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Welfare, Happiness, and Pleasure

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Time and philosophical fashion have not been kind to hedonism. After flourishing for three centuries or so in its native empiricist habitat, it has latterly all but disappeared from the scene. Does it now merit even passing attention, for other than nostalgic purposes? Like endangered species, discredited ideas do sometimes manage to make a comeback. Is hedonism due for a revival of this sort? Perhaps it is overly optimistic to think that it could ever flourish again in its original form; the evolutionary changes which have rendered the philosophical environment hostile to the classical specimens of the theory are doubtless irreversible. None the less, it is still possible that certain features of the classical view can, and should, be recuperated—like bits of DNA which could contribute to the emergence of new and more robust species. So let us ask ourselves: what is living and what is dead in traditional hedonism?

Orthodoxy has it that hedonism comes in two forms: psychological and ethical. In its psychological version, it is a causal theory of motivation in which all intentional action is ultimately to be explained in terms of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. In its ethical version, it is a theory of value in which pleasure is the sole good and pain the sole evil. Both theories count as hedonistic by virtue of assigning a foundational (explanatory or justificatory) role to pleasure and pain. Historically, these two varieties of hedonism have been closely associated, the psychological theory being thought to lend support to the ethical.

However, a hedonistic theory may also take a third form, distinct from both of the foregoing: it may be a theory about the nature of welfare. According to such a theory, a person's life is going well for him just in case he is experiencing it, or its principal ingredients, as agreeable or satisfying; conversely, it is going badly for him when his experience of it is, on balance, disagreeable or distressing. This rather vague formula is capable of being filled out in a number of ways, yielding quite different theories of welfare. During the heyday of hedonism it was given a particular elaboration by the principal utilitarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: Jeremy Bentham, James and John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick. The theory which they shared, in all of its essentials, will serve nicely as a model for our inquiry.

I. THE CLASSICAL VIEW

The utilitarians' hedonistic theory of welfare has tended to be somewhat overshadowed by their ethical hedonism.¹ Logically speaking, the two views are quite distinct: the one is a formal analysis of the nature of prudential value while the other is a substantive claim about which things have (ultimate) ethical value. However, the utilitarians plainly thought that they were intimately connected.

It is not difficult to find emphatic statements by the utilitarians of hedonism as a theory of ethical value. One of the best known is J. S. Mill's 'theory of life', on which he takes his moral theory to be grounded: 'pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and . . . all desirable things . . . are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain'.² However, it is interesting that Mill himself decomposes this theory of life into two constituent parts. The first component is a claim about the value, not of pleasure, but of happiness: 'The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as a means to that end.'³ The second is an analysis of the nature of happiness: 'By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.'⁴ Mill's line of thought thus appears to be the following: only happiness is good in itself, happiness is pleasure (and the absence of pain), therefore only pleasure is good in itself. If we assume that Mill simply identifies happiness and well-being, then he derives ethical hedonism as a conclusion from two premisses: a welfarist theory of the good plus a hedonistic theory of welfare.

¹ I will pass over the issue of psychological hedonism, since it divides the utilitarian camp. Bentham and J. S. Mill both subscribed to it: for their best-known statements of the doctrine, see *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart, London, 1970 (*The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*), ch. 1; and 'Utilitarianism', in *Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society*, ed. John M. Robson, Toronto, 1969, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, x, ch. 4. Sidgwick, on the other hand, rejected it: see *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition, London, 1962, Book I, ch. 4.

² 'Utilitarianism', *CW*, x, 210; cf. 214: 'the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable . . . is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments'. Likewise Bentham: 'Now, pleasure is in itself a good: nay, even setting aside immunity from pain, the only good: pain is in itself an evil; and, indeed, without exception, the only evil; or else the words good and evil have no meaning. And this is alike true of every sort of pain, and of every sort of pleasure' (*IPML (CW)*, p. 100). Bentham sometimes claimed his ethical hedonism to be true by definition; see *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring, 11 vols., Edinburgh, 1838-43, iii, 214; vi, 257n.

³ 'Utilitarianism', *CW*, x, 234. Note that the passage on p. 210 also begins with a claim about the value of happiness.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

The equation of well-being with happiness is implicit in the utilitarian tradition—too implicit to count as a developed theory about the nature of welfare.⁵ Instead, it is an assumed conceptual identity: for the utilitarians the two notions were indistinguishable. When this identity is kept in mind, counterparts to the two steps in Mill's derivation of ethical hedonism can readily be found in both Bentham and Sidgwick. Consider first their welfarism. Bentham has the following to say about the nature of ethics:

As to the *end* or object of it, if by this be meant the most general end, for this most general end or object it has or ought to have the same end or object which not only every branch of art or science has, but every human thought as well as every human action has—and not only has but ought to have: [namely,] the giving encrease in some shape or other to man's well-being—say in one word the sum of human happiness.⁶

Whereas Bentham never took seriously the idea that ethics could have to do with anything other than happiness or well-being,⁷ for both Mill and Sidgwick this was a substantive view in need of argument. Mill's attempt to provide such an argument, in the fourth chapter of *Utilitarianism*, is too well known, or too notorious, to require further comment. Sidgwick takes on essentially the same project in the chapter of *The Methods of Ethics* entitled 'Ultimate Good'.⁸ Whether the case he there makes in defence of welfarism is successful is not our present concern, but we should note his conception of the issue at stake. Sidgwick begins the chapter by affirming the priority of the good: 'the practical determination of Right Conduct depends on the

⁵ Mill nearly always prefers to speak of happiness or utility, as he does throughout *Utilitarianism*. However, he sometimes switches to talk of well-being; see, for instance, 'On Liberty', in *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. John M. Robson, Toronto, 1977, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, xviii. ch. 3. Sidgwick defines egoism in terms of happiness, as opposed to good or well-being, because of its relative freedom from perfectionist overtones (see *Methods*, Book I, ch. 7); it is clear that he is seeking a purely welfarist notion. Bentham sometimes uses well-being and happiness interchangeably (see, for instance, *Deontology, together with A Table of the Springs of Action and the Article on Utilitarianism*, ed. Amnon Goldworth, Oxford, 1983 (*The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*), pp. 124–5). Where he distinguishes them (*ibid.*, pp. 130 and 135), he treats the former as pointing to an individual's net balance of pleasure over pain, while the latter suggests a run of pleasures of an unusually high degree. See also *Chrestomathia*, ed. M. J. Smith and W. H. Burston, Oxford, 1983 (*The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*), pp. 179–80n.

⁶ *Deontology* (CW), pp. 124–5. Cf. Bentham's definition of eudaimonics: 'the art, which has for the object of its endeavours, to contribute in some way or other to the attainment of well-being, and the science in virtue of which, in so far as it is possessed by him, a man knows in what manner he is to conduct himself in order to exercise that art with effect' (*Chrestomathia* (CW), pp. 179–80). There is a striking resemblance between these passages and Mill's views on the relationship between art and science, and on the ultimate end of the 'art of life'; see *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive*, ed. John M. Robson, 2 vols., Toronto, 1974, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, viii. 949–52.

⁷ Thus his dismissive treatment of rival principles in *IPML* (CW), chs. 1 and 2.

⁸ *Methods*, Book III, ch. 14.

determination of Ultimate Good'.⁹ His next step is to narrow the list of contenders down to goods which include states of consciousness. He then continues: 'If then Ultimate Good can only be conceived as Desirable Consciousness . . . are we to identify this notion with Happiness or Pleasure, and say with the Utilitarians that General Good is general happiness?'¹⁰ As Sidgwick conceives it, the contest at this point is between happiness on the one hand and various (subjective) perfectionist goods, such as knowledge and the enjoyment of freedom, on the other. The arguments he then goes on to advance on the side of happiness constitute his case in favour of welfarism and against perfectionism.

That Bentham and Sidgwick both held hedonistic theories about the nature of welfare/happiness is so obvious as to be scarcely worth documenting. Bentham tells us that happiness consists of 'enjoyment of pleasures, security from pains',¹¹ and elsewhere offers a similar account of well-being as 'enjoyment of the several distinguishable pleasures and exemption from the several distinguishable pains'.¹² For his part, the assumption of a hedonistic account of happiness structures Sidgwick's handling of the substantive issue between welfarism and perfectionism. What distinguishes happiness from the competing perfectionist goods, for Sidgwick, is the fact that it includes no reference to states of the world external to the subject, since it consists entirely in the having of agreeable feelings, i.e. pleasures.¹³

All of this may seem so much belabouring of the obvious. Surely, it will be said, everyone knows that the classical utilitarians were hedonists both in their theory of the good and in their theory of welfare. There is, however, some point to identifying the steps which seem to have led them to their ethical hedonism. The line of thought, shared by Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick alike, seems to have been roughly the following:

- (1) Individual welfare is the only thing desirable as an end.
- (2) Welfare consists in happiness.
- (3) Happiness consists in pleasure (and the absence of pain).
- (4) Therefore, pleasure is the only thing desirable as an end.

The exercise of distinguishing these argumentative steps offers the intriguing possibility that, for all their talk about pleasure and pain,

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹¹ *IPML (CW)*, 74; cf. *Jeremy Bentham's Economic Writings*, ed. W. Stark, 3 vols., London, 1952-54, iii. 308. The empiricist reduction of happiness to pleasure can be traced back at least as far as John Locke; see *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch, Oxford, 1975, Book II, ch. 21, sec. 42.

¹² *Deontology (CW)*, p. 125; cf. *Chrestomathia (CW)*, pp. 179-80n. For a reduction of interest to pleasure and pain, see *IPML (CW)*, p. 12; *Economic Writings*, i. 207.

¹³ See *Methods*, pp. 92, 95, 398ff.

what the utilitarians thought ultimately valuable was happiness or well-being. Pleasure and pain came into the picture only because they were believed to be implicated in the nature of well-being. If this hypothesis is correct, then the classical utilitarians were primarily welfarists and only secondarily hedonists.

In order to round off an account of their theory of welfare, it remains to ask only what the utilitarians meant by pleasure and pain. Different conceptions of pleasure and pain—different accounts of their nature—will generate different versions of a hedonistic theory. At this point the story is somewhat complicated by the fact that the classical theorists offered two alternative models of pleasure and pain, one of which appeals to the internal qualities of these feelings while the other invokes their external relations. On both models pleasures and pains each constitute a class of distinctive feelings or experiences whose common properties can be identified by introspection. The internalist account was inherited by Bentham from his immediate predecessors, Hume and Hartley. For Hume pleasures and pains constituted an important category of impressions, along with sense impressions, while Hartley considered them to be one class of 'internal feelings'.¹⁴ In Bentham this basic idea was developed into an elaborate architectonic which began by dividing mental operations into two categories: intellectual (perception, imagination, judgement, etc.) and sensitive (feeling, desire, will, etc.). The basic ingredients for both sorts of operations are what Bentham called experiences or perceptions; in the former case sense impressions, in the latter sensations of pleasure and pain. In each case the perceptions in question are foundational within their domain: all operations are reducible to them, while they admit of no similar reduction. For this reason Bentham regarded sense impressions on the one hand, and pleasurable and painful sensations on the other, as the only classes of real psychological entities.

For Bentham the status of sensations as fundamental real entities precluded any further analysis of their nature. While there is little question that he thought of particular pleasures and pains as discrete mental states or events, he could offer no account of the difference between them, taken collectively, and sense impressions. In his view pleasure and pain are each *sui generis*, readily discriminable in our experience from other perceptions, and from one another, but susceptible of no (non-ostensive) definition.¹⁵ Bentham's inability to provide a reductive account of the nature of pleasure and pain should leave us in no doubt, however, concerning the range of phenomena which he

¹⁴ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edition, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. Peter Nidditch, Oxford, 1978, Book II, Part I, sec. 1; David Hartley, *Observations on Man*, London, 1749, Part I, p.2.

¹⁵ Cf. Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ch. 20, sec. 1.

wished to include in these categories. It is abundantly clear that he thought of pleasure, for instance, as embracing not merely bodily pleasures but all forms of gratification, enjoyment, satisfaction, fulfilment, and the like.¹⁶ These various forms of experience differ in their sources or causes—that in which the pleasure is taken. What they have in common, in virtue of which they all count as pleasures, is their positive feeling tone: an intrinsic, unanalyzable quality of pleasantness which is present to a greater or lesser degree in all of them.¹⁷ It is this quality whose intensity supplies one of the two core ingredients (along with duration) in Bentham's celebrated technique for quantifying pleasures.¹⁸ The class of pains, heterogeneous in their sources or objects, would likewise be picked out on the basis of their distinctive negative feeling tone. Pleasures differ from pains, on this view, simply by virtue of feeling pleasant or agreeable rather than unpleasant or disagreeable.

Bentham's identification of pleasure and pain in terms of their purely phenomenal properties was echoed by his utilitarian successors. In his *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, James Mill used the term 'sensation' to cover roughly what Bentham called perceptions or experiences. He then introduced pleasure and pain in the following passage:

Some sensations, probably the greater number, are what we call indifferent. They are not considered as either painful, or pleasurable. There are sensations, however, and of frequent recurrence, some of which are painful, some pleasurable. The difference is, that which is felt. A man knows it, by feeling it; and that is the whole account of the phenomenon.¹⁹

When John Stuart Mill came to edit the second edition of this work, he appended to it quite substantial notes in which he carried on a running commentary on his father's views, often registering dissent from them. Where the account of pleasure and pain is concerned, however, he found little to correct:

In the case of many pleasurable or painful sensations, it is open to question whether the pleasure or pain, especially the pleasure, is not something added to the sensation, and capable of being detached from it, rather than merely a particular aspect or quality of the sensation. . . . However this may be, the pleasure or pain attending a sensation is . . . capable of being mentally

¹⁶ For Bentham's catalogue of the various kinds of pleasures (and pains), see *IPML* (CW), ch. 5, and *A Table of the Springs of Action in Deontology* (CW).

¹⁷ Cf. Bentham's remark that pleasure and pain are 'names of homogeneous real entities' (*IPML* (CW), 53n).

¹⁸ *IPML* (CW), ch. 4; cf. Amnon Goldworth, 'Jeremy Bentham: On the Measurement of Subjective States', *Bentham Newsletter*, ii (1979), 2–17.

¹⁹ James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 2nd edition, ed. John Stuart Mill, 2 vols., London, 1869, ii. 184; cf. 190ff., 363ff.

abstracted from the sensation, or, in other words, capable of being attended to by itself.²⁰

The theme surfaces again in Sidgwick, who treats pleasures as a class of feelings 'so called because they have a common property of pleasantness'.²¹

This internalist view, however, is only part of the official story for the utilitarians. A different model of pleasure and pain can also be traced back at least as far as James Mill. The passage quoted above, in which Mill attempts to characterize the class of pleasurable and painful sensations, continues as follows:

I have one sensation, and then another, and then another. This first is of such a kind, that I care not whether it is long or short; the second is of such a kind that I would put an end to it instantly if I could; the third is of such a kind, that I like it prolonged. To distinguish these feelings, I give them names. I call the first Indifferent; the second, Painful; the third, Pleasurable; very often, for shortness, I call the second, Pain, the third, Pleasure.²²

On this view, what all pleasures share is not a homogeneous feeling tone but the fact that they are experiences which we like, or enjoy, or seek, or wish to prolong—in short, the fact that they are objects of some positive attitude on our part. Likewise, experiences are classified as painful by virtue of provoking a negative, aversive response. This account, unlike the uniform sensation model, is capable of recognizing that the great variety of experiences which we find pleasant or agreeable may be heterogeneous, not only in their sources or causes, but also in the way they feel. Pleasures may have nothing in common save the fact that we like them, pains nothing but the (external) property of being disliked.

The younger Mill appears to have presupposed some such model in his well-known emphasis on distinctions of quality among pleasures. Having appealed to the verdict of 'competent judges' to determine degrees of quality, Mill continues:

And there needs be the less hesitation to accept this judgement respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185n.

²¹ *Methods*, p. 94. Sidgwick draws the conclusion that all pleasures must therefore be commensurable in terms of their pleasantness, and all pains in terms of their painfulness (p. 123ff.).

²² Bentham gives occasional hints of such an account, as when he says that 'Pains and pleasures may be called by one general word, interesting perceptions' (*IPML (CW)*, p. 42), and when he distinguishes pleasures and pains from sensations which are 'indifferent' (Bowring, *Works*, vi. 217).

general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure.²³

However, it was Sidgwick who provided the best statement of the alternative view:

Shall we then say that there is a measurable quality of feeling expressed by the word 'pleasure', which is independent of its relation to volition, and strictly undefinable from its simplicity?—like the quality of feeling expressed by 'sweet,' of which also we are conscious in varying degrees of intensity. This seems to be the view of some writers: but, for my own part, when I reflect on the notion of pleasure,—using the term in the comprehensive sense I have adopted, to include the most refined and subtle intellectual and emotional gratifications, no less than the coarser and more definite sensual enjoyments,—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'. . . . 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.²⁴

There are philosophically significant differences between these two views of the nature of pleasure and pain—the sensation model with its emphasis on a uniform (positive or negative) feeling tone and the attitude model with its reliance on a uniform (positive or negative) reaction. However, they also share an important feature: on both views pleasures and pains are experiences which can be identified as such on the basis of some introspectible feature, whether this is an internal quality (the way they feel) or an external relation (being liked or disliked). On both models, therefore, pleasures and pains are purely mental states which do not involve or include any states of the external world.

A mental state analysis of pleasure and pain is the final component in the hedonism of the classical utilitarians. The ethical conclusion they drew—that pleasurable mental states are the only things worth pursuing for their own sake—is nowadays virtually universally rejected.²⁵ Can it be defended? If not, where does the argument to that conclusion go wrong? Can any of its steps be recuperated? Do we have

²³ 'Utilitarianism', *CW*, x, 213.

²⁴ *Methods*, p. 127; cf. p. 131:

Let, then, pleasure be defined as feeling which the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be desirable;—desirable, that is, when considered merely as feeling, and not in respect of its objective conditions or consequences, or of any facts that come directly within the cognisance and judgment of others besides the sentient individual.

For the breadth of Sidgwick's notion of pleasure, see also pp. 93 and 402.

²⁵ Though a version of it is defended in Rem B. Edwards, *Pleasures and Pains: A Theory of Qualitative Hedonism*, Ithaca, 1979.

anything at all to learn from classical hedonism? To these questions we now turn.

II. PROBLEMS WITH THE CLASSICAL VIEW

We will come at the main issues by a rather roundabout route, beginning with a closer look at the strengths of the classical view: the areas of our lives in which it seems to tell more or less the right story. Its heartland is the territory of physical pleasure and pain—especially pain. One of our most secure convictions about welfare is that extended episodes of physical pain or suffering constitute intrinsic evils in our lives. Calling (some kinds of) suffering ‘physical’ in this way does not, of course, commit one to thinking that pain is a merely physical, or neurological, state. Whatever our best understanding of the nature of pain may turn out to be, there is clearly something essentially mental about it. Rather, it points to the fact that some (but not all) pain or suffering has an organic basis or cause, usually (though not always) some threat to tissue integrity. In this sense we can distinguish between pain felt as the result of bodily disease or injury and the suffering occasioned by, say the loss of a loved one or the collapse of an important project.

To fix our frame of reference, let us focus on pain that is both intense and extended—the sort of chronic suffering associated with such debilitating diseases as cancer or such injuries as serious burns. Few among us would deny that the pain itself—the fact that it hurts so much or makes us feel so bad—is enough to blight our lives, whatever else may also be going on in our bodies. If so, then suffering is one condition which makes us worse off directly or immediately, and not through its connections with any other condition. It may be tempting to deny this. After all, it may be said, physical pain is typically the subjective accompaniment of some bodily injury which impairs functioning, and it is this objective impairment which is the real intrinsic evil, not the subjective feeling which signals it. However, sober second thought will reject this rather austere view. It is true that a serious disease such as cancer impairs bodily functioning, and it seems reasonable to treat this impairment as an important part of the devastation which cancer can wreak on us. But it is also true that cancer accompanied by severe and intractable pain is much worse than the organic impairment alone—otherwise, why would we try to alleviate or control the suffering of terminal patients? Furthermore, some varieties of very intense pain are accompanied by no detectable injury whatever. One of these, trigeminal neuralgia or *tic douloureux*, has been described in the following way:

This is the quintessential painful disorder, for it is marked by nothing other than sudden bursts of searing, agonizing pain, which appear and disappear for no apparent reason. There is no persistent alteration of sensation, no injury, no signs of disease of any type—just pain.²⁶

It would require a pretty heavy commitment to a theory to deny that this kind of suffering makes our lives go badly, just in and by itself.

But how are we to understand the nature of something as familiar as physical pain? Is it just a particular kind of sensation to be distinguished phenomenologically from other sensations—pleasure, temperature, touch, taste, kinaesthesia, etc.—by the way it feels? Is it possible to like or enjoy pain, or at least not to be averse to it? Is it possible to seek it, or at least not to shun it? And if so, then in such cases need pain be bad for us? These questions have been sharpened recently by some very interesting data concerning individual responses to pain. Basically, there seem to be two different ways of controlling or managing pain. One is exemplified by analgesia, anaesthesia, and possibly also hypnosis; when these methods are successful, the subject feels no, or at least less, pain.²⁷ The other way is exemplified by such psychosurgical techniques as lobotomy.²⁸ In these cases subjects often report that, while they still feel the pain, they no longer mind it.²⁹ Rather more difficult to classify are the well-known instances, such as the treatment of battlefield wounds, in which individuals endure, with few visible signs of distress, what would ordinarily be agonizing pain. Reflection on these cases, and on the lobotomy patients, has led many analysts to the conclusion that there is an emotional or attitudinal dimension to the perception of pain, in addition to the characteristic pain sensation itself.³⁰ It has even led some to deny that pain is a sensation at all, giving it instead a purely attitudinal analysis.³¹

Phenomenologically, it seems possible to identify many of the intrinsic properties of pains: their intensity, to be sure, but also many features which enable us to sort pains into different kinds, such as aches, stings, twinges, and so on.³² The similarity with our linguistic resources for characterizing, say, sensations of taste or touch lend

²⁶ Frederick W. L. Kerr, *The Pain Book*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981, pp. 44–5.

²⁷ See Kerr, chs. 9, 10, 12, 13; Ronald Melzack and Patrick D. Wall, *The Challenge of Pain*, New York, 1983, chs. 2, 12–17.

²⁸ Kerr, pp. 146–9; Melzack and Wall, p. 296.

²⁹ The cases may be open to different interpretations; see Roger Trigg, *Pain and Emotion*, New York, 1970, ch. 7.

³⁰ Kerr, p. 26; Melzack and Wall, pp. 69–71. For an extended treatment of this issue, see Trigg.

³¹ Norton Nelkin, 'Pains and Pain Sensations', *Journal of Philosophy*, lxxxiii (1986), 129–48.

³² See Melzack and Wall, p. 56ff., on the vocabulary available to us for the description of pain.

strong support to the idea that there is at least a sensory dimension to pain. At the same time, it also seems possible to distinguish between all of these properties, including intensity, and the extent to which we mind the pain or are bothered by it.³³ In addition to the pathological cases mentioned above, there are quite commonplace instances of our not being averse to, or even relishing, pain. I can deliberately probe a loose tooth with my tongue and find the sharp pang which results quite delicious. In this case I have no difficulty identifying the feeling as painful; indeed, that seems to be part of its appeal. In other cases pain seems to be welcomed because of its contextual meaning. I can remember vividly the shrieking of my leg muscles after I first completed a marathon in my younger days; since the pain was the continuing reminder of my accomplishment, I would have felt cheated without it. The same has been said of the pain of childbirth (though I am in no position to verify this), and has also been advanced as part of the explanation of the stoicism of soldiers during the treatment of wounds. For someone on the front lines, what the pain meant was not only that he was still alive but also that he would shortly be going home.

The phenomena remind us that pain is typically, though not necessarily, accompanied by feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, indignity, depression, or despair. These emotional responses, however, are not only directed to the physical sensation alone (assuming that this can be isolated from the whole experience), but also to its context, and its meaning in that context. Physical pain generally becomes worse, or harder to bear, when it is experienced as inevitable or intractable, or when it is associated with some permanent impairment or irreversible debilitation. Contrariwise, it is easier to cope with when we feel more in control of it (or at least that it is under someone's control), or when what it promises is healing or recovery of function. The impact on a person's life of an episode of physical suffering cannot be abstracted from his particular history and circumstances, nor from his outlook and expectations.

The seeming (logical and psychological) separability of pain sensations themselves from our emotional or attitudinal responses to them forces a choice on us when we are trying to characterize the nature of pain. One option is to stick with the sensation model: however much it may be affected by its emotional overlay, the pain, properly speaking,

³³ The distinction is nicely illustrated in a scene in David Lean's film *Lawrence of Arabia* in which T. E. Lawrence shows off his ability to extinguish a match with his fingers. When one of his colleagues attempts the same feat, he exclaims that it hurts and asks Lawrence what the trick is. 'The trick', replies Lawrence, 'is not minding that it hurts.'

is just the characteristic feeling itself.³⁴ A second possibility is to switch over to the attitude model and identify pain with our aversive response, so that it consists in any feeling, or any mental state, which we dislike or find intrinsically disagreeable.³⁵ If we were simply looking for the best account of the nature of pain, and if these were the only two available options, then there would be much to be said in favour of the former. The attitude model can make no sense at all of the testimony of lobotomized subjects who say that they continue to feel pain but are no longer averse to it. More seriously, it also runs afoul of the perfectly obvious fact that pain is not the only physical feeling to which we are (normally) averse. Think for a moment of the many physical symptoms which, when persistent, can disrupt our lives: nausea, hiccups, sneezing, dizziness, disorientation, loss of balance, itching, 'pins and needles', 'restless legs', tics, twitching, fatigue, difficulty in breathing, and so on. While none of these is quite the same as physical pain, we experience each as intrinsically disagreeable. The attitude model simply obliterates these categorial boundaries by treating all these states indifferently as pain. While there is something intuitively right about this approach (to which we will return), it is hopeless as a phenomenologically accurate picture of the nature of pain.

Reflection on these matters has led Eric Cassell to advance an interesting, and influential, distinction between pain and suffering.³⁶ For Cassell, physical pain is merely one possible symptom of disease or injury, whose impact is conditioned by its personal meaning for the subject. Suffering, on the other hand, is a response of the whole person, which takes into account both the subjective experience itself (in the narrow sense) and its meaning or significance. It follows that episodes of pain which are intrinsically indistinguishable (being of the same kind, having the same intensity, and lasting for the same duration) may cause quite different degrees of suffering to different subjects, or to the same subject at different times. It also follows that conditions other than pain may cause suffering. Cassell relates the case of a 35-year-old sculptor with breast cancer whose symptoms after radiation and

³⁴ In Ryle's well-known formulation, 'a pain is a sensation of a special sort, which we ordinarily dislike having' (Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, New York, 1949, p. 109). Cf. R. M. Hare, 'Pain and Evil', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume xxxviii (1964), 91-106, and *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point*, Oxford, 1981, p. 93; Richard B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 131-2.

³⁵ See Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis of Ethics*, Ithaca, 1958, pp. 268-75; also Edwards and Nelkin.

³⁶ Eric J. Cassell, 'The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine', *New England Journal of Medicine*, cccvi (1982), 639-45, and 'Recognizing Suffering', *Hastings Center Report*, xxi (1991), 24-31; for a similar distinction see Hare, *Moral Thinking*, p. 93.

chemotherapy included severe pain, but much else besides. As he observes:

we know why that woman suffered. She was housebound and bedbound, her face was changed by steroids, she was masculinized by her treatment, one breast was scarred, and she had almost no hair. The degree of importance attached to these losses—that aspect of their personal meaning—is determined to a great degree by cultural priorities.

With this in mind, we can also realize how much someone devoid of physical pain, even devoid of ‘symptoms,’ may suffer. People suffer from what they have lost of themselves in relation to the world of objects, events, and relationships.³⁷

In Cassell’s conceptual framework, suffering results from ‘injuries to the integrity of the person’:

If the injury is sufficient, the person suffers. The only way to learn what damage is sufficient to cause suffering, or whether suffering is present, is to ask the sufferer. We all recognize certain injuries that almost invariably cause suffering: the death or distress of loved ones, powerlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, torture, the loss of a life’s work, betrayal, physical agony, isolation, homelessness, memory failure, and fear. Each is both universal and individual. Each touches features common to all of us, yet each contains features that must be defined in terms of a specific person at a specific time.³⁸

For our purposes, Cassell’s distinction between pain and suffering contains an important lesson. As the foregoing passages make plain, the range of the latter notion is much wider than that of the former. While we may (or sometimes may not) suffer as the result of severe or chronic pain, suffering can be brought about by any condition which we apprehend as distressing. The possible sources of suffering thus extend well beyond the organic to comprehend disappointments and setbacks whose roots are personal or social. Cassell extends the range of suffering by confining that of pain, which is relegated to the level of physical symptom. In effect, therefore, he accepts the view that pain is merely a sensation while rejecting the ethical role which the classical hedonists assigned to it. That role is to be played instead by suffering.

No mere sensation is capable of playing the role assigned to pain in the classical hedonists’ account of happiness, since sensations which are identical in their internal qualities may evoke very different emotional or attitudinal responses. However, whereas it is (logically and psychologically) possible to be indifferent to painful sensations, or even to enjoy them, this is not possible for suffering.³⁹ By its very

³⁷ Cassell, ‘The Nature of Suffering’, 642.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 643–4.

³⁹ Hare, *Moral Thinking*, p. 93: ‘it would be self-contradictory to report suffering but claim that one did not mind it, and had no motive for ending or avoiding it, even *ceteris paribus*.’

nature, suffering is an experience which we dislike or find disagreeable; but it is just this feature of aversiveness which seems to fit suffering for the role traditionally assigned to pain. It is plausible to say of suffering, as it is not of pain, that its presence necessarily compromises our happiness, and thereby also our well-being. Suffering seems just the sort of condition which, in itself and apart from any further accompaniment, makes our lives go worse.

If we retain the view that pain is just a certain kind of sensation, identifiable as such by the way it feels, then we will have to give up thinking that it is by its very nature an intrinsic evil. We will also have to give up thinking that the magnitude of the evil, when it is such, is a strict function of the internal qualities of the sensation. Instead, we must look to our attitude or reaction to the pain—the extent to which we mind or dislike it, or experience it as unpleasant, disagreeable, discomfiting, or distressing—in plotting its negative impact on our lives. This affective response, in turn, will be conditioned by many factors other than the sensory qualities of the pain itself, factors which are likely to include our expectations, hopes, fears, values, self-image, cultural upbringing, and so on. In short: how physical pain feels to us, how much it hurts, is one thing; how much it matters to us is another.

We began this excursion through the heartland of classical hedonism by looking at what appeared to be its core case: physical pain. We have now adjusted that initial focus by fastening on the different, and broader, phenomenon of suffering. We are led through essentially the same dialectic if we start instead with physical pleasure. The seeking of pleasure seems a less urgent matter for most of us than the avoidance of pain, which is why the negative side of hedonism has always been the more convincing. However, only ascetics would deny that bodily pleasures make some positive contribution to the quality of our lives, whatever their relative priority in comparison to other goods.

There is a core of physical pleasures which are the counterparts in every respect of physical pains: they have a purely organic basis, they are often localized in one part of the body, they can have a quite specific duration, they vary in intensity, and we employ a similar vocabulary for describing the way they feel. The paradigm instances are the pleasures caused by stimuli such as scratching an itch, being massaged, taking a hot bath, quenching a thirst, using a recreational drug, urinating, defecating, and sexual arousal and orgasm. What these sensations have in common, by virtue of which we distinguish them from physical pain, is just the fact that they feel good. When asked to characterize the peculiar feeling tone of sensory pleasure (or pain) we find, like Bentham, that we have little to say. You either recognize what the intense rush of sexual release has in common with

the warm glow induced by a backrub, and what differentiates them both from backache or neuralgia, or you do not.

The feeling tone of pleasure is one which we typically like. But just as we need not mind pain, we need not welcome or enjoy physical pleasure. Too much of it can saturate or jade us; while this may result in a more muted sensation from the same stimulus, it can also lead us to care less about new episodes of undiminished intensity. We can also find the experience of embodiment occasioned by physical pleasure uncomfortable or unsettling; we can even regard the accompanying organic functions as vulgar or unclean. The ascetic is the opposite of the masochist: instead of enjoying pain, he shuns and rejects pleasure. Quite apart from the pathological case, the extent to which we prize pleasure itself, considered as an isolated sensation, will be partly a function of its emotional context: an orgasm induced by masturbation may actually be more intense and focused than one with a long-term romantic partner, but that is not to say that it is preferable. (For most of us there is more to sexual enjoyment than its purely physical sensations.) Besides its strictly phenomenal properties, a sensory pleasure can have a meaning or significance which profoundly affects our attitude toward it, and its attractiveness for us. There is no linear dose-response relationship for pleasures, just as there is none for pains.

It is our ability to distinguish physical pleasures from our emotional responses to them which forces a choice between the two models of the nature of pleasure: shall we identify it with the sensation itself or with our attitude of liking or enjoyment? There is more to be said for the latter option in the case of pleasure than in that of pain, which is why most philosophers have abandoned the view that pleasure is a particular kind of sensation, identified by its peculiar feeling tone, in favour of an account according to which it is any experience liked or enjoyed for its own sake.⁴⁰ What chiefly explains this tendency is the fact that our vernacular notion of pleasure covers a broader range of experiences than our notion of pain. While it is commonplace to speak of the pleasure of listening to music or reading, where no particular physical sensation is in question, we strain to extend the notion of pain to all disagreeable experiences.

All things considered, however, the attitude model is not much more satisfactory for pleasure than for pain. For one thing, it conceals the important differences between the special case of physical pleasures and all other sources of enjoyment or satisfaction. Whereas the former

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, pp. 107–9, and *Dilemmas*, Cambridge, 1954, ch. 4; J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire: The Case for Hedonism Reviewed*, Oxford, 1969, chs. 3 and 10; Edwards; Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, New York, 1989, pp. 103–4.

are liked just for their phenomenal qualities, the latter depend on our attitudes toward states of the world. The difference is between responding positively to the intrinsic pleasureableness of an experience and finding the experience pleasant because you attach a prior value to its object (walking with your lover, watching horror movies, or whatever). In the one case you like it because it feels good; in the other it feels good because you like it. By labelling all enjoyable experiences indiscriminately as pleasures the attitude model erases this boundary between the intrinsically and extrinsically pleasant. In so doing, it loses sight of the features peculiar to strictly physical pleasures; indeed, it is in danger of forgetting that there are such things. (This amnesia may not be accidental; most analytic philosophers prefer not to dwell on (or in?) the body.) On top of this, the attitude model can make no sense of being indifferent, or even averse, to a physical pleasure. But this phenomenon seems not only a logical and psychological possibility, but a common occurrence.

If we are seeking the model of pleasure which best fits our ordinary experience, then we will probably do well to fly in the face of current philosophical fashion by adopting the sensation model and restricting it to the core cases of physical pleasures. This opens up the possibility of drawing a distinction between pleasure and enjoyment, which will parallel Cassell's distinction between pain and suffering. Like suffering, enjoyment will consist in a response to a situation as a whole, to which a subject brings his entire hierarchy of values and concerns. Pleasure, in the strict sense, then becomes one thing among others which we are capable of enjoying (though we need not), the difference being that in this case the object of our enjoyment is just a particular kind of feeling. The sources of enjoyment available to us will extend well beyond such feelings, so as to include the objective conditions of our lives.

If we distinguish in this way between pleasure and enjoyment, then it quickly becomes clear that what matters in our lives is the latter rather than the former. Just as suffering seems the sort of thing which makes our lives go worse, enjoyment seems the sort of thing which makes them go better, just in itself and apart from any extrinsic connections. While the sensation model tells the right story about the nature of both pleasure and pain, what it shows us is that these phenomena merit no privileged place in an ethical theory. On the other hand, while the attitude model tells the wrong story about pleasure and pain, the phenomena to which it properly applies—enjoyment and suffering—seem much more appropriate candidates for the role of intrinsic goods and evils.

What are the implications for the classical view of our conclusions so far? They enable us to present the utilitarians with a dilemma. If by

pleasure and pain they mean particular kinds of sensations, distinguished just by their peculiar feeling tones, then their ethical hedonism has little plausibility. On the other hand, if they interpret pleasure and pain attitudinally then they have a much more promising theory of the good which, however, it is misleading to characterize as hedonistic. The dilemma is clearly more damaging to Bentham, who is stuck on the first horn, than to Sidgwick. Both construed pleasure and pain very broadly, so as to be roughly coextensive with what we have now called enjoyment and suffering. While Bentham mistakenly believed that the latter could be understood as sensations, Sidgwick's only lapse of judgement was to persist with the traditional labels 'pleasure' and 'pain' for the states of mind which are picked out by our attitudes of liking and disliking. Clearly our quarrel with Sidgwick is trivial, almost terminological. Technically, I suppose that a theory of value which dispenses with the old labels no longer qualifies as hedonistic. But if this is the only problem with classical hedonism, then it scarcely deserves its current oblivion.

Sadly, it is not the only problem. Recall what the two models of pleasure and pain share in common: they both treat these phenomena as mental states, discriminable purely by introspection. The classical view therefore yields a mental state theory about the nature of welfare. The case against any such theory has been nicely summarized by James Griffin. Against Sidgwick's version of hedonism Griffin raises the following objection:

The trouble with this eclectic account is that we do seem to desire things other than states of mind, even independently of the states of mind they produce. . . . I certainly want control over my own fate. Even if you convince me that, as my personal despot, you would produce more desirable consciousness for me than I do myself, I shall want to go on being my own master, at least so long as your record would not be much better than mine. I prefer, in important areas of my life, bitter truth to comfortable delusion. Even if I were surrounded by consummate actors able to give me sweet simulacra of love and affection, I should prefer the relatively bitter diet of their authentic reactions. And I should prefer it not because it would be morally better, or aesthetically better, or more noble, but because it would make for a better life for me to live.⁴¹

The same point is made vividly by Robert Nozick's hypothesis of an experience machine which is capable of synthesizing any states of mind we wish, including the illusion that they are not merely synthetic, while we float motionless in a tank.⁴² Were we given the option of plugging into the machine for the rest of our lives (and, of course,

⁴¹ James Griffin, *Well-being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance*, Oxford, 1986, p. 9.

⁴² Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York, 1974, pp. 42-5; *The Examined Life*, pp. 104-8.

forgetting that we had done so), would we take it? Why not, if all that matters to the quality of our lives is that our states of consciousness be as agreeable as possible?

As striking as Nozick's thought experiment is, it is not easy to decide just what lesson we should draw from it. For one thing, as soon as we start to think realistically about the hypothetical options then the decision not to plug in quickly comes to seem overdetermined. Once we are floating in the tank we will have relinquished all control over how things subsequently go for us; we will be in no position to change our minds or demand a refund if the goods are not as promised. We immediately begin to imagine the many ways in which things could go horribly wrong. How do we know that the technology is foolproof? What happens if there is a power failure? Suppose the operators of the machine are really sadistic thrill-seekers, or the premises are overrun by fundamentalist zealots? In order to isolate the philosophical point which the experience machine is meant to illustrate, we have to suppose that all of these risks have somehow been neutralized. But this is very difficult to do, since we know that in real life we cannot control all possible malfunctions. For the experience machine to yield any philosophically interesting results we must imagine ourselves in a world very different from our own—so different that any choices we make in that world might tell us very little about how we think our lives should go in the real world.

Perhaps we will do better to hypothesize less grand illusions, which can be visited from time to time without any commitment to taking up permanent residence. Virtual reality, now in its infancy, might some day offer us the appropriate sort of temporary escapism. For now, we are dependent on fictional examples: the machine-induced vacation fantasies in Paul Verhoeven's film *Total Recall* (which were also subject to malfunction) or the holodeck in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. We can more readily imagine having these 'experience machines' available to us, since they are merely technological extrapolations of options currently on offer (movies, television, computer games). Because they seem much less risky than Nozick's machine, we can also imagine indulging in them now and again. Would doing so always be worse for us than whatever the real world would have delivered during the same evening? Is reality always better for us, as such, than illusion? It seems excessively puritanical to say so. But then how do our lives go worse (intrinsically, rather than circumstantially) if we sometimes choose to plug into experience machines?

As Griffin points out, we can face similar choices between reality and illusion in our ordinary lives. And we do not always prefer reality; sometimes we opt for comfortable delusion over bitter truth. If the delusion on offer is a great deal more comforting than the truth we may

not only seize on it eagerly but also cling to it tenaciously. (How else to explain the phenomenon of religion?) Even Griffin has a rate of substitution between inner experience and outer reality: he prefers to control his own desirable consciousness 'at least so long as your record would not be much better than mine'. But this introduces mind-boggling complications. How much better must your record be before he will agree to a takeover? How are we to settle on the optimal rate of substitution between reality and illusion? On what value scale are they comparable? Is there an ideal blend of the two for a well-balanced life?

Suppose that Griffin and Nozick are right in holding that a life lived in touch with reality is, to that extent, a better life. Since there are many ways in which a life may have value, the question remains open whether it is a *prudentially* better life (one with a higher level of well-being). Griffin claims that he prefers reality 'not because it would be morally better, or aesthetically better, or more noble, but because it would make for a better life for me to live'. But a life of greater moral or aesthetic or perfectionist value is also, in that respect, a better life for him to live, so we have not yet succeeded in isolating the prudential question. Nor can we discount so easily the influence of these other ideals. Could our judgement not sometimes be that a life filled with illusion or deception, while it may be going very nicely for its subject, is none the less unworthy of a human being? If so, then the lesson of the experience machine may be, not that mental state theories are deficient as accounts of the nature of welfare, but that welfare tracks only one dimension of the value of a life.

Upon reflection, however, this is difficult to accept. Griffin's point (and probably Nozick's too) is not that we always prefer reality to illusion, or should always prefer it, but that we sometimes do. It is this preference which is difficult to accommodate within a mental state theory of welfare. Suppose that something which you have accepted as an important constituent of your well-being—your achievements, say, or the feelings of others about you—turns out to have been an elaborate deception. You are likely to react with feelings of hurt and anger. How else to explain this reaction, except to say that, in this area at least, what mattered to you was not merely how things seemed but how they actually were? Your preference for bitter truth over comfortable delusion seems to bear directly on how well your life is going *for you*. And that seems to place it squarely within the domain of prudential value. Since a subjective theory must be faithful to the full range of our concerns, and since these concerns typically extend beyond appearance to reality, such a theory cannot make welfare consist merely in having agreeable experiences, even of the eclectic variety that the utilitarians, in their better moments, were prepared to recognize.

As components of a theory of welfare, and an ethical theory, the two models of pleasure and pain offered by the classical hedonists fail for the same reason. Each of them overrides the authority of welfare subjects to determine for themselves which goods they will choose to pursue in their lives: the sensation model by stipulating that subjects must always prefer more pleasurable feeling tone to less, the attitude model by dictating that subjects must be indifferent between veridical and illusory experiences, as long as they are equally enjoyable. In the end, therefore, it does not matter which model the classical hedonists utilize in their analysis of happiness, and thus of welfare. In either case the result will fail to preserve the element of individual autonomy which is the most attractive feature of a subjective theory.

Griffin's objection to the classical view is damaging because it strikes against any hedonistic theory which treats pleasure and pain simply as mental states. Any such theory will entail that the impact on our well-being of some particular experience is entirely determined by features of the experience discriminable by introspection—how it feels, how agreeable we find it, how much we wish it to continue, or whatever. We may therefore track how well our lives are going just by attending to how they seem from the inside, bracketing off all questions of their anchoring in the external world. The lesson of the experience machine is that any theory with this implication is too interior and solipsistic to provide a descriptively adequate account of the nature of welfare. Since welfare does not consist merely of states of mind, it does not consist merely of pleasurable states of mind, regardless of how these are characterized.

III. THE TRUTH IN HEDONISM

Is this then the end of hedonism as a theory of welfare, and a theory of the good? Recall that the argument shared by the utilitarians runs roughly as follows:

- (1) Individual welfare is the only thing desirable as an end.
- (2) Welfare consists in happiness.
- (3) Happiness consists in pleasure (and the absence of pain).
- (4) Therefore, pleasure is the only thing desirable as an end.

Thus far we have focused attention on premiss (3), the analysis of happiness in terms of pleasure (and the absence of pain). What we have concluded is that this analysis results in a defective theory of welfare, and therefore also a defective theory of ethical value, at least as long as pleasure and pain (or enjoyment and suffering) are construed as mental states. But this raises an obvious question: can these phenomena be

interpreted in some other way, so that the resulting theory would be immune to experience machine objections? Might the classical view, so reconstructed, provide a more attractive theory of the good? And if so, would that theory still count as hedonistic?

We need a motive for pursuing these questions. Why should we make any effort at all to preserve, or revive, classical hedonism? What makes it worth saving? Having dwelt on the defects of the classical view, we will now do well to accentuate the positive for a while, by reviewing its considerable strengths. No theory could have survived as long as this one did, or attracted such distinguished advocates, if there were nothing at all to be said in its favour. Surely the principal source of its appeal has always been its welfarism—the idea that the ultimate ethical justification for any project or policy must lie in the fact that it will somehow make those it affects better off, or keep them being worse off. As a theory of the good, welfarism takes no stand on the question of what welfare is, or what it is for our lives to go well or badly. Whatever the best story may be about the nature of well-being, welfarists claim that it is the only thing which has ethical value in its own right, independently of its circumstances or consequences. Everything else—all other personal goods, all valuable states of the world—are worth pursuing or preserving only for their tendency to make our lives go better.

Welfarism is distinct from, and more primitive than, utilitarianism.⁴³ Whereas welfarists tell us only what the good is, utilitarians are additionally committed to consequentialism, aggregation, and maximization.⁴⁴ Embracing welfarism in no way commits one to any of these further steps, let alone all of them. It does commit one to the priority of the good over the right, but it leaves many routes open for deriving the right from the good.⁴⁵

Nearly everyone thinks the fact that a proposed course of action will produce benefits for people (or other sentient beings) counts in its favour, and the fact that it will cause harm counts against it. The cutting edge of welfarism is not the claim that welfare ultimately matters for ethics but the companion claim that nothing else does. Like Christianity, welfarism is an exclusive creed committed to rejecting the credentials of all rival faiths. However, even the comparatively ugly face of the theory is not so unattractive when viewed in the proper light. After all, welfarism does not deny that other goods matter, only

⁴³ See Amartya Sen, 'Utilitarianism and Welfarism', *Journal of Philosophy*, lxxvi (1979), 63–89.

⁴⁴ For an explanation of what these commitments amount to, see my account in *The Moral Foundation of Rights*, Oxford, 1987, sec. 6.1.

⁴⁵ For an example of a deontological welfarism, see John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Oxford, 1980.

that they matter in their own right and independently of their tendency to make our lives go better. And this does not seem unreasonable. For consider any personal characteristic on which you place great value—honesty perhaps, or integrity, or autonomy, or the exercise of talents. Would you esteem this trait so highly were you convinced that its cultivation would enrich no one's life—neither that of its possessor nor anyone else's either? Would it still be worth pursuing or protecting if doing so would make no one better off, or save no one from being made worse off? Do we not value these attributes precisely because we regard them as essential ingredients in a rich and fulfilling life, or as indispensable means of securing such lives for others? If so, then their value is dependent on their expected welfare payoff; they are worth pursuing, but not strictly for their own sake.

This is not the place to undertake a full defence of welfarism, but merely to suggest that there is much to be said for it as a theory of ultimate ethical value.⁴⁶ Its principal asset is the subjectivity of welfare—the dependence of an individual's well-being on his own schedule of interests and concerns. Welfare measures not how well a life is going from just any standpoint, but how well it is going *for the individual whose life it is*. Welfarism therefore ensures that ethical justification takes into account the autonomy and individuality of persons—their say in what is to count as a good or evil, gain or loss, for them. It is the subjectivity of welfare which also lends plausibility to its identification with happiness. For happiness is undeniably subjective, since it is the condition of being satisfied or fulfilled by the circumstances of one's life. My life is going well *for me* when I can endorse or affirm it in terms of my own priorities, which is to say, when it is making me happy.

The first two premisses of its central argument thus get the classical view off to a promising start. They are sufficient by themselves to provide a reason for trying to rehabilitate or reconstruct classical hedonism, or at least to extract from it the lessons it has to offer us. Or are they? The virtues claimed so far on behalf of the classical view have to do with its welfarism and with the central role it assigns to happiness—in short with everything in it except its distinctive hedonism. For reasons canvassed in the previous section, it is precisely with the introduction of pleasure and pain in the third premiss that the classical view begins to go astray. Happiness cannot be reduced to episodes of pleasure and pain, nor even to enjoyment and suffering if these latter are given a mental state interpretation. What hope is there

⁴⁶ I have undertaken a somewhat fuller defence in 'Two Theories of the Good', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, ix (1992), 1–14.

then of rehabilitating the hedonism of the classical view, and what reason even to try?

I believe that there are important lessons to be learned from hedonism, insights embodied in the classical form of the theory which must be preserved in any account of the nature of welfare. For one thing, as we noted earlier, even unrevised hedonism seems to tell the right story for the important cases of physical pleasure and pain. Here it is no defect to treat the sources of our well- and ill-being as mental states, which we (typically) like or dislike just because of the way they feel. Any successful theory must somehow be able to incorporate the hedonist's treatment of these phenomena, which are absolutely central to our welfare. More importantly, hedonism underlines a truth which applies to all goods and ills, whether they consist merely in our feelings or include states of the world. This truth is that nothing can make our lives go better or worse unless it has an impact, direct or indirect, on our experience. A successful theory of welfare will also have to include an experience requirement: it will have to connect our well-being in some way or other with our perception of the conditions of our lives.

The implications of this lesson are best appreciated by looking briefly at a form of theory which has not fully absorbed it. The currently dominant subjective view holds that well-being consists in the satisfaction of (informed) desires or preferences.⁴⁷ A desire for something is satisfied just in case that thing comes to exist or happens. If the desire is for some state of the world then its satisfaction consists in the occurrence of that state of the world—nothing more. It follows that a desire of yours can be satisfied (or frustrated) without your ever being aware of it; indeed, if your desires range over distant times or places, as most people's do, then this outcome will be commonplace. Are you automatically made better off every time, unbeknownst to you, the world happens to fulfil another of your wishes? Can your well-being be enhanced, for instance, by events which come to pass only long after you have quit the scene? If so, when are these benefits conferred? Posthumously, when your desire finally comes to be satisfied, or retroactively while you are still alive? If the former, then how can there be benefits with no beneficiary in existence to claim them? And if the latter, then does not this constitute a kind of backwards causation?

These questions are embarrassing, and ultimately fatal, for desire or preference theories precisely because they reject an experience requirement. They therefore allow states of affairs to count as benefits or harms for persons though neither the states themselves nor any of their consequences ever affect the experience of those persons in any way, whether positive or negative. It was the core insight of classical

⁴⁷ For the most developed version of the desire theory, see Griffin.

hedonism to repudiate this disengagement of our well-being from our lived experience. It was doubtless a mistake for the utilitarians to try to express this insight in the language of pleasure and pain, since these sensations are too narrow and specialized to carry that burden. But to discard hedonism on that score alone would be both shallow and dangerous—shallow because it would attach an exaggerated importance to matters of mere terminology and dangerous because it would risk obscuring the crucial role of affect or feeling in any adequate account of welfare, as the ascendance of desire or preference theories has done.

Suppose that we install enjoyment (or satisfaction or fulfilment) in the place which classical hedonism assigned to pleasure, and suffering (or dissatisfaction or distress) in the place it assigned to pain. Suppose further that a plausible account of happiness could be cobbled together out of these notions, and that welfare was taken to consist in happiness so defined. While the resulting theory of welfare would not, strictly speaking, be hedonistic, it could reasonably claim to have carried forward the spirit of classical hedonism. However, such a theory would still face a serious obstacle: if it treated enjoyment and suffering simply as mental states then it would remain open to the charge of solipsism. And so we come round again to the crucial question: is any alternative interpretation of these phenomena available?

I do not claim to have a definitive, or even well articulated, answer to this question. However, I think that here too we have something to learn from the classical utilitarians. I am intrigued by the fact that their official stories about pleasure/enjoyment—both of the models we have examined—seem inadequate to their own implicit understanding of these states. Alongside the dominant mental state theme it is possible to discern a quite different motif in their works. J. S. Mill, for instance, would have rejected the idea of a life spent passively plugged into an experience machine just as scornfully as Nozick or Griffin. When Mill spoke of the pleasure of, say, listening to music or writing poetry, he was not referring to an experience which was detachable from its accompanying activity and which could therefore, at least in principle, be induced by artificial means in the complete absence of that activity. Rather, he seemed to have in mind a complex whole consisting of the activity plus our enjoyment of it. For Mill, a pleasure was always the enjoyment of something in the world, and it was such enjoyments that he regarded as constitutive of happiness. (It never seems to have occurred to him that the experience might be synthesized without its object; thus does the advance of technology influence the philosophical agenda.) At this practical level, therefore, Mill's views about happiness (and welfare) are not vulnerable to the charge of solipsism. The problem is that neither he nor any of the other classical

utilitarians ever seem to have developed a theory about the nature of pleasure/enjoyment which was adequate to their own understanding of it, and their view of its place in our lives.

What might such a theory look like? Here is one possibility. Since pleasure and pain (strictly speaking) are best construed as sensations, they are best construed as mental states. However, it is not clear that the same is true of enjoyment and suffering. Both notions require intentional objects for their completion: one enjoys, or suffers from, this condition or that. These intentional objects certainly include states of the world. In their official stories (though not in their actual practice) the classical theorists interpreted enjoyment and suffering strictly intentionally—in order for me to be enjoying a game of tennis it is enough that I be having an agreeable experience which I take to be that of playing tennis, whatever I am actually doing, and in order for me to be suffering from the loss of my job is sufficient that it seems to me that I have lost my job, whether or not I have in fact done so. Now suppose we say instead that in order for me to be enjoying a game of tennis I must actually be playing tennis (and not floating in a tank), and in order for me to be suffering from the loss of my job I must actually have lost my job. Construed extensionally in this way, enjoyment and suffering are no longer merely mental states; instead, they are responses on the part of the subject to external conditions. (The same play is available in the notion of experience, which need not be read purely intentionally. I have not had any experience of Rome until I have been to Rome; the mere illusion of having gone there will not suffice.) If a suitably extensional interpretation of enjoyment and suffering could be developed, and if it were to be incorporated into the classical view, then perhaps the resulting theory would be immune to experience machine objections.

It is too early to tell whether or not this is a promising direction for a theory of the good. Unlike the historically dominant views—classical hedonism and desire/preference theories—this option has not been much explored. It might, for all we know, face insuperable problems of its own. Whatever its ultimate fate, it is close enough in spirit to the classical forms of hedonism to be acknowledged as their lineal descendant. At this stage in the evolution of ethical argument, therefore, the hedonistic option, or something recognizably similar to it, cannot be entirely discounted. What can be discounted is any version of the theory which treats enjoyment and happiness, and therefore also welfare, merely as mental states. But hedonism may yet prove to be more resourceful, and therefore more adaptable, than its critics have supposed.