

# Intrinsic Value and the Hedonic Thesis

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**ABSTRACT.** If hedonism is taken to be the view that all and only pleasures are the bearers of intrinsic value whilst also saying that complex things, such as states of affairs, can be ascribed intrinsic value, the hedonic thesis seems to be contradictory. Furthermore it has been argued that the hedonic thesis is inconsistent in its treatment of the notion of intrinsic value in another sense, namely that if the hedonic thesis is understood in the Sidgwickian sense, pleasures cannot be said to have intrinsic value due to the relational nature of the Sidgwickian understanding of pleasure. This paper argues that neither one of these problems is devastating for the hedonic thesis.

## 1. *Introduction*

The present essay is concerned with two distinct problems that face the hedonic thesis. The first problem has to do with the monistic nature of hedonism. The dilemma can be summarised as follows: If hedonism is the view that all and only pleasures are the bearers of intrinsic value whilst also saying that complex things, such as states of affairs, can be ascribed intrinsic value, the hedonic thesis seems to be contradictory. The second problem is related to the relational view of pleasure that is presented in the classic Sidgwickian reading of the concept. It would appear that intrinsic value cannot depend on relational features. The second problem, then, is this: how are we to assign value to pleasures in light of this relational feature?

Although the two problems are distinct, they still have a few things in common that makes them fitting to deal with in a single essay. For one thing, both of these problems are structural dilemmas, and as such do not operate on an intuitive level, unlike for example the problems associated with Robert Nozick's experience machine. Another feature shared by the two problems is their somewhat general nature. Both problems, and the solutions to them that I present, are such that they touch value-theoretical subjects of general character and therefore do not only concern hedonists. The two problems are also similar in another, less substantial, way. They are often discussed in brief when philosophers are pursuing other matters. In the present context they are at the centre of a attention.

The first dilemma is solved by appeal to the notion of derivative value, a solution that I feel has several appealing consequences especially when it comes to our pre-philosophical intuitions about value. The second problem is solved by challenging the classical, Mooreian, interpretation of intrinsic value, thus lending further support to philosophers who have attempted such challenges elsewhere.

2. *The hedonic thesis as contradictory*

One common way of characterising the hedonic thesis is by some combination of the three thoughts that are expressed roughly in the clauses (i), (ii) and (iii) below:

- (i) Pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically good.
- (ii) Pain is the only thing that is intrinsically bad.
- (iii) A complex thing such as a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action is intrinsically good iff it contains more pleasure than pain.

Fred Feldman has pointed out that in saying this one commits oneself to a contradiction.<sup>1</sup> This is due to the fact that there seems to be a conflict between clauses (i) and (iii). According to the first clause (all and) only pleasures have intrinsic value. The third clause then ascribes intrinsic value to states of affairs evidently distinct from pleasure. Since a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action cannot be identified as being only pleasure, the contradiction seems obvious.<sup>2</sup> The argument can be structured somewhat like this:

- (i) The hedonic thesis holds a) that pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically good and b) that a complex thing such as a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action can be intrinsically good.
- (ii) Complex things such as a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action cannot be identified solely with pleasure.

Hence:

- (iii) The hedonic thesis is contradictory.

This contradiction must be avoided if the hedonic thesis shall remain a serious standpoint in value theory. I will first present and evaluate the proposal advocated by Feldman. Thereafter, in section 2.2 *The value of complexities*, I will present a solution that I find superior, or at least in some cases preferable, to Feldman's.

2.1 *Feldman's solution*

Feldman, like Sidgwick and countless others, rejects what he calls the “distinctive feeling view”, the view that what makes all the things properly described as pleasures alike is that they all possess some common phenomenologically uniform element, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Feldman, Fred, *Basic Intrinsic Value*, pp. 319-321. Feldman argues that a series of influential hedonists such as Roderick Chisholm and Richard Brandt are committed to this contradiction.

<sup>2</sup> A possible world, the consequences of an action, or a life may contain pleasure but they cannot be identified solely with pleasure. Hence, this implies that entities distinct from pleasure are assigned intrinsic value, which is exactly what (i) denies.

feeling of pleasure itself. Rather, Feldman wants to identify the hedonic phenomena by an appeal to a certain propositional attitude, the attitude we indicate by saying that we are taking pleasure *in* or are pleased *about* some state of affairs. Feldman calls this attitude *propositional pleasure*. This propositional pleasure is not to be understood as a feeling. Feldman even says that we might take pleasure in a state of affairs even though we are not feeling any sensations at all.<sup>3</sup> Further, we can distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic propositional pleasure. If we take pleasure in a state of affairs simply because of the nature of the state itself, we are taking intrinsic pleasure in that state. We are taking extrinsic pleasure in a state of affairs if we take pleasure in that state in virtue of its cause, expected consequences or the like. In such a case, the source of our pleasure lies in some feature extrinsic to the state of affairs itself.

According to Feldman the pleasure that is being referred to in the hedonic thesis is *a whole state of affairs* that consists in an agent taking intrinsic propositional pleasure to a certain degree at a certain time in the fact that the agent is having a certain experience at this time. Such a state of affairs is a basic hedonic state. Basic hedonic states can then be defined like this:

“A state of affairs is a basic hedonic state if and only if there is an individual, S, a time, *t*, a positive number, *n*, and a sensory property, P, such that the state of affairs consists in S’s taking intrinsic propositional pleasure at *t* to the degree *n* in the fact that he himself is experiencing P at *t*.”<sup>4</sup>

Feldman proposes that we understand the hedonic thesis as the claim that basic hedonic states are intrinsically good.<sup>5</sup> The intrinsic value of such a state can then be computed as the function of the intensity of the intrinsic propositional pleasure and its duration.<sup>6</sup>

We can then structure Feldman’s account of hedonism in the following manner:

- (i) When we say that pleasures are intrinsically good, what we mean is that basic hedonic states are intrinsically good.
- (ii) A state of affairs is a basic hedonic state if and only if there is an individual, S, a time, *t*, a positive number, *n*, and a sensory property, P, such that the state of affairs consists in S’s taking intrinsic propositional pleasure at *t* to the degree *n* in the fact that he himself is experiencing P at *t*.
- (iii) The intrinsic value of a basic hedonic state is a function of the intensity of its intrinsic propositional pleasure and its duration.

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<sup>3</sup> Feldman, Fred, *On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures*, p. 463.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>6</sup> It is of course possible to think of other, more complex ways to compute this value, but for present purposes this simple method will suffice. It is also worth noting another problematic aspect of this account: since the variable *t* is thought of as having an extension it is fully possible, and rather likely, that the intensity, *n*, will vary for the duration of *t*. This entails other problems where we attempt to compute the value of such a state.

In order for the account sketched above to be a hedonistic account of value we need to include one further aspect into the scheme. This further aspect is what we could refer to as the “*only-aspect*” of hedonism. A multitude of value theories assign value to pleasures. What makes the hedonic thesis special is that it takes pleasure to be the *only* thing possessing positive intrinsic value. Feldman does not explicitly discuss the move from the account embodied in clauses (i) through (iii) above to an explicitly stated monistic account in “On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures” but he seems to take this move to be unproblematic.<sup>7</sup> Feldman’s model of understanding the hedonic thesis easily avoids the problem of contradiction that faced the crude form of hedonism that was presented at the beginning of this section. This is due to the fact that Feldman takes states of affairs as the fundamental bearers of intrinsic value. It will then be possible to say that the intrinsic value of a world, a life or total consequences of an action is equal to the sum of the intrinsic values of the basics that are *true* within it. Such a formulation will not be contradictory, and hence, the problem is solved.

Several problems arise here however. The first problem that this kind of theory has to solve is that in talking of states of affairs one invites double-counting. This might seem like a minor problem in the light of the fact that Feldman refers to “basic” states. It seems possible to argue however that even if Feldman successfully solves this problem on the theoretical level, the problem might still remain as part of our epistemological shortcomings. It might be difficult in everyday life to isolate the basic states from the non-basic ones. Note that I am not saying here that the theoretical problem remains. I am merely expressing a worry that this theory might be too complex to be easily handled in practice.

It could also be argued that in saying that:

“when we say that pleasures are intrinsically good, what we mean is that basic hedonic states [...] are intrinsically good.”<sup>8</sup>

Feldman offers a reading of the hedonic thesis that is quite controversial. In assigning intrinsic value to states of affairs and interpreting these hedonic states as pleasures, Feldman’s view departs to quite a large extent from the classical interpretation of the hedonic thesis. This is due to the fact that on most traditional interpretations of the hedonic thesis pleasures are seen as experiences, rather than states of affairs. It could be argued that this departure perhaps is too radical and that we therefore should reject Feldman’s solution to the problem. Following this line of thought, we could say that what the hedonic thesis is meant to express is the belief that nothing distinct from pleasure has intrinsic value. Now, on Feldman’s account things evidently distinct from what is normally (that is, traditionally) thought of as pleasures are ascribed intrinsic value. According to this argument, then, in ascribing intrinsic value to whole states of affairs, rather than experiences, Feldman’s account departs from the classical interpretation of the hedonic thesis in an unacceptable manner.

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<sup>7</sup> This move is made in his 1998 article “Basic Intrinsic Value”. See Feldman, Fred, Basic Intrinsic Value, pp. 337-339.

<sup>8</sup> Feldman, Fred, On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures, p. 465.

This argument does nothing to show, of course, that there is anything wrong with this account. It merely points out that what Feldman develops is not as such a solution to the problem that was presented in the beginning of this section. Rather, what he develops is a new theory of what is to be taken as the bearers of intrinsic value. If we want to remain truthful to the classical interpretation of the hedonic thesis another solution to the problem must be found, a solution that does not challenge the traditional interpretation of the notion of pleasure.<sup>9</sup>

### *2.2 The value of complexities*

Another way of solving the problem and avoiding the contradiction is to offer a different reading of what it really means to say that a complex thing has intrinsic value. This proposal could be stated somewhat like this:

Complex things such as a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action do have intrinsic value but the value these states have is *derivative*. The value of these states derives from the value of the pleasure contained within these complexities.

The notion of derivative value can be understood in numerous ways. The easiest and, to my liking, the most unproblematic way of understanding this notion is to view the derivative value of complexities as functionally determined by the value of the components contained within these complexities. In the simplest possible case this function would be purely additive. If this was the case, the following formula for computing the derivative value of a complex whole would be used: The derivative value of a complex whole,  $C$  is equal to the value of  $a, b, c \dots n$  added together, where  $a, b, c \dots n$  are the intrinsically valuable non-derivative components contained within  $C$ . Following the crude formulation of the hedonic thesis presented at the beginning of section 2, these intrinsically valuable non-derivative components would consist in the pleasures and pains included in the complex whole which value is being computed. On this view, nothing other than the bearers of non-derivative intrinsic value is added into the equation and the notion of derivative value is simply a term we use to signify the product of this equation.

By talking about derivative value we could still talk of complex things as having intrinsic value in pretty much the same way as in the original formulation of the thesis. There is no need to resort to talking of states of affairs as the true bearers of intrinsic value. We still capture the essence of the hedonic thesis, that the true bearers of value are

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<sup>9</sup> There is, of course, a wide range of different theories that can be said to be classical hedonistic theories (for example Jeremy Bentham's hedonic tone theory and Henry Sidgwick's desire oriented view). In the light of this, it might be considered misleading to refer to these theories under any common label, be it classical or traditional or whatever, but none of the classical theories interpreted the hedonic thesis in terms of states of affairs and so, in this respect, I think that we can accept this generalization.

pleasures. But the addition of the notion of derivative value allows us to assign value to complex things and still avoid the contradiction.

The pleasures contained within such complex wholes would then, according to this proposal, have intrinsic non-derivative value. This way of understanding the value of pleasures also enables us to account for the positive value of pleasures that are parts of a complex negatively valued wholes. Ponder the following example:

Nick experiences pleasure of a certain degree,  $n$ , in torturing Polly. Polly, on the other hand, as a result of Nick torturing her, is experiencing pain of a certain degree,  $n'$ . Now Polly's pain is greater than Nick's pleasure and therefore the derivative value of the whole state of affairs is negative. Would the pleasure experienced by Nick have been greater than Polly's pain the state of affairs depicted in the example would have a positive value.

In addition to enabling us to say that the intrinsic derivative value of the whole state of affairs is negative (and therefore bad) we can also account for the value of the pleasure Nick is experiencing by saying that this episode of pleasure has a certain positive intrinsic non-derivative value.<sup>10</sup>

The solution presented here shares several similarities to the solution proposed by Feldman and could perhaps be seen as a similar solution, only applied at a more general level. By operating at a higher level of generality, however, greater flexibility is granted and because of this the solution presented here can more easily be made compatible with a wider range of axiological theories than the solution advocated by Feldman.

In addition to being more flexible than the solution advocated by Feldman the appeal to the notion of derivative value does avoid some of the problems that faced Feldman's solution. We are, for example, in no danger of abandoning the hedonic thesis for value pluralism, since the only value making components of a complexity are the pleasures and pains included within this complex entity.

Furthermore the danger of double-counting is substantially smaller on this view. The danger of double-counting still persists in light of the fact that pleasure experiences can be part of other pleasure experiences, however. It is, on this account, still possible to talk about possible worlds and other complex entities, only that we now must do so in terms of derivative value. The value of complex wholes derives from the pleasure and pain elements contained within them. The notion of derivative value, then, provides a solution to the problem that does not require us to slip into a controversial reading of the hedonic thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> There is another matter operating here however. Some philosophers have argued that malicious pleasures, such as the one Nick is experiencing in my example, should not be assigned any value at all, or even that they should be assigned negative value, but that is an entirely different matter that will not concern me here. For a somewhat more lengthy discussion of malicious pleasures see Harman, Gilbert, *Intrinsic Value*, p. 139 – 141. Would the reader be troubled by this controversial example, I assume that it would be easy to construct a different example expressing the same point.

If we were to state the hedonic thesis using the modified view put forward above, we could do it like this:

Hedonism is the view that:

- (i) Pleasure is the only thing that has positive non-derivative intrinsic value.
- (ii) Pain is the only thing that has negative non-derivative intrinsic value.
- (iii) A complex thing such as a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action has positive derivative intrinsic value iff it contains more pleasure than pain.

There are additional problems that arise when one ponders upon the way intrinsic value functions in the hedonic thesis. In the next section we shall see that the modifications that led us to adopting the formulation above do not suffice. We shall see that further modifications have to be made, if the hedonic thesis is to remain a possible and appealing standpoint in value theory.

### 3. *Intrinsic value in the hedonic thesis*

According to the Sidgwickian tradition, the concept of pleasure is to be understood in terms of relational properties. This is done to account for an intuition that is formulated by Henry Sidgwick in the following way:

“When I reflect on the notion of pleasure [...] the only common quality that I can find in the feelings so designated seems to be that relation to desire and volition expressed by the general term ‘desirable’”<sup>11</sup>

The key element here is the intuitive idea of pleasures as a phenomenologically heterogeneous class, or as it is sometimes put, the absence of any such thing as the feeling of pleasure itself.

In response to this intuition Sidgwick gives an analysis of the notion of pleasure in these memorable words:

“I propose therefore to define pleasure [...] as a feeling which, when experienced by intelligent beings, is at least implicitly apprehended as desirable or - in cases of comparison - preferable.”<sup>12</sup>

The Sidgwickian definition analyses the notion of pleasure in terms of relational properties.<sup>13</sup> This has been taken to imply some consequences when combined with the

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<sup>11</sup> Sidgwick, Henry, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 127. Sidgwick discusses and elaborates his understanding of pleasure throughout *The Methods of Ethics*. See especially pp. 42-43 and p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> As Wlodek Rabinowicz & Toni Rønnow-Rassmusen and Shelly Kagan point out, the contrast between intrinsic and relational properties is not as clear cut as one might believe. There might be relational properties that also are intrinsic, for example certain relations between an object and its parts. For the sake of simplicity however, whenever I talk of relational properties these are *extrinsic* relational properties. For Kagan’s view on the subject, see Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking Intrinsic value*, p. 278. And for Wlodek Rabinowicz’s & Toni

concept of intrinsic value. The classical philosophical tradition, deriving from G. E. Moore, takes the concept of intrinsic value to imply that such value exclusively depends or supervenes on the object's internal properties. Because of this, or so the argument goes, Sidgwickian pleasures cannot be ascribed intrinsic value. The argument can be structured like this:

- (i) Sidgwickian hedonism holds that a) the nature of pleasure is to be defined in terms of relational properties, b) all and only pleasures have intrinsic value and c) pleasures have their (intrinsic) value in virtue of being pleasures.<sup>14</sup>
- (ii) The value things have in virtue of their relational properties (such as being desired) cannot be intrinsic.

Hence:

- (iii) Sidgwickian hedonism is inconsistent.

An argument of this kind has been used by Fred Feldman in his attack on Sidgwickian hedonism.<sup>15</sup> Feldman does this to add further support for his own form of hedonism that was outlined under section 2.1 *Feldman's solution*. The problem here sketched does not concern Feldman's version of hedonism, due to the fact that it is an intrinsic property of a basic hedonic state that it consists in someone taking pleasure in a certain state of affairs. Therefore the basic hedonic states do possess intrinsic value in the Mooreian sense, that is, have value in virtue of their intrinsic nature.<sup>16</sup> The ability to deal with both of these problems using a single model does speak in favour of Feldman's solution. Objections similar to the one put forward by Feldman have also been raised in other areas of moral philosophy, perhaps most notably in environmental ethics.<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of ways in which one can answer the objection, each of these corresponding to the two premises of the argument. These two premises are the Sidgwickian view of the nature of pleasure and the Mooreian view of intrinsic value. Therefore, any attempt to solve this problem must either challenge the Sidgwickian reading of pleasure or the Mooreian conception of intrinsic value.

Rønnow-Rasmussen's, see Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>14</sup> In much of the literature concerning these matters the third condition, embodied in c) above, is taken to be implicit, and therefore is seldom explicitly stated.

<sup>15</sup> Feldman, Fred, *On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures*, pp. 448 – 461.

<sup>16</sup> It is also reasonable to say that these states possess this value by necessity. This is due to the fact that each of the cited properties of such a state is essential to the state of affairs in question. Should any of these properties be missing (say for example in a different possible world) we would quite simply be dealing with a different state of affairs.

<sup>17</sup> A. Gunn, for example, raises a similar objection against the idea of endangered and rare species as bearers of intrinsic value. See Gunn, A., *Why should we care about rare species?* The argument raised here can be characterised in a similar way to Feldman's.



*3.1 Bengtsson's solution*

One such attempt to provide a different analysis of the pleasure experience has been made by David Bengtsson. Bengtsson agrees with Feldman in seeing “taking pleasure *in*” as the basic hedonic phenomenon, but contrary to Feldman he does not see this in a propositional sense. This is partly due to the fact that Bengtsson notices a potential problem with the Feldmanian account of sensory pleasures. According to Feldman, pleasure taken in a sensation is to be understood as the whole state of affairs that consists in someone taking intrinsic propositional pleasure to a certain degree at a certain time in the fact that this someone is having that experience at that time. The problem discussed by Bengtsson could be stated like this: It seems that it is possible to take pleasure in a certain experience without taking pleasure in *the fact that* one is subject to this experience.<sup>18</sup> Ponder the following example:

Nick is experiencing pleasure to a certain degree,  $n$ , at a specific time,  $t$ , due to the fact that he is tormenting Polly at  $t$ . At the same time ( $t$ ) Nick is also feeling bad, due to the fact that he is experiencing this kind of malicious pleasure. In other words, Nick is experiencing pleasure of the degree  $n$  at  $t$  but at the same time he is not taking pleasure in *the fact that* he is has this experience.<sup>19</sup> This example could easily be modified to concern other matters than malicious pleasures.<sup>20</sup>

If we agree to Bengtsson's objection, as I think we should, then we have to conclude that the way Feldman accounts for sensory pleasures is too narrow to be satisfactory. Even if we accept Bengtsson's objection, a proponent of Feldman's view could say that *taking pleasure in  $x$*  is in itself a state of affairs, even though  $x$  in itself isn't a state of affairs but an experience. In reply to this we could, which seems plausible, hold that the state of affairs that one is taking pleasure in an experience,  $x$ , derives its value from the value of  $x$  (That is, the value of one taking pleasure in an experience derives its value from that experience).

Another problem with Feldman's proposal, which relates to the solution just offered, is that it seems open to the “cart before the horse”-objection. One could argue that what the hedonic thesis is meant to say is that states of affairs are valuable because they contain pleasure, not the other way around. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen makes the same point in a recent paper. He writes:

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the problem mentioned above Bengtsson has another objection towards the way Feldman sees propositional pleasure as primary. The objection could be stated like this: the attitude involved needn't always (that is, in every case) be a clearly stated attitude or for that matter be directed towards some state of affairs. If this is true, then, why should we think of this attitude as propositional? Why couldn't the attitude be directed towards the experience itself? For a full account of this objection, see Bengtsson, David, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> For the full account of how Bengtsson sees this problem, see Bengtsson, David, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> I see no call for this, but there might be other philosophers that find the subject of malicious pleasures unsatisfying in this respect.

“The reason why we think that it is valuable that the experience which is pleasant exists is that the experience itself is valuable. The value of the experience is the ground for the value of existential fact. [...] A way of expressing the relation at issue is to say that the value of the fact derives from the value of the experience, and not the other way around.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus it seems clear that there are serious problems with Feldman’s solution. Of course, one could always deny the importance of “cart before the horse”-objections. This is done by David Bengtsson in his *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*. He writes:

“I must admit that I rarely find “cart before the horse” objections very convincing. It’s at least not *obvious* that one could not say, ‘The reason why we think that the pleasant experience itself is valuable is that the fact that the experience which is pleasant exists is valuable.’”<sup>22</sup>

I on the other hand find this objection extremely serious. It seems to me obvious that this line of reasoning gets things exactly the wrong way around. Here a philosopher who sympathises with Bengtsson can always say that it is far from obvious which of the views is the wrong one, and in a way, as I take it, this is what Bengtsson is saying in the quotation above. The best I can do here is to say that it seems obvious, at least to me, that it is the Feldmanian reading that is at fault. In saying that the true bearers of value are states of affairs containing sensory pleasure Feldman is misplacing the nature of the value in question. The value of the fact, the abstract entity or the state of affairs, must in some way be derived from the value of the experience and not the other way around. The conclusions drawn from this argument against Feldman’s proposal seems to grant further support to the solution I offered in section 2.2 *The value of complexities*.<sup>23</sup> This being said about Feldman’s solution let us now return to Bengtsson’s account.

Bengtsson articulates his proposal in the following passage:

“Now, my proposal comes in two forms: For there to be a pleasure in my sense in this case [A person, X, is taking pleasure in something, p] either (i) the awareness of p is an experience intrinsically liked by X, or (ii) the awareness of p in combination with the pro-attitude towards p amounts to an experience, intrinsically liked by X.”<sup>24</sup>

This gives us the following schematic structure of the Bengtssonian account:

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<sup>21</sup> Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *Hedonism, Preferentialism, and Value Bearers*, p. 470.

<sup>22</sup> Bengtsson, David, *The intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p.58. Italics in original.

<sup>23</sup> In connection with these matters, Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen ask a more fundamental question: Why would anyone feel compelled to resort to such a reduction of the value of an object to the value of a state or fact? They give two reasons for such a manoeuvre. Firstly, a value theorist who reduces all value to proposition-like objects can fall back on a rather well-developed formal framework and secondly, reducing all intrinsic value to the intrinsic value of states of affairs or facts has the advantages of monism. (See Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, 1999. pp. 44-45.) To my mind, the first of these reasons does not seem to carry much weight, since it is a formal rather than a substantial reason. The second reason seems at first glance rather compelling. However, if we accept the account of derivative value given in the previous section, it follows that, as far as the ontology of value-bearers is concerned, this ontology is easily reducible to the fundamental, or basic, bearers of intrinsic value.

<sup>24</sup> Bengtsson, David, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 45.

An experience,  $E$ , is a pleasure on the Bengtssonian account iff:

i)  $E$  consists in an intrinsically liked awareness of something,

or,

ii)  $E$  consists in an intrinsically liked awareness-cum-proattitude towards something.

Central to the Bengtssonian account is the concept of internal liking.<sup>25</sup> It is this internal liking/disliking by the agent of the experience that makes the experience a pleasure/displeasure. Pleasures, then, are always and necessarily liked and it is this fact that makes them intrinsically valuable. An experience could still be a pleasure, on the Bengtssonian account, even if it weren't extrinsically liked. Intrinsic likings resemble extrinsic likings and it is this that justifies us in calling them likings. The relation between intrinsic and extrinsic likings is somewhat confused on Bengtsson's account. It is for example unclear whether intrinsic likings can be picked out by any motivational capacity (something that seems possible to do when we handle extrinsic likings). It is clear, however, that it is in the nature of pleasures (that is, it is due to their being intrinsically liked) that they provide us with reasons to form extrinsic desires towards them.

It is important to note that Bengtsson does not deny that pleasure experiences have "hedonic tones". What he does deny, I believe, is that these "hedonic tones" are identical from one occurrence to the next. Rather than being phenomenologically uniform, these hedonic tones, on Bengtssons account, are dependent upon the internal likings of experience and vary with the experience in question. One could argue that since all pleasures are subject to this internal liking and that this liking is intrinsic to the experience, then there is something that all pleasures have in common. But since there is nothing on the account advocated by Bengtsson that takes these likings as phenomenologically alike, Bengtsson is not denying the heterogeneity of pleasures.

It should by now be clear how Bengtsson avoids the problem stated at the beginning of this section. Pleasures, on this account, are what they are because they are internally liked. Because this liking is intrinsic to the pleasure experience, there is no inconsistency in assigning intrinsic value to these experiences.

One thing that speaks in favour of Bengtsson's model is its close connection with Moore's principle of universality.<sup>26</sup> Moore argued that judgements of intrinsic value

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<sup>25</sup> A number of things should be noted here. First, we should note that the "attitude" of intrinsic liking does not take any proposition as its object. Second, Bengtsson's model implies that it is only experiences that can be intrinsically liked in this sense. Third, the reason, or at least one of them (another reason can be found in Bengtssons argument against Feldmans proposal that was outlined in footnote 18), for Bengtsson to draw this distinction between propositional and non-propositional pleasures is to avoid falling victim to the criticism offered against Feldmans proposal above. By drawing this distinction Bengtsson can account for the difference between taking pleasure in an experience and taking pleasure in the fact that one is having that experience.

<sup>26</sup> This is also, perhaps to a lesser extent, true of Feldman's solution (see footnote 16). This of course is only an argument in favour of Bengtsson's and Feldman's solutions provided that we take this principle to be

have a certain universality about them that is lacking in the corresponding judgements of extrinsic value. This is, according to Moore, due to the fact that if something has a certain amount of intrinsic value, then anything intrinsically like it must possess the same amount of value.<sup>27</sup> On the Bengtssonian account “[t]o say that an experience is ‘intrinsically liked’ means that any experience qualitatively identical to it is also intrinsically liked. Being intrinsically liked, then, changes an experience as to its intrinsic nature.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Bengtsson’s reading of pleasure satisfies Moores principle of universality and not only does so but does it in an easily apprehended and elegant manner.<sup>29</sup>

Since, on Bengtssons account, the internal liking is part of its own object, there is no experience prior to the liking, or rather, there may be an experience prior to the liking, but since the intrinsic nature of the experience is changed by the addition of the internal liking it is not *that* experience that is internally liked. This self-reflexivity might, as Bengtsson acknowledges<sup>30</sup>, be a problem if we were to make an attempt to justify the liking in question.<sup>31</sup> After making this point Bengtsson, rather hastily I believe, brushes it to the side, saying simply that this is no concern of his at present.

Another bothersome aspect of the Bengtssonian model is the role of internal disliking. According to Bentsson “intrinsic likings and dislikings change the quality of experiences as to make them pleasures or displeasures”.<sup>32</sup> Surely, Bengtsson could not mean that being the object of a disliking makes an experience a pain. This would tie the concepts of pain and pleasure too closely. But if that’s not the role of dislikings then what is?

Perhaps the most rewarding way of reading Bengtsson on this point is to understand displeasures as a wide class containing all experiences that the agent in question dislikes internally and which are as such as to be assigned negative value according to his theory. This wide class would then contain those episodes of pain that are disliked internally, and therefore have negative value, but it would not include those episodes of pain that are internally liked, say those experienced by a masochistic agent.<sup>33</sup> This model

sound, it seems after all to be other ways to formulate a principle of universality, ways that need not be dependent upon intrinsic properties.

<sup>27</sup> Moore, G. E., *Principia Ethica*, pp. 23, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Bengtsson, David, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> One other thing in Bengtsson’s favour is that his model is, at least to a certain extent, neutral to what is commonly referred to as the “buck-passing” account of value. The “buck-passing” account of value, as laid out by T. M. Scanlon in his *What We Owe to Each Other*, holds “that being valuable is not a property that provides us with reasons. Rather, to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.” (Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, p. 96.). Even though the Bengtssonian account might point towards some kind of naturalistic version of the “buck passing” account, it does in no way rely on this kind of conception of value. This neutrality could be seen as an appealing aspect of the Bengtssonian model. It should be added that this neutrality in respect to the “buck-passing” account also holds for Feldman’s solution.

<sup>30</sup> Bengtsson, David, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 45, footnote 11.

<sup>31</sup> That is, these internal likings are justifiable only *ex post*, not *ex ante*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> These episodes of pain experienced by a masochistic agent would probably belong to the class of pleasures.

of understanding does not tie the concepts of pleasure and pain too closely together and as such it seems very plausible.

This account of displeasures as the bearers of non-derivative intrinsic value can be incorporated in a (broadly) Sidgwickian account. This Sidgwickian account of displeasures would then come out somewhat like this:

Displeasure is a feeling which, when experienced by intelligent beings, is at least implicitly apprehended as undesirable.

I think that there is much to be gained by viewing displeasures as a wide class of the kind here suggested.

On Bengtsson's account, then, the fact that one is taking pleasure in an experience (that one likes the experience intrinsically) changes the nature of that experience. In Bengtsson's own words: "Being intrinsically liked, then, changes an experience as to its intrinsic nature".<sup>34</sup> On a purely intuitive level I find something odd in this statement. It seems strange to say that the fact that I like an experience, be it the taste of beer, the sight of a red patch or anything else for that matter, should be an essential part of its nature. It does not, at least to me, seem utterly strange to say that the attitude I take up towards any experience I have is something external to that experience and that it doesn't change the experience as such. This makes it reasonable to think that the intuitions under debate here are anything but clear cut. There seem to be strong intuitions at work on both sides and therefore it might be unwise to draw any definite conclusions regarding these matters. However, the fact that there seems to be a clash of intuitions here should provide us with a reason not to regard the idea of internal likings as entirely uncontroversial.

One possible standpoint in the debate over the intrinsic value of pleasures is that pleasures are valuable only insofar as they are deserved.<sup>35</sup> The value of pleasures would then be relational on the basis of desert. Even though I do not share this standpoint I do consider it to be a consistent view that should be argued against rather than just defined away by the way we choose to define the technical terms involved. This is a view also expressed by Shelly Kagan. He writes:

"Even if we reject these positions after further reflection, we should not be disposed to simply rule them out of court as incoherent. We should leave conceptual space for views of these sorts"<sup>36</sup>

In arguing for the value of pleasures as intrinsic in the Mooreian sense, it seems to me that the Bengtssonian model fails to provide such a conceptual space. In saying that pleasures are intrinsically valuable due to their being internally liked, the model, by its

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<sup>34</sup> Bengtsson, David, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> This view was for example held by Kant. He thought that happiness is a conditional good, something that is good only on the condition that it is deserved, i.e. if the agent has a good will.

<sup>36</sup> Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking intrinsic value*, p.281.

use of the Mooreian definition of intrinsic value, excludes the possibility of any such further, extrinsic, dependence of value on desert.

This implies that in order for the Bengtssonian model to account for the view that the value of pleasure experiences is relational to some further fact in the situation, for example that they are deserved, the Bengtssonian model would still need to challenge the traditional interpretation of the notion of intrinsic value.

It is possible for a philosopher who sympathises with Bengtsson to argue that the model need not account for the value of pleasures as being relational in this manner because such a view is faulty. This may very well be the case, but, as mentioned earlier, the Bengtssonian model relies on a definition of the notion of intrinsic value that excludes such a possible standpoint. It is my firm belief that any theory that takes pleasures as valuable in relation to some such further fact should be argued against and not merely removed from consideration by the way we choose to define the terminology involved.

Let us now explore another possibility to solve the problem at hand, namely by challenging the Mooreian conception of value. If we can succeed in providing an alternative to the notion of intrinsic value as it is understood by Moore, we can answer the objection without slipping into a controversial reading of the hedonic thesis. This is more appealing because of the fact that it is the uncompromising simplicity of the hedonic thesis, as laid out by Sidgwick, that makes it such an attractive standpoint in value theory.

I will here try to show that such a challenging of the notion of intrinsic value can be made successfully and without appeal to theories concerning the nature of value that depart too much from the common conception of intrinsic value. There might however be other, more convincing, arguments that should lead us to the conclusion that we should abandon Sidgwickian hedonism. I do intend to try to show, however, that the objection raised by Feldman is not such a reason. I believe that the fault here lies in the Mooreian conception of intrinsic value rather than in the Sidgwickian reading of pleasure. So let us turn our attention towards the concept of intrinsic value.

#### *4. The concept of intrinsic value*

The concept of intrinsic value is one of the most important value theoretical notions in the history of western philosophy. Philosophers usually try to explain what the term “intrinsic value” means by referring to two different lines of thought.<sup>37</sup> Two very common formulations of these lines of thoughts go something like this:

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<sup>37</sup> Fred Feldman distinguishes between no less than eight different intuitions concerning the notion of intrinsic value but it is only two of these that are of major concern here. I therefore limit the discussion to just these two. For a full list of these intuitions characterised by Feldman see Feldman, Fred, Hyperventilating

- i) The value of an object is intrinsic if it has this value regardless of the circumstances in which the object exists. Consequently the object would still have this value even if it were the only thing existing in the universe.<sup>38</sup> This is because the object has this value *in virtue of its own intrinsic properties*.
- ii) The value of an object is intrinsic if the object has value as an end. This is thought to mean that the object is valuable, not as means to something else, but rather *for its own sake*. It is commonly thought that if some objects do have instrumental value, that is value as means to something else, then there must be other objects that these instrumentally valuable objects are means to. These objects that are at the end of the chain so to speak are thought of as having intrinsic value.<sup>39</sup>

The two different characterizations embodied in i) and ii) above are commonly used interchangeably when referring to the notion of intrinsic value.<sup>40</sup> This has been done over a long period of time, possibly during the entire history of western philosophy.<sup>41</sup> The fact that these ideas have been so dominating from the historical perspective has resulted in that the term intrinsic value has become laden with theories concerning the nature of value.<sup>42</sup> The two distinctly different views represented by i) and ii) above have

About Intrinsic value. John O'Neill also makes a distinction of different intuitions concerning the nature of intrinsic value. See O'Neill, John, *The Varieties of Intrinsic Value*, p. 119-120.

<sup>38</sup> That is, it has to pass Moore's well known "isolation test" from *Principia Ethica*. Moore defends this view on a number of occasions in *Principia Ethica*, for example, Moore, G. E., *Principia Ethica*, p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> It could be argued however that, as it stands, this argument for the existence of intrinsic values is no more persuasive than the "first-cause" argument for God's existence. (Such an argument is put forward by Gilbert Harman in his *Toward a Theory of Intrinsic Value*, p. 112). This, I believe however, rests on a mistake. In explaining a certain effect, it is sufficient to point at the cause of that effect to fully explain the existence of that effect. In this respect, however, the notion of value is not analogous with the notions of cause and effect. We cannot fully explain the instrumental value of some entity, x, merely by pointing at some other instrumentally valuable entity, y, prior to x. In order to fully understand and account for the value of x, we need to be able to point to a further entity, n, which has some other kind of value that x is valuable as a means to. David Bengtsson does make a similar objection to this argument. He writes: "well, the difference, I think, is that the justification-chains in the latter case really do end. Their ending is a familiar phenomenological event." (Bengtsson, *The Intrinsic Value of Pleasure Experiences*, p. 54). So, the argument therefore shows that there must be something that satisfies the condition embodied in clause ii). What the argument doesn't show, however, is that this value has to be intrinsic in the Mooreian sense (that it has to satisfy both clauses i) and ii)). There is nothing in this argument that should lead us to think that the entity that we find at the end of the chain must pass Moore's isolation test. It shows only that there has to be some kind of value that is valuable *for its own sake*. It is worth noting that there is (to my knowledge at least) no comparable argument for the existence of intrinsic value in the sense embodied in clause i). The same point that I make here is also made by Wlodek Rabinowicz, and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen. See, Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> John O'Neill points out that this shifting between readings often takes place in literature concerning environmental ethics also. See O'Neill, John, *The Varieties of Intrinsic Value*, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle expresses thoughts concerning the 'chief good' in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that could be interpreted in line with both of i) and ii) above. He writes, '[The chief good is] always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else'. (*NE* I,7). Plato also expresses thoughts along these lines when he discusses the value of righteousness in his *Republic*. See Plato, *the Republic*, book II.

<sup>42</sup> The fact that the term "intrinsic value" has become laden with theories concerning the nature of value is emphasized by Kagan. He writes: "In particular, it seems to me that the very label we have provided ourselves – 'intrinsic value' – reflects a philosophical theory about the nature of the value in question. And it seems to me that this theory might well be false. [...] given that the theory is effectively 'built in' to the term itself, there is a strong temptation to think that the theory must be true, by definition. It is a temptation I am especially keen to resist." Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking intrinsic value*, p. 278.

both been incorporated into the term “intrinsic value” in such a way that the term has come to stand for both these views.

One way of challenging the traditional interpretation of the notion of intrinsic value has been proposed by Shelly Kagan. Kagan is arguing that we should understand the notion of intrinsic value in accordance with clause (ii) above. In other words, we should use characterization (ii) as the preferred analysis of intrinsic value. In order for this to work, we have to show that the intuition concerning intrinsic value that was embodied in clause (i) above is, in some way, mistaken, at least when it comes to the concept of pleasure.

If Kagan’s claim could be made plausible, then this should provide us with a way to answer Feldman’s objection. Let us then look more closely at what this proposal really means.

The leading intuition here is that the two concepts picked out by clauses (i) and (ii) are indeed distinct concepts and that there is no reason to assume, at least not without further argument, that they always come to the same thing. Rather, to embrace the classical conception of intrinsic value is to embrace a substantive claim, a specific theory of value, that is by no means self-evidently true. It is of course possible, like Feldman, Bengtsson and the classical philosophical tradition at large, to accept this substantive thesis. But even if we do accept this substantive claim, this is not something that we should do without further argument.

Now Kagan claims that it is the concept of value as an end that is the central concept in our pre-philosophical thoughts about value. In using the term “intrinsic value” to theorize explicitly about these thoughts, the dominating philosophical tradition surrenders to an unthinking allegiance to the substantive thesis. The use of a single, theory laden, concept to pick out both concepts makes this unthinking allegiance even harder to detect. Kagan is claiming that intrinsic value need not depend solely upon intrinsic properties. As Kagan points out, this claim might appear incoherent. He writes:

“To those trained in philosophy, however, this claim might appear incoherent. But of course, I am not claiming that the value of an object which depends solely upon its intrinsic properties need not depend solely upon its intrinsic properties. This is indeed a trivially false suggestion. I am claiming, rather, that value *as an end* need not depend solely upon an object’s intrinsic properties.”<sup>43</sup>

The claim that Kagan makes, then, is that:

“[T]he substantive thesis is false. Or at least (a bit more cautiously) I want to argue that we should not assume the thesis to be true without considerable argument.

That is to say: it seems fairly *likely* that value as an end need *not* depend solely upon an object’s intrinsic properties”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking Intrinsic Value*, p. 280. (Italics in original).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280. (Italics in original).



Thus, we can state Kagans proposal in the following manner:

VTC1: Intrinsic value need not depend solely upon intrinsic properties.

In arguing for proposals of this kind philosophers often try to show that objects can have value, at least in part, in virtue of their relational properties. For example, they point out that people tend to value things in virtue of their being unique or rare. Stamps are often seen by collectors as more valuable in virtue of their uniqueness. Uniqueness is clearly not an intrinsic feature of any particular stamp. Rather, uniqueness, or rarity, is a relational property of the object that possesses it. It also seems plausible to think that the value of any particular stamp would diminish if the Post Office Department were to print more copies of that stamp.<sup>45</sup> If we think that the intrinsic value of an object can depend, at least in part, on its rarity or uniqueness then this provides an argument for the view that the intrinsic value of an object might depend, at least in part, upon its relational properties.<sup>46</sup>

It could be argued that the value of a certain object which is dependent upon its relation to some other object in reality should be seen as an intrinsic value belonging to the state or fact that the objects and this relation exists. The state or fact contains these objects and the relation as intrinsic features and therefore the value such states or facts possess can be seen as intrinsic. If this reduction is possible then any value which is dependent upon relational properties could be reduced to such a state or fact and therefore there is no need to account for intrinsic value as dependent upon relational properties. This reduction manoeuvre, however, carries a strong resemblance to Feldman's proposal that was discussed above and it seems to me that it could be met with the same response as the one used against his proposal above. In other words it seems clear to me that this reduction manoeuvre puts the cart before the horse.<sup>47</sup>

It has also been argued that perhaps objects can have value in virtue of their causal properties. Ponder an original work of art. Original works of art are often thought of as more valuable than copies of that artwork. This is presumably due to the special causal relation that the artwork stands in to its creator, the artist.<sup>48</sup> A similar story could be

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<sup>45</sup> Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen make some rather interesting notes concerning an early version of this "stamp-argument". See Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, 1999. p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> For variations of the argument presented here see, Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, 1999. p. 40, O'Neill, John, *The Varieties of Intrinsic Value*, p. 124 and Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking Intrinsic Value*. pp. 282-283.

<sup>47</sup> The same point that I make here is also made by Wlodek Rabinowicz, and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen. See, Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>48</sup> For variations of the argument that value can depend upon causal properties see, Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, p. 41 and Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking Intrinsic Value*. pp. 283-284. Kagan also considers a related case involving excellence in practical arts such as fine cooking etc. But, or so the thought goes, mere excellence in any skill whatsoever can hardly be considered valuable for its own sake. The excellence in any skill, then, can only be considered valuable if the skill itself is useful, which is a relational property. (See, Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking Intrinsic Value*, pp. 284-285). Christine Korsgaard discusses a related example. A mink coat can be seen to be valuable as an end but

told about the religious belief that mankind possesses a certain value in virtue of being created in God's image. Mankind's special value is dependent upon both the causal relation of being created by God and the relational property of being an image of God, that is, resembling God.<sup>49</sup> These are views that we have to take seriously, or so the argument goes, and therefore we must leave conceptual space for them. In order to do this we have to allow for value as an end to depend, at least in part, upon relational properties.

Arguments trying to support VTC1 that focus on relational properties come in abundance. If, as I have argued for, the reduction manoeuvre proposed by, among others, Feldman<sup>50</sup>, is incorrect, then it is easy to think of other cases concerning objects whose value as ends is dependent upon relational properties. On a hedonist basis, however, these arguments carry little weight. This is due to the fact that the hedonic thesis ascribes value as an end to pleasures only. It is of course possible to argue that the views put forward in the argumentation above are to be considered serious standpoints and as such deserve conceptual space, a space that can only be provided by accepting VTC1. If we agree with this, then we must also, or so it seems, allow for pleasures to be ascribed value in accordance with VTC1. Seen in this way these arguments still carry some weight in the present context. There is however, another argument, proposed by Kagan<sup>51</sup>, that seems more fitting for our present agenda. The argument can be structured like this:

- (i) Subjectivism is the view that absolutely nothing would have any value as an end in the absence of some creature that values it.
- (ii) To be valued by some creature is a relational property.

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this value also seems to supervene upon the mink coats instrumental usefulness. (See, Korsgaard, Christine, *Two Distinctions in Goodness*, p 185). In cases of this kind, then, the instrumental usefulness is a necessary pre-condition for the intrinsic value of the object in question. Korsgaard also notes that this type of cases seems to have peculiar implications when it comes to applying Moore's isolation test upon them. The value of the mink coat is dependent "upon an enormously complicated set of conditions, physiological, economic, and symbolic. Certainly, it does not pass Moore's isolation test, so far as I can see. [...] It seems hard even to apply the isolation test here, for one is tempted to say that its instrumentality *is* one of the elements in the 'intrinsic nature' of a coat, even though it can hardly be said to be a property the coat would have under any set of laws of nature. If its instrumentality is not one of its intrinsic properties, then one is regarding the coat as something else – an animal skin sewed into a peculiar shape, perhaps." (Korsgaard, Christine, *Two Distinctions in Goodness*, p 185, Italics in original). It could also be argued, I think, that the mink coat argument, and others like it rests on a mistake. It seems possible to argue that it is the rarity of the mink coat that provides it with value as an end. But this would be beside the point. In arguing that it is the rarity of the mink coat that makes it valuable as an end we fail to notice the complicated set of conditions that seem to provide the ground for value in this case. It is also hard to see what such an argument is meant to amount to since the rarity is also a relational feature of the mink coat.

<sup>49</sup> It could perhaps be argued that this argument rests on a linguistic error. What we really mean, or so one could argue, when we say that mankind is valuable because we were created in God's image is that the human race possesses some features which are valuable, not because of their relation to God, but because of their intrinsic nature. Seen in this light, then, the argument presented above carry much resemblance to the familiar, and rarely held, view that good means simply being liked by God.

<sup>50</sup> Other philosophers that hold similar "reductionist" views include Gilbert Harman, W. D. Ross, Roderick Chisholm and Michael Zimmerman.

<sup>51</sup> Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking intrinsic value*, pp. 281-282.

- (iii) According to subjectivism, then, value as an end is dependent upon a relational property.
- (iv) Subjectivism is a serious standpoint for which we must leave conceptual space.

Hence:

- (v) We must leave open the possibility that value as an end can be dependent upon relational properties.

Subjectivism of the kind presented here is a value-theoretical view that is easily compatible with hedonism and it is therefore easy to see why this argument is preferable in the present context. This argument provides a very general kind of support for VTC1. Unlike the previous arguments, it does not rely on examples concerning specific objects and, as such, cannot be explained away as a simple exception from the general rule.<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that we need not actually *be* subjectivists to acknowledge the force of this argument. We need only accept that it is a value theoretical standpoint that is to be regarded as serious.

The “Subjectivist argument” presented above has come under attack however. Both John O’Neill<sup>53</sup> and Rabinowicz/Rønnow-Rasmussen<sup>54</sup> argue that this argument conflates the supervenience base for value with its constitutive ground. Rabinowicz/Rønnow-Rasmussen write:

“Kagan here conflates the supervenience base of value with its constitutive ground: It is the latter, not the former, that according to the subjectivist conception is located in the creatures that value the object”<sup>55</sup>

The idea here is that the “Subjectivism argument” is ambiguous between two readings. On the one hand we might be thinking of the features of the object on which its intrinsic value supervenes, its “good-making” properties. On the other hand we might be thinking of the constitutive ground of the object’s intrinsic value. The constitutive ground for value might well be located outside the object itself even though the supervenience base is internal to the object. The difference between the supervenience base and the constitutive ground for value is illustrated by Rabinowicz/Rønnow-Rasmussen by an analogy to chess:

“[T]hat a certain move in chess is admissible is a feature that supervenes on the internal properties of the move and of the situation on the chess-board. But the constitutive grounds of its being admissible are to be found in something external – in our conventions that determine the game of chess.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Rather, if we accept this kind of subjectivism, it sets a new rule which is, as Kagan points out (Ibid., p. 281, footnote 4.), only broken by a creature that values itself. That is, it ought to be an intrinsic feature of that creature that it values itself.

<sup>53</sup> O’Neill, John, *The Varieties of Intrinsic Value*, pp. 121-123.

<sup>54</sup> , Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, p. 39-40.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 39-40.

<sup>56</sup> Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, p. 37.

In the case of value-subjectivism, then, the constitutive ground for the object's final value might well be external. The value of the object would still be intrinsic if the relevant supervenience base for value is found to be internal to the object. To make matters more clear, consider a version of a preferentialist account of value. According to this conception of value, preferences grant value to the objects towards which these attitudes are being directed but, if these attitudes are being taken up or maintained due to features internal to the objects, then these externally constituted values are still intrinsic due to their supervenience on the internal properties of the objects.<sup>57</sup>

In this case, then, one might assume that the preferential attitudes, which are seen as the constitutive ground for value, take on a trans-worldly role. The preferential attitudes would then not only confer value to the objects of the attitudes in this world but in any possible world towards which these attitudes might be directed. This would also imply that value might be conferred on objects even in those worlds where our attitudes towards these objects would have been different from our attitudes in this world.<sup>58</sup>

Given this chess-analogy we can see how the conflation is supposed to be present in the "Subjectivism argument". Luckily for our purposes, however, there seems to be two ways around this critique. The two possible courses of action are:

- i) Arguing for a possible breakdown of the distinction between the constitutive ground and the supervenience base.
- ii) Accepting, at least for the sake of argument, a more radical form of subjectivism that holds that both the supervenience base and the constitutive ground for value are located in the creature that values the object.

The first possibility to save the "Subjectivism argument" shall not be pursued here. However, it is, I think, valuable to note that this possibility exists and to acknowledge that this should make us sceptical to the distinction until it gets better backing.

The second way to deal with the critique against the "Subjectivism argument" entails that we acknowledge that there must be left conceptual space for a more radical form of subjectivism. This kind of subjectivism is possibly what Kagan initially had in mind when he formulated his argument. This given that he actually uses the phrase "radical subjectivism" to refer to the form of theory he has in mind. Take for example the following passage:

"Consider first, a *radical* subjectivist, who holds that absolutely nothing would have any value as an end, in the absence of some creature who values it"<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For a complete account of this see Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Again, for a more thorough account of these matters please consult Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking intrinsic value*, p. 281. (Emphasis added).

If we accept that there must be left conceptual space for this more radical form of subjectivism we would have saved the “subjectivism argument” from the critique offered by philosophers such as John O’Neill and Rabinowicz/Rønnow-Rasmussen. Such a radical subjectivist would hold that the constitutive ground for value is located in the creature that value the object. But, and here comes the radical claim, such a subjectivist would also hold that all intrinsic values are superveniently dependent upon the attitudes of the creature that ascribe value to the entity in question. This claim would imply that the constitutive ground for value does not confer value to objects in other possible worlds where the constitutive ground is not present. And, I must add, I fail to see what it is about such a theory that has led philosophers to dismiss it so easily.<sup>60</sup>

With the support provided by these arguments, Kagan now proposes a linguistic reform. Since it is value as an end and not value in virtue of intrinsic properties that is of primary interest in normative questions, Kagan argues that we should rid ourselves from our unthinking allegiance to the substantive thesis and use the term “intrinsic value” for value as an end. In other words Kagan is claiming that: The value of an object is intrinsic if it has value as an end, or for its own sake. If we take the term intrinsic value to mean only valuable as an end, then there will be no contradiction involved in claiming that Sidgwickian pleasures have intrinsic value and thereby we will have an answer to Feldman’s objection. In using VTC1 as the preferred characterization of what intrinsic value means, there will be no reference to intrinsic properties at all.

This linguistic reform is problematic however. Kagan himself acknowledges that it might be useful to adopt a different term than ‘intrinsic value’ for the type of value here discussed. Kagan writes:

“There may be some, however, with a certain amount of sympathy to my basic position [...that] might insist nonetheless that value as an end should not be *called* ‘intrinsic value’”<sup>61</sup>

Kagan considers this to be an objection “offered in a kindly spirit”<sup>62</sup> but nonetheless offers some critique of such a suggestion. He points out that other, competing terms, also have a potential to be misleading in their own right. There are however a few reasons that might tip the favour in balance of choosing a competing term. One such reason has been put forward by Christine Korsgaard, who writes:

“This is not, however, what the words ‘intrinsic value’ mean. To say that something is intrinsically good is [...] to say that it has its goodness in itself.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The reason for this easy dismissal on behalf of some philosophers ought to be that this proposal goes against their intuitions concerning the objectivity of value. It seems to me, however, that it would constitute a natural, albeit it is not a necessary, step for anyone compelled to accept the subjectivist thesis to challenge these intuitions concerning the objectivity of value.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 278. (Italics in original)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>63</sup> Korsgaard, Christine, M., *Two Distinctions in Goodness*, p. 170.

The term ‘intrinsic value’ refers to value being had in virtue of intrinsic properties. Thus, Kagan’s proposed linguistic reform would go against the actual meaning of the words, and why should we adopt such a reading of the term?

Another reason why we should not accept Kagan’s proposal is the confusion that would be generated by such a manoeuvre. The concept of intrinsic value has a rich history, a fact emphasized by Kagan<sup>64</sup>. If we were to perform such a linguistic reform, would this not add further confusion into the matters associated with an already ambiguous concept? Furthermore, when the meaning of a term is changed, there is always a strong tendency to start reading earlier works in the light of the new understanding of the term. Such attempts would perhaps be devastating to the understanding of works by philosophers like G. E. Moore or W. D. Ross<sup>65</sup>.

It could also be argued that the reform proposed by Kagan sets unnecessary limits to our value theoretical vocabulary. If we were to use an additional term for entities that are valuable as an end but still not intrinsic this would grant us a greater flexibility.

##### 5. *The final value of pleasures*

The traditional Moorean conception of intrinsic value has been questioned in a different way however, most notably by John O’Neill, Christine Korsgaard, Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen and Wlodek Rabinowicz. All of these philosophers argue for a value theoretical claim slightly different from Kagan’s proposal:

VTC2: There are final values that are not intrinsic.

This proposal does not rule out the first characterization of intrinsic value. Rather, this proposal introduces a new term, final value, to account for values that satisfy condition (ii) but not (i). This new terminology captures the spirit of the intuition that was the ground for Kagan’s proposal and at the same time provides us with the flexibility that was requested in the end of the previous section. Up to this point I have spoken of such values as “value for its own sake” or “value as an end”. In the forthcoming I choose the term “final value” for these values for two reasons.<sup>66</sup> Firstly, the term “final

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<sup>64</sup> See for example, Kagan, Shelly, *Rethinking intrinsic value*, p. 278.

<sup>65</sup> A similar point to the one I make here has been made by Johan Brännmark in his PhD. Thesis. Brännmark says that: “As usual when a new piece of terminology is introduced, it is tempting to start reading the philosophers of the past through the philosophical lenses thus introduced.” (Brännmark, Johan, *Morality and the Pursuit of Happiness: A Study in Kantian Ethics*, p. 30). Brännmark then goes on to make some rather interesting points concerning the way Moore himself came to some hasty conclusions regarding Kant’s value theory due to his understanding of the terms involved. It should be added that there is an even greater danger of misunderstanding when it comes to Kagan’s reform since the term here is not only similar, as in the Kantian case discussed by Brännmark, but literally the same.

<sup>66</sup> The term “final value” is chosen by Rabinowicz/Rønnow-Rasmussen over the competing terms despite the fact that the term “final” (finis = end) might lead us to think that it only applies to proposition-like entities (since ends are proposition-like entities), although not all final values are meant to be proposition-like.

value” is nowadays widely accepted in the literature and I see no reason to quarrel with this and thereby create further confusion. Secondly, the term “final value” is appropriate because the kind of value discussed here “are ‘final’ in the sense of being ‘ultimate’”.<sup>67</sup>

I have here been questioning whether all final values need to be intrinsic and tried to find support for the claim that they do not. As Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen point out, however:

“entailment in the other direction has nearly never been questioned, [...] It seems to be a general if not a universal view that all intrinsic values are final.”<sup>68</sup>

If this is true, it seems that we have another reason not to go along with Kagan’s linguistic reform. If intrinsic value entails final value in all cases then it would perhaps be useful to benefit from this fact. If we can show that an entity possesses intrinsic value we will also have shown that this entity possesses final value. In light of this, there might be cases where we have use for the notion of an intrinsic value as understood in the classical manner.

#### 6. *The hedonic thesis reformulated*

If the claim made explicit in (VTC2) were to be incorporated into the reading of the hedonic thesis that was argued for in section 2. *The hedonic thesis as contradictory* and using an essentially Sidgwickian understanding of pleasure, then the hedonic thesis would come out something like this:

- (i) There is no such thing as “the feeling of pleasure itself”; Pleasures are phenomenologically heterogeneous.
- (ii) To say that a feeling is a pleasure is to say that it is a feeling which the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be desirable for its own sake.
- (iii) To say that a feeling is a displeasure is to say that it is a feeling which the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be undesirable for its own sake.
- (iv) Pleasures are the only bearers of positive non-derivative final value.
- (v) Displeasures are the only bearers of negative non-derivative final value.

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But, as they point out, there is another reading of the term “final” that better serves their purposes, namely “final” in the sense of being “ultimate”. See Rabinowicz, Wlodek, and Rønnow-Rasmussen, Toni, *A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34. In this context Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen point to Moore as an exception (*Ibid.*, p. 34, footnote 3). Moore held that for anything to be good for its own sake it must be intrinsically good in every aspect of its being, that is it cannot contain parts that are bad or indifferent. For Moore’s own formulation, see *Ethics*, pp. 30-32.

- (vi) A complex thing such as a life, a possible world or the total consequences of an action has positive derivative intrinsic value iff it contains a favourable balance of pleasure over displeasure.

This formulation of the hedonic thesis implies that there is nothing that possesses non-derivative intrinsic value in the Mooreian sense. This is due to the fact that all intrinsic values that are allowed for in the formulation of the thesis are derivative.<sup>69</sup>

The formulation of the hedonic thesis presented above avoids the two problems that were the starting point of this essay. The problem associated with the monistic nature of hedonism was solved by appealing to the distinction between derivative and non-derivative value. The second problem, associated with the relational feature in the Sidgwickian understanding of pleasure, was solved by a challenging of the Mooreian conception of intrinsic value and the introduction of the concept of a final value.

In light of this, I believe I have achieved what I set out to do, namely to argue that neither of the two problems we considered is devastating for the hedonic thesis as a standpoint in value theory. There might be other, more substantial, reasons for abandoning the hedonic thesis<sup>70</sup>, but I hope to have shown that neither of the problems discussed here supplies such a reason.

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<sup>69</sup> It should be noted that this does not imply that it is a logical impossibility that things should have this kind of value. The hedonic thesis is just saying that this isn't the case.

<sup>70</sup> To my liking, a prime example of such an additional reason why we should not go along with the Sidgwickian model is its anthropocentric nature, which has the effect of excluding the possibility of primitive animals ever experiencing pleasure: such animals may not be able to have such sophisticated attitudes as apprehending an experience they have as desirable for its own sake.



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