependent or not.

2.1 Analogy argument: Colour

Analogy arguments are abundant in this discipline. One of the more frequent ones draws an analogy between value and colour. Colour is a property ascribed to objects, but there is a widespread consensus that this property is not the property that colour *experiences* display. Colour-experience *detects* properties in the external world, reflection of light more precisely. And presumably, the correlation between a certain experience and a particular wave-length is arbitrary. Colour-experiences detect properties that hold in virtue of matters of natural fact, and a reliable correlation can be established. Is value like this? There are actually two questions here. First: Is there a corresponding correlation between external natural facts and ascriptions of value? And, second: Are statements about value, as are statements about colour, based on *experiences of value*? My type of hedonists (but also supposedly non-hedonists, like C.I. Lewis¹⁰) will claim so; and further that experiences of value are, actually, *pleasures*.

¹⁰ Lewis (1962)

I suggest that our evaluative intuitions can be divided into two kinds: conceptual and phenomenological. As argued above, we know something about value. We know what it is supposed to be able to *do*, namely motivate, be a sensible end of a justification chain etc. But our intuitions also consist in our having *phenomenological access to value*¹¹. The hedonist that uses this analogy also relies on a *dis*-analogy with colour: there is no equivalent reliable external source for the experience of value, as there is for colour. And even if there is some consensus about what is good in life¹², these things do not seem to have anything very interesting in common. Thus there is no ground for arguing that the experience of value detects some external property in the way colour does. Does this mean that value-experience is *illusory*? No, it doesn't. The qualitative nature of experience does not *say* anything about the feature thus detected, unless a correlation has been established beforehand and experiences are interpreted as being about what they correlate with. And if it does not *say* anything, it can hardly be an illusion. If we don't find anything "outside" that explains mental phenomena, we get a warrant to search inside. The hedonist account of value depends on this arrangement.

2.2 Value analysis

Axiology is sometimes understood as value *analysis*. Now, what type of analysis is intended? Is it conceptual analysis? Are we trying to extract the *meaning* of the term 'value'? Or should it be more on the line of *chemical* analysis? Compare with the most familiar of chemical statements in philosophical literature: Water=H₂O. This is not a definition of what 'water' *means*: it is an empirical statement about what we have found out that water *is*. At a time, the question "is water H₂O?" was an *open* question. If naturalism is correct, explaining value is a bit like finding that water is H₂O.

Water is "the watery stuff of our acquaintance"¹³, and that watery stuff is H₂O. Could value, then, be something like "the valuable stuff of our acquaintance". What *is* the valuable stuff of our acquaintance? The usual suspects involve such diverse things as pleasure, knowledge, justice, true friendship etc. The problem, as noted above, is that these things do not seem to have very much in common, besides their being good things.

When it comes to the conceptual part of analysis, there is a limit to what a theory of value could be required to do. I side with C.I. Lewis in that we could not expect it to account directly for each and every use of evaluative terms, since

¹¹ Joseph Mendola (1990) made a similar claim, arguing that value is a phenomenological property of a certain type of experience, namely pleasures and pains.

¹² The existence of objective list theories of value is an indication to that effect

¹³ I borrow this phrase from Jackson (1998)

that use is inconsistent¹⁴. I do not think that a theory of value must be able to shadow or paraphrase every use of the term ‘value’ and its normative cousins. I do not think that any very enlightening theory could result from such an enterprise. It is probable that our concept of value does not correspond to anything very basic, naturalistically speaking. Value analysis has sometimes been ruled out on account of the claim that no analysis of value could dispense with an evaluative notion, thus making the analysis circular. But what if something that we could describe as *proto*-evaluative could be found? I would say that we then have an explanation underway.

Explaining value is about explaining what lies at the bottom of the listed things: our valuations, motivation, justifications. If they can be explained without reference to anything evaluative in nature, then we have no reason to suppose that there is such a thing as value. Value would be nothing but a useful fiction. Naturalism in general and naturalistic hedonism, which we are concerned with here, in particular, marks the borderline between explaining value and explaining it away. Naturalism claims that some natural property does what we believe that value does, and hedonism claim that pleasure is that property. But it does *not* claim that there is no such thing as value, but only pleasure and the role played by pleasure. Rather, hedonism as I construe it claims that pleasure *is evaluative in nature*.

3. Hedonism, the phenomenology of value and the philosophy of mind approach

There is a case to be made for hedonism. The case made here begins with an analysis of what pleasure is. As I have argued elsewhere¹⁵, pleasures can be understood as Internally Liked Experiences. The *liking* involved is directed at, and modifying the felt quality of, the experience as to make it hedonic in nature.

Historically, pleasure has been understood in two different ways. The first one claimed pleasure to be a certain *distinctive feeling*. In response to this view, Sidgwick, claiming pleasures to be a more diverse class, suggested that pleasure were rather a feeling accompanied by a certain desire for it. “Desirable Consciousness¹⁶”, he called it. The reason for this change of emphasis was twofold. First: there seems to be no reason why a certain feeling should always be good for the person having it. Making pleasure into desired consciousness block this option since it would be part of the definition of pleasure that it is

¹⁴ Lewis (1962) writes: “There is at bottom only one kind of value in objects, states of affairs and other existents; namely, potentiality for realizations of value in direct experience. But the *modes of predication* of such value are so various that the attempt to bring them all under one single paradigm is hardly practical and would in any case serve no purpose.” (p 511)

¹⁵ This is a *very brief* summary of the view developed in my paper “the Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences”, see volume 1.

¹⁶ “a feeling, which, when experienced by intelligent beings, is at least implicitly apprehended as desirable”. Sidgwick (1930) (p 127)

desired by the person having it whenever it occurs. The other reason is phenomenological: episodes of pleasures seem to have very little in common with each other. This perceived *phenomenological heterogeneity* of pleasure is present already in Sidgwick, but became popular with Ryle¹⁷. What does the pleasure of hitting a delicate ball in tennis have in common with the pleasure of listening to a late Beethoven string-quartet? Ryle claimed, plausibly, that pleasures are not exchangeable; they are necessarily connected with the activity which they complete. What is it, then, that pleasures have in common, in virtue of which they constitute a coherent and interesting class? *Do* they constitute a coherent and interesting class? It seems to be important for hedonism that they do, since their phenomenological diversity would put in question their being equally, or at all, valuable. For naturalistic hedonism in particular, they need to have some *natural* property in common, namely that property which is to be identified with, or explain, value.

But let's reconsider the argument for heterogeneity. It goes like this: On the different occasions that I feel pleasure, it is not *the same feeling* that occurs. There is, therefore, no "feeling of pleasure itself" that occurs every time I feel pleasure. I agree fully with this observation, but deny the implication that pleasures have nothing phenomenological in common. Phenomenal experiences can be quite complex events, and most pleasures are of this kind. Pleasures are heterogeneous by having *other* qualitative features than the one in virtue of which they are pleasures. Being pleased by Beethoven's string-quartets is hearing them *pleasurably*, it is not having two distinct experiences, one the hearing of the music and the other the feeling of pleasure. I find it phenomenologically fitting to describe this feature as pleasures being *internally liked* experiences¹⁸. This conception makes pleasure a phenomenological class, but it is still necessarily connected with, actually *involving*, a pro-attitude.

3.1 The goodness of pleasure

Pleasures have this phenomenological feature in common: They *feel good*. Nothing else is or feels good in *this* sense. Pleasure is not "that which" feels good, it is not the *cause* of the feeling, it *is* feeling good (compare with the difference between what *looks* red and *seeing* red). Feeling good, i.e. feeling pleasure, is exactly the "having phenomenological access to value" mentioned earlier. At the core of the hedonistic suggestion made here lies the claim that the qualitative property of feeling good is the basic value property.

¹⁷ Ryle (2000)

¹⁸ Of course, it is possible for pleasures to be *externally* disliked: I might be seriously disturbed by the fact that I take pleasure in listening to Beethoven. It is also possible to be pleased by listening to Beethoven separately from the experience of listening to Beethoven, namely by being pleased by *the fact* that I am listening to Beethoven. *This* pleasure will appear relatively isolated from the hearing of the music.

When you look for what has value intrinsically you immediately come up with pleasure. But even if you come up with other things as well, say knowledge, beauty, true friendship or what not, these things do not seem to have value *in quite the way pleasure has it*. Even if you would say that true friendship is valuable for its own sake, is it really valuable in the sense that pleasure is valuable¹⁹? The evaluative phenomenal quality obviously can not be had by anything that is not a state of mind. But then what happens to those things that are *not* states of mind, but are nevertheless argued to be good “for their own sake”? True friendship is held as valuable because of what *it* is, not because of any pleasurable state of mind that it leads to, the reasons you give for valuing it are, usually, internal to *it*. It should be noted here that there seems to be a difference between *being* good and *feeling* good. If the colour analogy holds, being good would be the property picked out by feeling good. But, as we have seen, hedonism stresses a significant dis-analogy with colour, and it does so by noting that even though there is some reliability in what gets experienced pleurably, it is not consistent enough for us to invest something as important as intrinsic value in it, and it is not a reliability that supports the existence of an independently holding property. The order of explanation should be reversed. Feeling good does not *track* goodness, it *is* goodness. The naturalist hedonist claim that feeling good is the only basic value fact there is.

Our concept of intrinsic value may fit better with a notion that can account directly for the value of things like true friendship, knowledge, justice etc. but such a notion is not the one discovered and argued for by the hedonist. Intrinsic value is not just whatever best fits the concepts as we use it: it is the ultimate prize in axiology. Intrinsic value is supposed to explain or at least make sense of the normative domain in general. And the argument here is that a theory that ascribes value to true friendship, virtue, knowledge etc. *directly*, actually explains nothing, while the hedonistic one does. Even if the reasons one gives for valuing true friendship, then, may be intrinsic, the value property thus assigned to true friendship has no explanatory force. That hedonism is incompatible with certain intrinsic value claims only demonstrates the trivial fact that not every one is a hedonist. The naturalistic hedonist, if convinced by the argument that pleasure does not fit the intrinsic value concept, may fall back on the notion of proto-value, mentioned earlier.

3.2 *Psychology, philosophy of mind, and just a hint of neuroscience*

Pleasure has features that make it suitable for explaining value. Indeed the qualitative feel of pleasure would probably not be identified as (which does not mean that it would not *be*) evaluative in nature were it not for its close connection to motivation and to evaluation in the everyday sense of the term.

¹⁹ There is a sense in which you might want to say this, namely if pleasure is valuable in this other sense as well, which it is very likely to be.

The oldest psychological observation about pleasure is that it has intrinsic motivational force (“Come on, it’ll be fun!”, or “Try the lasagne, it is delicious”). But the connection between pleasure and motivation runs even deeper than that. As Murat Aydede has pointed out²⁰ the feeling of pleasure is dependent on what he calls the *affective/motivational system* in the brain. How exactly this dependency relation is structured is not yet clear, but this much has been convincingly argued for: disrupting the system responsible for our feeling pleasure disturbs motivation as well. This is a familiar fact from the neuro-psychology of pleasure and pain. Aydede considers the peculiar phenomenon of non-bothering pain. According to the Melzack/Wall theory there is one system for identifying pain as pain, the sensory/discriminative system, and another system that reacts affectively to pain, providing the “bothering” aspect of pain experience. The communication between the two systems sometimes breaks down, for instance under the influence of morphine, or after certain types of lobotomy, in which cases the patient typically reports that she is feeling pain, but is not bothered by it. The corresponding phenomenon does not occur with pleasure, most likely because there is no sensory/discriminative sense of pleasure: pleasure is always an affective reaction to something, may that be a sensation or a proposition or some complex object consisting in both.

This affective/motivational system, usually found in what is known as the “limbic” system, receives signals from many areas in the brain, not least from those higher cognitive areas (typically found in the prefrontal cortex) where, presumably, conscious thought and deliberation takes place. This resonates well with another feature of pleasure: What we like, what our concerns and commitments are, has a tendency to change, not only how we reason practically, but what gets pleurably experienced as well²¹.

The point of this observation for hedonism is this: the usual hedonistic explanation of non-hedonic values claim that what gives pleasure will influence and ultimately decide what we find valuable and worthwhile. We will start valuing friendship for its own sake, for instance, *because of* its reliable conductivity towards pleasure²². We now see that this is not the whole story. Influence, as is so often the case in the brain, runs in both directions. Particular pleasures may be causally dependent on our valuing something beside pleasures.

²⁰ Aydede (2000), following a classic paper by Melzack and Wall

²¹ Bennett Helm developed this idea in *Felt evaluations: a theory of pleasure and pain* (2002). If Mill had realised it, and maybe he did, he could have made a more convincing case for qualitative hedonism.

²² Mill’s version of this argument suggests that everything that gets valued as a result of it leading to pleasure, ultimately becomes *part* of pleasure. This is not very convincing. A related story is told by Peter Railton (1989), in his suggestion of how hedonism could explain our valuing intrinsically other things. Sobel (2002) argued that this story, if true, merely says that there was a time when hedonism was true.

It appears, then, that we are dealing with two quite different senses of evaluation: one the immediate evaluation inherent to pleasure, noted above, and the other a more “refined” judgment, more in line with the everyday sense of “evaluation”. If the hedonistic story is true, the latter is *based* on the former, even though, once in place, it can exhibit some independence. It is important to note that the dependency which does hold is not such that these non-basic evaluations are always *about* the occurrence of pleasure. This is precisely why hedonism might seem to fail as a theory of value: The *reasons we give* for valuing what we value may have nothing whatsoever to do with its conductivity towards pleasure. But being based on pleasure in the proposed way does account for the (ambiguously) perceived similarity of the things that do get valued, which in turn makes sense of the search for “value-making” properties, and of the plausibility of the supervenience thesis.

3.3 *Two different concepts of value?*

If we hold on to the idea that concepts somehow *track* reality, we find ourselves at a crossroad here. If you are a hedonist, you will say that ‘value’ tracks the affective, immediate evaluative quality inherent to pleasure experiences. In favour of that view, you could point to the things I have listed here: that it makes sense of there appearing to be evaluative properties, that it is closely connected to motivation, that there is a hedonistic story about how non-hedonistic evaluations come about²³. If you are a non-hedonist, you might want to turn to those non-basic valuations instead, and see if they could be made to support some coherent theory of value. If you choose this road, and succeed, you will be able to take more of our value statements at face value.

Let’s return for a minute to my initial *minimal requirement*: a theory of value must be about what we take ourselves to be talking about when we talk about value. But the hedonistic theory outlined here might seem to be a theory about how those valuations *come* about, rather than what they *are* about. This would indeed be a serious objection, if it were not for the fact that value claims to such a large extent *do* concern pleasure.

Pleasures are immediately valuable, but a concept of value applicable only to occurring pleasures is not very practical. We need a way to account for the value claims inherent in long-term motivation, planning, evaluating what is not present, and for making general value claims, and value claims concerning others than ourselves. And this is precisely, it might be argued, what we have a prefrontal cortex for. There seem to be plenty of use for an intrinsic value concept that accounts for things other than pleasure in a direct fashion. True friendship is one of those things that typically are believed to be valuable, so the value claim *fits* it, quite literally. But there is no need to postulate any evaluative

²³ Admittedly, this story is yet incomplete.

property in virtue of which friendship has value: only to point towards features in virtue of which we *think* that friendship has value. This explanation of why we hold that friendship is valuable that invokes hedonistic states closes the fact-value gap²⁴, even if it does not capture what we mean when we say that friendship is valuable.

4. Conclusion: Hedonism as the explanation of value

Explanatory hedonism is not traditional axiology. It seems rather to replace traditional axiology, or at least to rob it in part of its point. Substantive axiology is supposed to tell us to what extent we are right, when we are right, and, ideally, why we are wrong, when we are wrong. Explanatory hedonism complicates matters by its reluctance to do this in a straightforward fashion. I have argued that the hedonist can make a case for pleasures being the basic value facts, and that it can explain the apparent existence of non-hedonic value. Whether you accept this as a theory about *value* or not depends on what you take to be the purpose of value theory. I hope that I have made clear what I take to be the most important philosophical questions about value.

The hedonistic suggestion made here is reminiscent of the classical move from psychological hedonism to ethical hedonism. This move has been discredited, not on behalf of being apparently misleading, but on behalf of being logically invalid. The close association between pleasure and things usually connected to value does not imply the truth of hedonism. But, then again: it would be quite surprising if the truth of any value-theory would be a matter of *implication*. What has been argued is that hedonism does what I suggested that a theory about value is required to do. It is a theory about *that* property mentioned in the introduction of this paper. The hedonist might rest with having established this much. Hedonism with an attitude goes on to claim that this is all there is to be true about when it comes to value.

Hedonism does not flatter our ability to get things right: it second-guesses our commitments, and these are things that literally *matter* to us. We are perhaps more willing to get corrected when it comes to things like vision, learning, memory, dreaming, than we are when it comes to things like knowledge and, above all, value. Hedonism, as we have seen, does show that our commitments have some impact on what has value intrinsically, and it does not claim that all our reasons are hedonistic. So, you see, it does not undermine our non-hedonic values entirely. And to the extent that it does: Philosophy *is* second-guessing.

²⁴ It should be mentioned that hedonism could now be construed as a claim about the more “refined” evaluations mentioned. This is probably roughly the version of hedonism usually contrasted with other substantial theories of value.

What is the relevance of hedonism thus conceived to *ethics*? The theory presented here doesn't say. Value could be explained hedonistically, but morality seems to have additional features. Even if hedonism could tell something about how morality came about, the story is bound to be incomplete, and perhaps not even to the point. Hedonism as understood here concerns "immediate value", it does not say that an action is right if it maximizes, whatever *that* means, the amount of pleasure in the world. Naturalism about value does not imply naturalism about ethics. But it does restrict the possible content for an ethical theory that makes substantial reference to prudential value.

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