Is the esse of intrinsic value percipi?: pleasure, pain and value

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1. Introductory

In this paper I shall speak sympathetically of a hedonistic theory of intrinsic value which, ignoring any other such theories, I shall simply call the hedonistic theory of value. How far I am finally committed to it will partly appear at the end.

The hedonistic theory of value identifies intrinsic value, that is, positive intrinsic value, with pleasurableness as a quality of certain experiences, or components of experience, and similarly identifies negative intrinsic value or disvalue with painfulness or unpleasurableness as a quality of the same.

I mostly prefer the expression 'pleasurable' to 'pleasant' for that quality possession of which makes an experience a pleasure. This is because 'pleasant' in common usage, often implies a rather tepid degree of that quality. Experiences can, of course, be unpleasurable, unpleasant or painful, that is, pains, in the sense relevant for ethics or value theory without being physically painful.[1]

To be valuable otherwise is to be extrinsically valuable as a means to promoting pleasure or preventing pain or in the case of negative extrinsic value the converse. The sharp separation of intrinsic and extrinsic value is sometimes challenged as ethically unhelpful. If what is meant is that the things and activities which it is most desirable to promote are both intrinsically and extrinsically valuable, I agree, but that does not challenge the distinction between the two ways of being *valuable*.

If we combine this hedonistic theory of intrinsic value with ethical consequentialism we arrive at a hedonistic ethic. This hedonistic ethic will be universalist in the sense that it regards the equivalent pleasures and pains of all sentient individuals as equally important. Hedonistic psychology, in contrast, presents itself most obviously as an egoistic theory.

Hedonistic ethics or value theory is more associated historically with empiricism than idealism. However, many empiricist philoso-

[1] The suffix 'able' of course has no normative force such as it has in 'desirable', nor does it imply merely what can be pleasant on analogy with 'visible'.

phers have rejected hedonistic ethics while something not far from it has been advocated by some idealists. I suggest, however, that a case can be made for it both on empiricist and on idealist grounds.

The basic principle of at least *British* idealism has been that to be is to perceive or to be perceived, or alternatively that to be is to be experienced in the sense of either being an experience or a component in an experience. I side with the modification of Berkeley's '*esse* is *percipere* or *percipi*' into 'to be is to be experienced' on the ground that consciousness or experience comes in units which normally divide into a self and a not-self side and that both, and the relation between them, are experienced. If one looks at a painting, the painting as seen belongs to the not-self side of one's experience while one's thoughts about it belong to the self side of one's experience. The painting may be said to be an object of consciousness while one's thoughts about it belong to the self side of one's experience and are modes, but not objects, of consciousness.

Pleasure and pain float between the self side and the object side of experience. So far as they pertain to the object side, when one looks at a painting. they will constitute the painting's beauty or ugliness, so far as they pertain to the self side they will constitute one's more detached appreciation or dislike of it.

So, as I see it, *percipere* and *percipi* come together as different ways of being experienced and the idealist should say simply that to be is to be experienced.

I suggest now that if an idealist applies this identification of *being* with *being experienced* to value he may find it hard not to embrace some form of hedonism. For to say that an experience *feels good* is very little distance away from saying that it is *pleasurable*. So if the *esse* of goodness, in the sense of intrinsic good, consists in being experienced or felt as good, 'goodness', in this sense means virtually the same as 'pleasure'. Similarly to say that an experience *feels bad* is very little distance away from saying that it is *unpleasant*. So if the *esse* of badness in this sense is to be *experienced as bad*, then badness means virtually the same as pain or unpleasure.

Admittedly when pleasure or pain is objectified[2] that is, qualifies an object on the not-self side rather than the self-side of our experience, it is usually inappropriate to say that the object feels good, unless indeed it is something handled in which case 'feel' is being used in a different sense. But though we would not say of a paint-

[2] Santayana defined 'beauty' as 'pleasure objectified' in George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), chapter 1, §11. Santayana, of course, was no idealist.

ing that it feels good, we may well say that it looks good. So here again if the esse of visual goodness, or beauty, is *to be experienced as good*, that is to say, *to look good*, then visual goodness or beauty, for an idealist, becomes a form of pleasure. Similarly with what is perceptually presented through the other senses. Ugliness may likewise be described as objectified pain or unpleasure.

Thus there is a clear logical path from idealism to a hedonistic theory of intrinsic value.

What of the path from empiricism to a hedonistic theory of intrinsic value? Well, as I see it, the fundamental principle of empiricism is Hume's doctrine that an idea must be derived from an impression, or 'constructed' out of what is so. Or something at least very much of the same sort. Now if we ask what the impression is from which we get our idea of the intrinsically good, or the intrinsically bad, I suggest that it is from impressions of pleasure or pain.

When life is really joyous everything seems good. Stale questions about the point of life fade away and the present totality of experience seems justification enough. We exaggerate if we identify the present totality of experience with the world, but that is what we tacitly do in such moments. And this goodness or wonderfulness of the world is its pleasurableness. Similarly with pain and unpleasure. When our consciousness is pervasively unpleasant things as a whole seem simply bad. And this is where we get our idea of the intrinsically bad from.

It is generally believed that pleasure and pain can only occur as qualities of experiences or, as I would add to be more precise, components of experience.[3] Yet some people have believed that things lying quite outside of anyone's experience can be intrinsically good or bad. G. E. Moore's description of the goodness of a beautiful world even in the absence of consciousness is too well know for me to quote.[4] But I am rash enough to suggest that Moore was confused as to what he was conceiving and was really conceiving a beautiful world presenting itself to a consciousness enjoying its beauty.

So my claim is that we get the idea of the intrinsically good, worthwhile, or whatever you like to call it, from the impression of pleasure, but that we confusedly think of it as capable of qualifying things other than experiences or components of experience. Similarly with pain and badness. Come to think of it that is what many of us think about the secondary qualities; indeed, it is what

[3] A painting as presented to vision is a component in an experience, but it would be unnatural to call it an experience, though an idealist sounding language in which everything is called an experience is strangely current (e.g. the millennium-dome experience).

[4] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1954, first published 1903), pp. 83–4.

idealists think about the primary qualities of the physical too. So I think I have made my case that empiricism and idealism both point strongly in the direction of a hedonistic account of intrinsic value.

So much by way of introduction. I shall now present my own case for a hedonistic theory of value.

2. Main argument

2.1 If there are objective values they must possess a feature which in fact nothing possesses except pleasure and pain

If there is such a thing as intrinsic value as an objective property of things it must have a certain feature which it has been thought problematic for any objective property to possess.[5]

And this feature is so much the clue to understanding, the concept of intrinsic value that it would seem not only that it must be met by objective intrinsic value, if there is such a thing, but that anything which meets it must be regarded either as simply identical with intrinsic value or as a species thereof.

The feature in question is that of being necessarily attractive or. so to speak, magnetic for the will. That is, the belief that something conceived as a future possibility would possess this property must have some essential tendency to encourage the desire that it will exist or occur, other things being equal.

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, must be true of intrinsic disvalue, if there is such a thing. That is, the belief that something conceived as a future possibility would possess this property must have some essential tendency to encourage the desire that it will not occur or exist.

It must also be true that the recognition that something which exists or is occurring now has the one or the other of these properties must have some essential tendency to encourage the desire that it will continue, or not continue, to do so.

Desire here must be understood as a mental state which has some intrinsic tendency to produce action which is thought likely to actualise what it is a desire for on the part of an organism in whose mind it occurs.

Or, in the case of what we may call negative desire, it must be

[5] On looking up a point just recently in Moritz Schlick's *The Problems of Ethics* I realised that I have probably been to some considerable extent influenced by him in the development of the suggestions in what follows about pleasure and pain, as values and motivators. See Moritz Schlick, trans. David Rynin, *Problems of Ethics* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962, being the 1939 translation of *Fragen der Ethic* first published 1930).

understood as a mental state which has some intrinsic and *necessary* tendency to produce action which is thought likely to stop the actualisation of that of which it is a desire for the non-existence or non-occurrence.

Here again I am speaking of a necessity of a kind which may be thought deeply problematic.

For certainly, as I mean this specification to be understood, the fact that an organism desires something is not the fact that it tends to act, in the sense of moving about, in a way likely to bring its object about, (or prevent its coming about in the case of negative desire) but something distinct which necessarily tends to cause this.

However, my more immediate concern is to argue that pleasure and pain are species respectively of intrinsic and negative intrinsic value. For they precisely meet the requirement which is thought so distinctively problematic in the very notion of there being such a thing as objective intrinsic value, positive and negative.

But how can pleasure and pain be regarded either as identical with or as a species of objective intrinsic value seeing, that they are essentially subjective phenomena?

Such a question rests on a misunderstanding. An objective fact, in the relevant sense, is a fact such that its affirmation is not simply the expression of an emotional attitude or some other mental phenomenon incapable of being true or false. In short, we are dealing with a matter of objective fact wherever it is genuinely true or false that the fact exists. I shall not spend time on what 'genuinely true or false' means hoping that it is clear enough what I have in mind, however difficult to find a satisfactory analysis.

In this sense it is an objective fact whether a certain experience is pleasurable or unpleasurable, and relatedly whether a particular conscious individual is presently experiencing something pleasurable or painful. It is an objective fact, so we may put it, about a subjective state.

I now contend that pleasure is intrinsically attractive and pain intrinsically unattractive (or better: disattractive) precisely in the sense that to know or believe that some experience which one might bring about would be pleasurable has a necessary tendency to encourage the desire that it should exist or occur, and that to know or believe that some experience would be painful has a necessary tendency to encourage the desire that it should not occur.

Of course, these tendencies may be inhibited by other mental states, most obviously by contrary desires.

Ah, you may be saying, if there is any truth in this at all, it is only when the experience is going to be one's own that its expected pleasurableness or painfulness has any such necessary tendency.

To this I reply as follows. The mere belief that an experience, whether mine or someone else's, would be pleasurable or painful does indeed have some tendency to produce a desire that it should or should not occur, a desire which has the tendency to affect action as described above. However, where the experiences will be those of someone else, the desire tends to be a weak one easily overcome by more egoistic desires. But this is at least partly because beliefs about our own future experience are upon the whole more fully realised. Most of what we call our beliefs go with fairly little real conscious grasp of what it is we believe. My claim about the necessary attractiveness or disattractiveness of pleasure or pain may now be qualified as the claim that this tendency depends upon, and is more powerful, the more we fully realise in consciousness what it is that we are believing, when we are believing that some experience promoted by certain activity on our part would be pleasant or painful.

Much of the time, though in words and in expectations about external behaviour we may acknowledge that another is suffering, or is about to suffer, we do not really take in the reality of this. For such beliefs, like beliefs in general, may be more or less intuitively fulfilled, to use Husserl's terminology.

Let us hear Josiah Royce on the subject and forgive a certain suggestion of the pulpit which some Harvard philosophers then thought appropriate.

> What, then, is our neighbour? ... He is not that face that frowns or smiles at thee, although often thou thinkest of him as only that.
>
> ... Thou hast regarded his thought, his feeling, as somehow different in sort from thine. Thou hast said, 'A pain in him is not like a pain in me, but something far easier to bear.' Thou hast made of him a ghost, as the imprudent man makes of his future self a ghost. Even when thou hast feared his scorn, his hate, his contempt, thou hast not fully made him for thee as real as thyself. His laughter at thee hast made thy face feel hot, his frowns and clenched fists have cowed thee, his sneers have made thy throat feel choked. But that was only the social instinct in thee. It was not a full sense of his reality. ... Of thy neighbor thou hast made a thing, no Self at all. ...
>
> Have done with this illusion, and simply try to learn the truth. Pain is pain, joy is joy, everywhere, even as in thee. ... The result of thy insight will be inevitable. Seeing the oneness of this life everywhere, the equal reality of all its moments, thou wilt be ready to treat it all with the reverence that prudence would have thee show to thy own little bit of future life. Lift up thy eyes,

> behold that life, and then turn away, and forget as thou canst; but, if, thou hast *known* that, thou hast begun to know thy duty.[6]

So at least part of the reason why we are more concerned about our own pleasures and pains than those of others is that our beliefs about our own experiences are much more fully realised. I am probably not alone in shamefacedly sometimes thinking more intensively of my own next meal, if I am a little bit hungry, than the fate of starving people I see on television.

I shall say a bit more about the contrast there is for us between our own experiences and those of others later. I am only concerned to claim that the hedonic quality of the lives of others, as we think our actions might affect them, have some tendency, and necessarily so, however weak it may be, to influence our behaviour in the direction of improving it, and the more so the more vividly their situation is imagined.

This provides a strong case for saying that pleasure and pain, are either identical with positive and negative intrinsic value, or are species thereof. For they meet the requirement of being intrinsically magnetic, positively or negatively, which I have suggested is so essential to our concept of what objective intrinsic value, positive or negative, if it exists, must be.

In spite of this, pleasure and pain are most sharply distinguished from intrinsic value and disvalue by the philosopher who was most influential in the development of the latter concepts. However, as was implied above, it is my belief, when, as in this respect a Humean, I ask from what impression G. E. Moore got his idea of intrinsic value, that what was really magnetic here was, in fact, pleasure confusedly conceived as present in the absence of consciousness, similarly in the case of the negative magnetism of intrinsic badness or 'vileness'.

So may we go further and say that pleasure and pain are actually identical with intrinsic value, positive and negative? My positive answer rests upon the fact that, as in the case of Moore, so with all others who claim to conceive of intrinsic value (positive or negative) as pertaining to things quite other than pleasure and pain (in all their various forms) and even existing outside all consciousness, when I try imaginatively to identify with their thought I find myself thinking of these things as suffused with just that emotional magnetism (positive or negative) which, as it seems to me, can only really belong to a pleasurable or unpleasurable experience or component thereof.

[6] Josiah Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965), pp. 156–62.

2.2 Pleasure and pain as intrinsically prescriptive realities existing in rerum natura

Some philosophers may think that the intrinsic appeal to the will, which we are ascribing to pleasure and pain, does not justify their identification with what we all refer to clearly or confusedly as intrinsic value, positive and negative. For that it must be shown that they are somehow inherently prescriptive in the sense of having a kind of imperatival force which cannot be gainsaid by those who are properly aware of them.

However, to me it seems that there is little difference between the notion of something as thus intrinsically prescriptive and the notion of something to know of which is necessarily to desire its existence or non-existence, continuation or cessation.

As such, even for those not yet persuaded that they are identical with positive and negative value, pleasure and pain pose a formidable challenge to the idea that nature, so to speak, does not offer imperatives of its own which are not some kind of freely adopted human option. So let us consider them simply in this light for a little.

Perhaps the defender of the view that nothing in nature can be intrinsically prescriptive will claim that it is merely a contingent fact that we are attracted by, and desire the existence of, what we expect to be pleasurable, and similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, with pain.

But I do not think that it is *merely contingent* that we desire the occurrence of the one and the non-occurrence of the other. That there is a certain necessity to this, where the pleasure and pain is our own, will be granted by most people quite readily. The further claim, that it is mainly because the experiences of others are only half believed in, that the thought of their pleasure and pains is so much less strongly motivating, may be less readily granted. So let us consider the egoistic concern with our own pleasure and pain first.

Is a species of animal whose tendencies are contra-hedonistic possible? I believe that we find such an idea absurd. It seems obvious that any being capable of pleasure and pain, and capable of anticipating them, will be concerned to get the former and avoid the latter. But if a contra-hedonistic species is impossible then pleasure and pain are intrinsically magnetic, positively or negatively, for all those capable of experiencing and expecting them.

Two alternative responses are possible for those who wish to deny that nature contains anything with this sort of necessary appeal to the will.

(1) The first is that this is a mere trivial analytic truth. For 'pleasure' (the objector will say) is simply being used as a common term for such experiences as a conscious individual as a matter of

contingent fact, likes and seeks, and 'pain' simply as a common term for experiences which such an individual dislikes and tries to avoid.

But this seems simply wrong. If one goes for a long time without serious pain, one can more or less forget its distinctive nature. But then, when it comes, one is reminded only too well of what it is like, that is, of its reality as a distinctive quality of experience. And that one responds by attempting to bring it to an end is a distinct fact, though one with a necessary relation of tendency, to its having this quality.

This is as true of such mental pain, as depression, as it is of physical pain.

Similarly, if one is gloomy over a period one may half forget what pleasure is. But immediately it comes one is orientated towards continuing it, and does so other things being equal.

If a contra-hedonic species is impossible, then, it would seem to be a transparently necessary truth that any being who can experience and conceive them, must desire pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Moreover, since this is not a mere matter of definition it would seem that it is what used to be called a 'synthetic *a priori* truth'.

I speak of the necessity as 'transparent' because I am not concerned with the necessities of which some speak, especially in connection with the laws of nature, which are radically distinguished from the *a priori* knowable.

(2) The alternative strategy for those who are reluctant to admit the existence of real necessities in nature is to insist that it is only because it is so very much the norm in fact, that we are inclined to think it a necessary truth that pleasure and pain, or the prospect of them, have the the effect on us which they do but that this is really something essentially contingent.

Two cases are stressed here, in connection with pain. First, we are reminded of the phenomenon of masochism. Secondly, we are informed of brain operations which produce a state in which pain is recognised as pain, but is not minded. Similar results, it is said, may be achieved through meditative practices.

Regarding masochism, I would argue that what is painful at one level can be pleasurable at another level. I might even appeal to Moore's principle of organic unities here, giving it a hedonistic interpretation which he might have disliked. That is, there may be states of consciousness in which an included pain adds to the pleasure of the whole. In masochism, I urge, for a mixture of reasons, partly physiological and partly more psychologically determined, the response of dislike to something going on within consciousness

is wrapped round in, so to speak, a blanket of pleasurableness, this being the more over-all character of the total experience. An attempt to imagine masochistic delights will surely support this.

Regarding the experience of pain which one does not mind we should distinguish here between a character of a physical sensation and the painfulness which usually comes along with it. The person who does not mind his pain is aware of a sensation which he used to find painful but which no longer is painful.

Of course, there is such a thing as Stoic bravery, but the person who withstands torture without imparting the information which would stop it, as much desires that the pain would stop as anyone else but he has an even stronger desire not to betray his cause or his associates, and we are not saying that pleasure and pain are the only things we desire, though I shall shortly be claiming that all desire involves pleasure and pain even when they are not its objects.

What of counter-examples to the attraction of pleasure? May not certain ascetic inclinations actually turn one away from sources of pleasure? Yes, I am sure that this is so. But here the pleasure, for whatever reason, seems somehow sordid, that is, bad in a particular kind of way, and this badness, which is a certain painfulness in which our thought of it bathes it, is more powerful than the expected goodness of it.

2.3 The more basic explanation of why we desire pleasure and avoidance of pain

Our claim then is that there is a certain transparent necessity to our desire for pleasure and for the avoidance of pain. But is this necessity the consequence of the operation of some still more basic necessity? I suggest that it is, for we ought to distinguish between the necessary effects of actual pleasure and pain on our activity and the necessary effects of conceived pleasure and pain in virtue of which we necessarily desire the one and desire the avoidance of the other.

This basic necessity, so I suggest, is that it is of the nature of consciousness to move somehow towards the pleasurable and away from the painful, and – so far at least as its past can influence its future at all[7] – to prompt to activity which in the past has sustained

[7] The astute reader may realise that, as a panpsychist (see below) I hesitate as to whether all forms of consciousness allow of any such ability to learn at all. Maybe there is learning in the so-called inanimate world, but maybe, as I suppose science suggests, there is not. But even if not I should suggest that there is some kind of necessary movement towards the pleasurable and away from the painful as they occur and that this is the noumenal grounding of the laws of nature.

or produced pleasurable experience or has terminated, or diminished the intensity of, painful experience.

Also there must be some basic power of calculation on the basis of experience as to what is likely to increase or sustain pleasure or terminate or diminish pain where this is not a matter of the exact repetition of a past situation.

An objection worth a brief comment is that certain obsessive ideas seem to be sustained in consciousness precisely because of their unpleasantness. The answer is surely that there is something in our situation which continually evokes them. And their result is behaviour which consciousness calculates may expel them from our system by presenting the world as one in which their content has no place. Our thought thus dwells on them as something to be expunged from reality.

The views presented here on the influence of pleasure and pain on behaviour might be described as a phenomenological version of the reinforcement theories of psychologists like B. F. Skinner.

When I say that consciousness prompts to activity on this basis I assume that the consciousness is linked up with a brain, or some other guiding machine within the individual whose consciousness it is. I am in no position to theorise as to the nature of this link. What I do urge, however, is that whenever there is a link of a kind which makes a consciousness the consciousness of a particular organism it must be one which allows for this influence.[8]

However, the influence may not be entirely from consciousness to the physical and vice versa. There is activity which is internal to consciousness and here we can take it that a consciousness, as long as it continues at all, will influence its own internal activities in this way.

This is a very dualistic picture of the relation between consciousness and an organism. I am quite prepared for the truth to be rather that consciousness is the felt inner nature of certain brain processes, and that physical theory will find an analogue, perhaps to some extent already has done so, of this necessary tendency of consciousness to prompt to activity which has been hedonically useful in its past.

This is very easy for me to grant since I am in any case a panpsychist who believes that the mental, in the sense of consciousness, is the inner nature of all physical processes. That is, all physical processes are the outer or structural appearances of a system of flows of experience, of more, or much less, personal kinds.[9]

[8] I am inclined to say that consciousness can only be causally linked to an organism in a way which allows this tendency to prompt to activity which has been hedonically valuable in the way indicated.

[9] See my *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (Edinburgh University Press, 1983), especially chapters 3 and 4.

Therefore it is likely that what we call *our consciousness* is the inner nature of certain processes in the brain. However, I suspect that these physical processes are ones which do not conform entirely to the standard laws of physics.[10]

What I do insist on is that if epiphenomenalism is false, and though I once believed in epiphenomenalism it has come to seem to me very implausible, consciousness – meaning by this not some so far not quite understood physical process identified only by its function – but consciousness, as what we know the true nature of by being instances of it, must have some kind of dynamic of its own which settles the kind of influence it can have on the brain and via that on behaviour, or if it is itself the inner nature of brain process the way it interacts with the inner nature of other brain process, and thus with the remainder of the brain and the organism.

If consciousness develops according to the hedonic principles I have adumbrated, then there must be some way in which this should be taken into account in a more full explanation of human and animal action, which will be based both upon brain research and phenomenological reflection.

How does this basic hedonic principle relate to what we might call the derived hedonic principle that pleasure and pain, conceived as effects of action open to us, are intrinsically attractive or disattractive, which is as much as to say that we tend necessarily to desire pleasure and the avoidance of pain, though of course any particular desire of this sort may be checked by other desires?

It is simply this. These ideas operate like any other components of consciousness in the sense that, to the extent that they are pleasurable, consciousness does what is required to sustain or strengthen them, while if they are unpleasurable consciousness does what is required to remove or weaken them. Now nothing so sustains or enriches an idea of an action which one might do as the doing of that action, and nothing removes an idea of an action so effectively as another action which prevents it. And this is true not only of ideas of actions, but of ideas of states of affairs which one's actions may produce or prevent. Thus pleasant ideas of things to be done or brought about tend to realise themselves, that is to make real that of which they are the ideas, while unpleasant ideas tend to make real that which prevents the occurrence of what they envisage.

And this, in my opinion, is what desires are, namely pleasurable ideas of behaviour on our part, or of its consequences, which pass into action because this is what best sustains belief in their content or, if the ideas are painful, tends best to prevent the actualisation of their content.

[10] Ibid., chapter 4.

However, these pleasant or unpleasant ideas which our embodied consciousness has learnt to sustain or be rid of, by banishing their objects from that real world of which its awareness is compulsory, need not be ideas *of* pleasures or pains. Our goals are a matter of what the ideas are of, not the quality of pleasurableness or painfulness in virtue of which they cause behaviour.

Thus I may be concerned at the despoliation of some beautiful countryside by a new road, and my idea of the badness of such despoliation may be so strong that it passes into activity calculated to hinder its construction. It is because the idea of this despoliation is painful that consciousness prompts behaviour which looks as though it may prevent it. But it is the despoliation which I am trying to prevent, not my own pain or anyone else's.

So our desires consist of self-realising or self-de-realising pleasant or unpleasant ideas of what can be produced or prevented by our behaviour but they need not be ideas *of* pleasure or pain at all. The basic hedonic mechanism of consciousness prompts behaviour which will strengthen our pleasant ideas and weaken our unpleasant ideas, and this will include especially behaviour which will bring about or prevent that of which they are the ideas.

But though, on this view, our goals need not be pleasures or pains, there is a special tendency for pleasure and exemption from pain to become main objects of our concern. This is because, although an idea of a pleasure and a pleasurable idea must be distinguished, it is also true that the more vivid our ideas of pleasure, the more pleasurable they, become, and similarly, *mutatis mutandis*. with ideas of the painful.

My views on this matter are associated with the belief that in a fully realised idea of some situation one is attributing to it qualities which are actually there as qualities of the idea itself, though the more normal case is that there is just the most fleeting adumbration of them. In the case of desires the fuller the realisation of the goodness or badness we are attributing to the envisaged situation the more powerful the influence of their own hedonic quality upon us.[11]

So ideas of pleasure and pain are likely, in virtue of their own pleasurableness or painfulness, to be particularly strong prompts to behaviour.

Another perspective on the matter is this. If I am right, our idea of intrinsic goodness is derived from the impression of pleasure actually experienced, and our idea of badness is derived from the impression of painfulness. Thus when we think of something as

[11] A return to the introspective investigation of mental phenomena (such as 'ideas') is certainly called for. Why is it that I at least can imagine sounds so much more adequately than colours?

intrinsically good we are really thinking of it as having this quality of pleasurableness, and when as intrinsically bad this quality of painfulness. But nothing can really have this quality except pleasurable experience, or pleasurable components of' experience, or, in the negative case, painful experience or painful components of experience. So the thought that something unexperienced, or not pleasurable, can really be intrinsically good is always an illusion, and similarly thoughts of things as intrinsically bad.

We can now see that psychological hedonism, of the kind I have been developing, which concerns not the goals of behaviour, but its mental causation by pleasant and unpleasant ideas, can explain why it is that we can genuinely mind how what we do affects the pleasures and pains of others. This is because, in so far as we imagine them with vividness, they, must prompt behaviour which is expected to produce the one and prevent the other.

From this point of view, the problem is rather why, for the most part, we are so selfish rather than why or how we can ever be altruistic. To this there are two aspects. First, it is easy when comparing my attitude to my own comfort and that of others to forget that it is not only *ideas of my own pleasure and pain* which operate upon me, but *pleasures and pains themselves* (I mean pleasures and pains which do not consist in ideas). Thus if I am reluctant to give up my seat on a bus to someone who looks very frail it is my present actual comfort which acts against its disruption as much as my idea of the discomfort of standing up, and when I eat greedily, it is the pleasure of *eating* which makes me continue to do so, perhaps at the cost of greater goods, rather than *ideas of eating*. Thus the pleasures and pains of others can only influence me through my ideas of them while my own pleasures and pains can operate on me non-ideally.

But the other factor, as we saw above when I quoted Josiah Royce, is that we tend not to believe in the reality of the pleasures and pains of others quite as vividly as we believe in the reality of our own.

Natural selection offers an easy explanation of this fact if explanation is needed.

3. The relation of the hedonistic theory of value to the moral ought

3.1 The ought

The topic of this series of lectures is value rather than such notions as that of the *ought*, moral or otherwise. But unless there is some tie in with the notion of *ought* a theory of intrinsic value is incomplete.

It will be expected that I hold a hedonistic consequentialist ethic, and that is roughly, true.

However, there is something unfortunate about the word 'consequentialism'. It suggests that it is never what one is doing now but only its subsequent consequences which matter. Moreover, there is some difficulty in distinguishing between the consequences of an act and the act itself. C. I. Lewis thought that the act was the mere more specifically uncharacterisable *oomph* of decision and everything else its consequences.[12] But I believe that this *oomph* is simply the relief from the tension of indecision, and that decisive or spontaneous actions are not thus preceded.

The proper solution is simply to consider the character of the act itself as among its most important consequences. And by the character of the act I mean here the character it has strictly *at its own time*, for if it is characterised in terms of its objective relations to past facts – unless, indeed, these are inherent in its present character – the spirit of consequentialism is lost. And of course for hedonistic ethics the relevant character is its present unique pleasurableness or unpleasurableness.

But even with this explanation, it is all too easy to see consequentialism as failing to do justice to the value of action in its own time. But in many cases, where consequences are slight or largely unpredictable, that is what most matters. An enjoyable country walk is its own justification unless it leads to trouble. I do not know what expression other than 'consequentialism' would meet this point better.

That intrinsic value and disvalue lead to an **OUGHT** follows from their inherent positive or negative magnetism. What one believes one ought to do is that towards doing which one is most drawn by the positive magnetism of some good expected to be its result, or negative magnetism of some evil it is expected to prevent. Since one's being so drawn is a mistake if one misconceives the nature and value of the present character and consequences of the act, it would seem to follow that to be right is to be thus drawn by a true judgement of the same nature.

This yields the most basic sense of 'ought'. But what one more specifically *morally ought* to do is what it would be best that one should be encouraged to do by the approval and disapproval of others, and indeed of oneself, not that is, what they actually approve and disapprove but what they ought to do, in the basic sense.[13] This points, I would argue, not so much to rule utilitarianism as to what

[12] C. I. Lewis, *The Ground and Nature of the Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 43

[13] Although I did not use the expression there, Part Two of my *The Rational Foundations of Ethics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988) is, in effect, a defence of way-of-life utilitarianism.

may be called 'way of life utilitarianism'. Desirable action is action in the spirit of that way of life which is hedonically the best available for all those engaged in it, or affected by it, and what one is morally obliged to do is that which it is part of the goodness of that way of life that one should be blamed for not doing.

In supporting way-of-life utilitarianism, rather than direct utilitarianism, I distance myself considerably from the cost/benefit approach to moral issues characteristic of, and to some extent derived from, Jeremy Bentham.[14]

3.2 The hedonistic calculus

In virtue of this a hedonistic calculus need not function largely in deciding what I ought to do. However, it does seem that, at some very basic level, some sort of hedonistic calculus must hold. For it is a hedonistic calculation which provides our reason, when we feel the need to reflect on it, for living according to the norms of the way of life we regard as best.

Bentham's hedonistic calculus, with its seven dimensions of pleasure and pain, intensity, duration, probability, proximity, fecundity. purity and extent, was never presented as something which could be used in any mechanical or precise way.[15] Rather it specified an ideal ground for decision making, not fully available to us in practice, to which our grounds of decision making should approximate so far as possible. Even so it would seem that there must, for utilitarianism, be a truth as to what it would be best to do determined by the dimensions which figure in that calculus even if we cannot have more than a reasonable guess at it.[16]

I have three main answers to this.

(1) The utilitarian may argue that what is objectively true is that every first level fact in favour of an action must consist in pleasure promoted or pain prevented and conversely with first level facts against an action. But the second level at which these pleasures and pains are weighted against each other is a matter of how an individual is attracted to the mix of pleasures and pains produced by an act, whether for himself or others, and this is a mat-

[14] For example, even when a cost/benefit analysis may favour vivisection, way of life utilitarianism may condemn it as incompatible with the spirit of the best form of life possible for us.

[15] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chapter IV.

[16] There is a difficulty, however, in the idea that probability figures in ultimate truth rather than in human thought.

ter of personal psychology. What is ruled out are reasons which have nothing essentially to do with pleasure and pain.

(2) The second answer goes further than this and says that with any mix of pleasures and pains distributed between different persons and times there is a truth as to how an adequate synthesising imagination of them all would be attracted more or less to it than some other mix.[17]

(3) A third point worth making is that it is obviously always desirable to go for pleasures which are fecund and nearly pure in Bentham's sense, that is pleasures which are productive of further pleasures and unproductive of pains, and for the avoidance of fecund and pure pains on the other. This is a policy which largely dispenses with the need for a precise hedonistic calculus. And it must be this above all which gives value to a particular way of life.

4. Objections to the hedonistic theory of value

4.1 Pleasure is not one uniform kind of sensation

Let us now consider some of the objections to equating the pleasurable with the positively valuable and the painful with the negatively valuable.

A first objection is to the alleged impoverishment of the notion of value implied in the claim that there is only one good thing in life, a simple sensation of pleasure, and only one bad thing, a simple sensation of pain or distress.

Well, certainly if pleasure were a uniform sensation differing only in intensity and duration, then it would be sad, indeed, to think it the sole good in human life.[18] For then what gives us pleasure would only be a means to an end which it might be better to obtain in some more immediate way. Listening to the music of Bach or listening to the music of Delius, enjoying a vigorous swim in beautiful surroundings or the companionship of a loved one – all these would be just different means to obtaining the one desirable sensation of pleasure.

But this is a quite wrong conception of pleasure. There are all sorts of pleasures, each enjoyable in its own way for those with the capacity and in the mood for it. Each such enjoyable experience has its own distinct sort of pleasurableness, and it is intrinsically impossible that that kind of pleasurableness should come with any other

[17] For more detail see my (*Rational Foundations*), chapter VII.

[18] Much of G. E. Moore's classic critique of J. S. Mill's hedonism turns on this conception of pleasure. See Moore, *Principia Ethica*, §§ 47–8.

sort of experience. Pleasure is a genuine generic universal but its species are infinitely varied.

We must not move from this to saying that pleasure is for each person simply such experiences as he tends to go for, whatever their character may be. We may if we wish, speak of pleasure as enjoyed or liked experience, but this is not altogether helpful. It suggests that pleasurable experience consists in two components, an experience which in itself is hedonically neutral, and then a mental act of liking directed at it. But when we really like things our mind is not thus divided into two components; there is one component an essentially pleasurable experience with its own individual sort of pleasurableness. Much worse, however, than the view that pleasure is experience at which a mental act of liking, is directed is the view that it is simply, what the organism goes for, in an entirely, behavioural sense of 'goes for', for here the whole qualitative nature of pleasure is lost sight of.

In the case of pain too, where by 'pain' is meant not a particular sort of physical sensation, but any unpleasant experience, there is pain or suffering of many different sorts. Physical pain, to take the most obvious example, is a different matter from the grief of bereavement.

But if pleasures and pains are of radically different kinds, can there be even so much of more and less about them as even our way of life utilitarianism must leave standing? The answer is, perhaps, that although they are qualitatively different there is a sense in which one pleasure can be more pleasurable than another, and similarly with pain, and that there are certain ways of living, for each of us, where one's total state of mind is on the whole pleasanter than it would be if one lived otherwise.

4.2 Wicked pleasures

Another objection to hedonism is the widespread belief that wicked pleasures are not just instrumentally bad but intrinsically so. Enjoying hurting someone or relaxing from your work as a concentration camp guard as those condemned to die perform beautiful music, are both pleasures (it may be insisted) which are evil in themselves.

I certainly feel the force of this objection and find it somewhat disturbing. There are two aspects to my answer.

First, since beauty is one of the great goods which a proper hedonism should recognize I ally myself with Francis Hutcheson in holding that character or personality can be beautiful or ugly. The ugliness of the hidden portrait of Dorian Gray was indeed a transformation into visual terms of his ugliness of character.

A character is beautiful, above all, to the extent that it is open to appropriate influence by all that is best and all that is worst in the world. It is good for us that such characters should appeal the most. The pleasures of concentration camp guards can hardly be abstracted from the personality of their subject so far as our reaction to them goes.

As for the pleasures of cruelty, the proper way to reproach those addicted to them, is to persuade them that the sorrows of their victims far outweigh what positive value they have. That way, you admit that there is something good about the sense of power which perhaps is the core of their appeal but insist that there are other ways of enjoying one's power which are not so calamitous for others. But should not cruelty and sadism be impossible on our account? No, for aggression has to some extent been selected for in the development of the species, and, in its extreme forms, makes the signs of suffering on the part of its victim an exciting component in the not-self part of the cruel individual's consciousness, and, this together with the pleasure of power distorts his conception of the reality of what it is like to be the other.[19]

4.3 The experience machine

A third objection to a hedonistic theory of value is that it apparently suggests that the cognitive validity of an experience is irrelevant to its value. And this has the unacceptable implication that someone who enjoys the thought that another person loves them, when in fact the love is a deception which will never be revealed to its apparent object, is in a state which is in itself just as good, just as valuable, as it would be if the love of the other person was real.

What of values encountered in an enduringly illusory world produced by a so-called experience machine? Well, I am near enough to being some kind of phenomenalist to hold that life-long deception here is short on meaning, though the subject *calls* for a fuller discussion, especially of the experience of physical effort.[20]

However, when the deception is as to the feeling of another conscious being the phenomenalist way out is closed, so far as I am concerned. My inclination, however, is to think that actually our experiences so interpenetrate that really what we experience is the relationship between us and another, and that this relationship

[19] See my (*Rational Foundations*), pp. 235–238.

[20] There is certainly a real world which determines facts about what sensations are available, but it is more the availability of the sensations, than the real world causing them, which constitutes the truth of ordinary physical object statements.

necessarily has for each of us a qualitative character which it could not have if really there were no such relationship.

4.4 The ethical a priori

In his 'The Conception of Intrinsic Value' in *Philosophical Studies* G. E. Moore claims that the intrinsic value of something depends on its intrinsic nature but does not belong to its intrinsic nature.[21] Two things could not be exactly alike (have the same intrinsic nature) and the one possess and the other lack intrinsic value to a certain degree, and yet the value is not one of its intrinsic properties. In fact, there is a sense in which a value predicate does not describe what possesses it (see p. 274). (Here Moore seems within an inch of the view that value judgements are something other than statements of fact.) Is anything like this true of pleasurableness on our account? No, for it would seem (as Moore himself mentions) that its pleasurableness does belong to the intrinsic nature of an experience. However, we would bring pleasure very close to Moore's account of intrinsic value if we decided that the pleasurableness of an experience always depends on its other characteristics, so that two experiences could not differ only in their degree of pleasurableness. Now I am rather inclined to believe that this is true. Is it not plausible to say that if hearing a certain piece of music is pleasurable for me and not for you, then the music is organised differently within your experience from mine? And may not something of the same sort be true even of less complex experiences? And what of painfulness? Anyway, the case for identifying pleasure and pain with intrinsic value and disvalue is much stronger if this dependency holds. We may still identify them if it does not, but would have to admit that in realising their identity we also realise that intrinsic value and disvalue do not quite live up to expectations.

However, I am quite happy to recognise a necessity here since, in any case, I hold that that there is much more necessity *in rerum natura* than are dreamt of in most post-Humean philosophy.

4.5 Environmental issues, panpsychism and the absolute

The thought that all that matters is pleasurable or unpleasurable experience, even when pleasures and pains are regarded as immensely, various in quality, seems to rob anything non-conscious of any real value. Nothing in nature, apart from the experiences of animals, seems to matter.

[21] G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1922), chapter VIII.

My views on this matter can only be briefly stated. I believe that there are several different conceptions of the natural or physical world which can be regarded as having varying degrees of truth.

First, there is the world as revealed to our senses, that which constitutes what Husserlians call the life world.

This is basically a construction which we join in making each on the basis of their own perceptual fields. As much of it as is perceived genuinely exists, but what is not perceived of it does not exist, or if it does its status is only that of a permanent possibility of perception. When we are appreciating something beautiful, it is not our sensations which we are appreciating but the object present as a component in our consciousness, and which we believe can be present in the consciousness of others too. Its beauty is that of an object, and that beauty may be regarded as objectified pleasure, to use Santayana's expression again.

Actually calling it *objectified* is misleading, since it suggests it was once subjective. For it was only once primitive infantile consciousness had divided itself into self and not-self that beauty arose as peculiarly a quality of the latter. It would therefore be better to call it *objective* rather than *objectified* pleasure.

The value of beautiful things in the life world is among the greatest of values. This world is only fully actualised when it is perceived, but among the most important things anyone can do is add to the beauties which are there to be actualised. This is what a great artist does.

Moreover, when confronted with great works of art it is we who are under judgement as much as they are. Are we capable of actualising them in our mind in their full wonderfulness?

A thought about music may help here. Few will believe that unheard music, as when one leaves a Hi-Fi playing something lovely in an empty room, is in itself of value. But the great composers have added objects to the world of music which are important in their own right. That is, they can only be actualised in a consciousness, but when actualised they are so with a value which belongs to them and to nothing else.

Moving on from the life world, must there not be a more absolute reality which is the source of those experiences on the basis of which we construct it? The answer must be affirmative, and the most obvious candidate for this role is the world as described by the more fundamental sciences. But is *the world of science* any more an ultimate reality independent of our awareness of it than *the life world*? Only so, I suggest, if we interpret it as the abstract structure of a reality whose inherent nature it as much obscures as reveals.

So what is its inherent nature? I have already indicated my answer above in describing myself as a panpsychist. This is, in brief, because it seems to me that in the end there is no conceivable reality except experience and its modes and objects, from which I infer that

the inherent or noumenal reality of nature at large consists in an immensely complex system of interacting streams of experience.

This allows me to hold that there are values in nature other than those realised in the consciousness of men or animals. However, as to what these values are I believe we must remain entirely or almost entirely ignorant. For it is not the values in the hidden ocean of non-animal feeling which we are appreciating when we admire beautiful things or scenes in nature, only the values of the life world which their influence produces for us. It is just possible, however, that some experiences of natural beauty, or of the sublime, do genuinely reflect some inarticulate but genuine participation in this larger life of the universe.

I should perhaps admit that I also believe that all the experiences which make up the stuff of the world are united in one cosmic consciousness and that without this they cannot interact. Doubtless that fact grounds further values which ordinary utilitarianism can with difficulty allow.[22]

Idealism and utilitarianism are usually thought of as belonging to very different schools of thought. But my utilitarianism springs from my attempt to think what value really is, and my idealism springs from my attempt to think what nature really is, and in both cases my views spring from what I regard as the insight that their being is their being experienced. And experienced positive intrinsic value is appropriately called 'pleasure' and experienced negative intrinsic value is appropriately called 'pain', or at least 'unpleasure'. So if my idealism seems to be brought in simply to allow for values which utilitarianism does not normally recognise, then I must insist that both stem from the same essential insight.

It may be that my position would have more appeal if I gave the words 'pleasure' and 'pain' a less central place in my argument and simply contended that value consists in experience which feels good, or objects within consciousness which look or otherwise present themselves as good, and that disvalue consists in what feels bad or looks, or otherwise presents itself, as bad. Such might be an equally correct way of putting my position, but it seems appropriate to keep my language in touch with the utilitarian tradition in which, however eccentrically, my outlook on this matter belongs. I might note that somewhat the same combination of utilitarianism and idealism is present in the ethical thought of process philosophers in the tradition of Whitehead and Hartshorne, though my agreement with them is only partial.[23]

[22] See my (*Vindication*) chapters 5 and 6 or (*Foundations*) chapter X.

[23] For an important discussion of the utilitarian tendency of ethics based on process metaphysics see Clare Palmer, *Environmental Ethics and Process Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).