On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures*

Fred Feldman

I. INTRODUCTION

A great many moral philosophers find themselves called upon to say something about the "hedonic thesis"—the view that "pleasure is intrinsically good." Hedonists typically want to defend the hedonic thesis, since it lies at the heart of their theory of value. Some pluralists want to affirm the thesis; others want to deny it. Others may want neither to affirm nor deny the thesis but find it necessary to state and discuss it as they pursue some other project in moral philosophy.

In spite of the prominence of the hedonic thesis in moral philosophies of all sorts, there is disagreement about what it means. Some of this disagreement turns on yet more fundamental disagreement about the nature of pleasure. As a result of such disagreement, different philosophers have provided different and nonequivalent interpretations of the hedonic thesis.

In this article, I focus on a certain way of understanding the claim that pleasure is intrinsically good. The problematic feature of this interpretation is not the concept of intrinsic goodness—that is understood in the classic Moorean way. Rather, it is the distinctive concept of pleasure presupposed.

This way of understanding the concept of pleasure apparently derives from some things Henry Sidgwick said in *The Methods of Ethics*.[1] It gained currency in recent years in America. A number of prominent philosophers construe pleasure in this Sidgwickian way. Among them are Richard Brandt, William Alston, and William Frankena. Brandt

* I am grateful to many friends for generous critical comments and suggestions. I am especially grateful to David Copp, Earl Conee, and three anonymous editors of this journal for extensive and insightful criticism of an earlier draft; to Owen McLeod for criticism and bibliographic assistance; to Ingmar Persson, Irwin Goldstein, Michael Zimmerman, Ted Sider, Richard Feldman, and Chris Deaton and other students who took Philosophy 760 with me during the spring of 1996.

1. Henry Sidgwick discusses the concept of pleasure in various places in *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1962). Some especially interesting and relevant passages occur in bk. 1, chap. 4, sec. 2; bk. 2, chaps. 2–4.

Ethics 107 (April 1997): 448–466

wrote a major ethics text, as well as books, journal articles, and an encyclopedia article in which the concept of pleasure was interpreted in this way.[2] Alston contributed an article titled "Pleasure" to *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in which he understood the concept in the same style.[3] Frankena wrote a very widely used introductory text in moral philosophy, as well as another article in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.[4] His formulation is relevantly like Brandt's.

A generation of philosophy students grew up understanding 'pleasure' in the hedonic thesis in the Sidgwickian way. Of course, not everyone thinks the thesis is true, but very many philosophers nowadays seem to assume that the Sidgwickian interpretation provides a conception of pleasure that can be used in the statement of the hedonic view. I think this is a mistake. My central aim in this article is to show that when we combine Sidgwick's conception of pleasure with the classic Moorean conception of intrinsic value, we get an interpretation of the hedonic thesis that is incoherent. If we are to understand the thesis, we must find some other way to interpret the concept of pleasure.

In this article, I first (Secs. II and III) present the Sidgwickian conception of pleasure. I then (Sec. IV) present the resulting formulation of the hedonic thesis. Next (Secs. V and VI) I turn to arguments. I try to reveal the conceptual conflict at the heart of the thesis, so interpreted. In a final section (VII), I sketch a more promising approach. I begin with some thoughts about the nature of pleasure.

II. THE HETEROGENEITY OF PLEASURES AND PAINS

Think of an array of typical sensory pleasures: the taste of sparkling cold beer; the smell of roses; the feeling in your nether parts when reaching fruition in happy sex. Many philosophers recognize that pleasures such as these might not feel alike. They might have no common phenomenologically given element.[5]

2. I refer here to Richard Brandt's *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), "Hedonism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, Free Press, 1967), vol. 4, pp. 432–35, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), and "Two Concepts of Utility," originally published in *The Limits of Utilitarianism*, ed. Harlan B. Miller and William H. Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), and reprinted in Brandt's *Morality, Utilitarianism, and Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 158–75.

3. William Alston, "Pleasure," in Edwards, ed., vol. 6, pp. 341–47.

4. William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), and "Value and Valuation," in Edwards, ed., vol. 8, pp. 229–32.

5. This is a consistent theme in Brandt's work. He makes the point in many passages. See, e.g., *Ethical Theory*, pp. 303–7, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, pp. 35–38, and "Hedonism," p. 433. I endorsed the view in my "Two Questions about Pleasure," in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. David Austin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), pp. 59–81. An

This raises a question: if these feelings do not feel alike, then why are they all called pleasures? In a typically thoughtful and perceptive passage, Sidgwick discusses this issue. He remarks that some writers seem to think that 'pleasure' expresses an indefinable quality of experience; that this feeling comes in various degrees; that it is in these ways analogous to the quality of feeling expressed by 'sweet'. But Sidgwick demurs: "This seems to be the view of some writers: but, for my own part, when I reflect on the notion of pleasure . . . the only common quality that I can find in the feelings so designated seems to be that relation to desire and volition expressed by the general term 'desirable'. . . . 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."[6]

Thus, Sidgwick apparently held that a feeling is properly said to be a pleasure because the person who experiences that feeling "apprehends it as desirable." In subsequent passages the view is refined and developed.[7] Many other philosophers have agreed with Sidgwick's claim that pleasures do not "feel alike."[8] They have also agreed that what pleasures have in common is the fact that the "intelligent being" who experiences them has some favorable attitude toward them. There is some difference of opinion about the precise nature of the attitude.

Over a period of many years, Richard Brandt consistently maintained a broadly Sidgwickian conception of pleasure. In his 1959 book *Ethical Theory,* Brandt said: "'Is pleasant' is to have the same sense as 'is a part of an experience, containing a subjective element, which one wishes at the time to prolong (or in which one is absorbed without effort) for itself.'"[9] According to this formulation, a feeling is a pleasure because the person who experiences it wishes to prolong it for itself. Thus, Brandt substitutes a purely psychological concept ("wants to prolong") for Sidgwick's apparently partially value-theoretical concept ("desirable").

Almost a decade later, in his article "Hedonism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Brandt presented a very similar view. He there said: "It is plausible to say that a person is enjoying himself (that is, his state

---

interesting discussion of the view and some of its alleged implications can be found in Irwin Goldstein's "Hedonic Pluralism," *Philosophical Studies* 48 (1985): 49–55.

6. Sidgwick, p. 127.

7. Remarks similar to the one quoted from Sidgwick, p. 127, can be found on pp. 42, 131, and elsewhere.

8. For further discussion of hedonic pluralism, see J. L. Cowan, *Pleasure and Pain: A Study in Philosophical Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Rem B. Edwards, *Pleasures and Pains: A Theory of Qualitative Hedonism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979); and J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire: The Case for Hedonism Reviewed* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). For further references, see Goldstein, p. 54, n. 1.

9. Brandt, *Ethical Theory,* pp. 306–7.

of mind is pleasant) if and only if at the time he likes his experience or activity *for itself,* in the sense that, aside from moral considerations or considerations of consequences or of the possibility that something he likes even better could be substituted, he does not wish to change it and in fact would wish to avoid changing it if such a change impended."[10] This statement differs from the previous one only in details. The relevant attitude here is liking it for itself in the specified sense, rather than wishing to prolong it for itself.[11]

In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article "Pleasure," William Alston presented a number of views about the nature of pleasure. The last of these—and the one to which he seems most sympathetic—is in important ways similar to Brandt's view. Alston explicitly mentions Sidgwick and states the view in this passage: "(E) To get pleasure is to have an experience which, as of the moment, one would rather have than not have, on the basis of its felt quality, apart from any further considerations regarding consequences."[12] Alston's view is only trivially different from Brandt's. He says that what makes an experience a pleasure is that the one who has it would rather have it than not, on the basis of its felt quality.

If one thought that there is an attitude of "taking pleasure in," one might attempt to identify sensory pleasures by appeal to it.[13] One could try to distinguish this attitude from the attitude of wanting it to continue as well as from preferring to have it rather than not have it. One could then say that when a person takes immediate pleasure in some feeling he is experiencing, then that feeling is called a pleasure; it is said to be a pleasant feeling.[14]

Let us generalize, so as to collect together a bunch of similar theories about the nature of pleasure. Each of these theories focuses on some special attitude. Different versions focus on different attitudes. It might be apprehending as desirable; it might be enjoying for its own sake; it might be wanting it to continue for its own sake; it might be taking immediate pleasure in it; it might be finding it intrinsically

10. Brandt, "Hedonism," p. 433.

11. Brandt says essentially the same thing in "Two Concepts of Utility," pp. 164–65. A similar but slightly more complex view is defended in his *A Theory of the Good and the Right,* pp. 38–42. According to the latter view, an experience is pleasant "if and only if it makes its continuation more wanted" (p. 40). The added complexity is that there must be a causal connection between the experience and the increased desire for continuation.

12. Alston, p. 345.

13. This is how I tried to explain "sensory pleasure" in my "Two Questions about Pleasure."

14. I return to this issue below in Sec. VII. See also my "Two Questions about Pleasure."

enjoyable.[15] The theories have this in common: each of them selects a certain attitude, A, and then maintains that a particular feeling is a pleasure (or is pleasant) on some occasion if and only if the person who experiences it takes up attitude A toward it on that occasion. We can call such feelings "Sidgwickian pleasures." Philosophers in the Sidgwickian tradition maintain that the "pleasures" mentioned in the hedonic thesis should be understood to be Sidgwickian pleasures.

III. A CRUCIAL DISTINCTION

It is important in this context to take note of a crucial distinction. Some philosophers and psychologists apparently believe that there is a certain special feeling of "pleasure itself." They think that this feeling comes in various intensities and durations (and perhaps also in different qualities) but that it is nevertheless phenomenologically uniform. When he wrote *Principia Ethica,* G. E. Moore held such a view. He said that when a person experiences pleasure,

> his mind, a certain definite mind, distinguished by certain definite marks from all others, has at this moment a certain definite feeling called pleasure. . . . and though we may be more pleased or less pleased, and even, we may admit for the present, have one or another kind of pleasure; yet in so far as it is pleasure we have, whether there be more or less of it, and whether it be of one kind or another, what we have is one definite thing, absolutely indefinable, some one thing that is the same in all the various degrees and in all the various kinds of it that there may be.[16]

Let us use the term 'the distinctive feeling view' (or 'DFV') to indicate this Moorean conception of pleasure. According to the DFV, there is a certain distinctive feeling, P, such that whenever a person is feeling pleasure, he or she is feeling P.

I can imagine a philosopher struggling to pinpoint this distinctive feeling. Since she has experienced it herself, she knows how it feels. However, she finds it impossible to define the feeling by appeal to its

15. It should be clear that I am here glossing over differences among these definitions. For present purposes, the differences are unimportant. What's important is that on each of the cited views, there is some attitude, such that when we say that a feeling is a pleasure what we mean is that the person who has the feeling takes the attitude toward it.

16. See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 12–13. In the preface to the second edition of *Principia Ethica,* Moore says that he no longer thinks that pleasure is indefinable. I have not been able to find his alleged definition. A more recent advocate of the distinctive feeling view seems to be David Brink, who describes hedonism as the view that "the one and only intrinsic good is pleasure, which is understood as a simple, qualitative mental state" (*Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], p. 221).

feel. She agrees with Moore's 1903 view. The feeling itself is "absolutely indefinable."

However, such a philosopher might thinks she has found another way to identify the relevant feeling. She might think that as a matter of contingent psychological fact we always have a certain attitude toward this feeling. Perhaps she thinks that whenever we experience this feeling, we like it for its own sake, or want it to continue, or take a certain sort of enjoyment in it. She might also think that there is no other feeling that we like or enjoy in quite the same way. Such a philosopher might want to make use of this feature of pleasure in her attempt to pick it out. She thinks that the cited feature is a surefire (though contingent) mark of pleasure. She could go on to offer a sort of "definition" of pleasure. She might say that a person is experiencing pleasure if and only if she is experiencing something she likes for its own sake, or wants to continue for its own sake.

As a result of all this, a philosopher who adopts the DFV might end up saying something very similar to the things that Sidgwick, Brandt, and Alston have said. We might confuse this Moorean view with the Sidgwickian view. But there are crucial differences.

Sidgwickians reject the DFV. They deny that there is some special feeling of pleasure itself. Brandt has consistently emphasized this point. For example, in *Ethical Theory* he said, "There is virtual unanimity today that pleasantness is not an element of experience like a color patch or a sound. Just try to examine pleasantness by itself, in the way you can inspect a red patch by itself. It cannot be done. Pleasantness always seems to be the pleasantness *of* something, of an activity, or some other elements of experience. . . . It is not a distinct element of experience (like a red patch . . .)."[17]

In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article "Pleasure," Alston said virtually the same thing and even made use of the same contrasting example: "When we reflect on a wide variety of cases of getting pleasure . . . we are unable to isolate a felt quality which they all share, in the way in which we can easily isolate a quality of redness which a number of different visual sensations share."[18]

Consider a Sidgwickian who says that a feeling is a pleasure if and only if the one who experiences it wants it to continue for its own sake. Such a philosopher is *not* supposing that there is a certain distinctive feeling that as a matter of contingent fact we always want to continue for its own sake; such a philosopher is *not* merely trying to pick out this distinctive feeling by pointing out that it is the unique one toward which we happen to have this special attitude. Rather, the

17. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, p. 305.
18. Alston, p. 344.

Sidgwickian is supposing that there are many different feelings, any of which might be a pleasure for some person on some occasion. The Sidgwickian is proposing to tell us what we mean when we say that a feeling someone feels on some occasion "is a pleasure" for that person on that occasion. According to the present version of the view, we are saying that the person who feels it on that occasion wants it to continue for its own sake. A person might in principle have this attitude toward virtually any feeling.

So we must be sensitive to a fundamental distinction. Some philosophers think that 'pleasure' picks out a certain distinctive feeling—that all pleasures are phenomenologically alike. Sidgwickians deny this. They think that 'pleasure' picks out feelings of various sorts, linked only by the fact that they are all liked for their own sakes by the people who experience them. A Sidgwickian could consistently maintain that any feeling could in principle be a pleasure. Even the feeling caused by overstimulated nerves in a rotting tooth could be a pleasure for someone on some occasion; and it would be a pleasure if the one who experienced it wanted it to continue for its own sake.

In any case, we are now ready to state the first components of the Sidgwickian conception of pleasure (i.e., Sidgwickian hedonism [SH]). They are

SH1: There is no such thing as "the feeling of pleasure itself"; pleasures are phenomenologically heterogeneous.

SH2: To say that a feeling is a pleasure (or a pleasant experience) is to say that the person who experiences it enjoys it for its own sake (or wants to prolong it for itself, or reacts in some other specified favorable way toward it).

IV. THE HEDONIC THESIS

If we understand pleasure in the Sidgwickian way, then we will understand the hedonic thesis to be the view that these Sidgwickian pleasures are intrinsically good. Many philosophers have so construed the hedonic thesis. Brandt, for example, states the view in these words: "Something is intrinsically desirable (undesirable) if and only if and to the degree that it is an experience with a subjective element that the person at the time wants to prolong (terminate or avoid) for itself. . . . In brief, the intrinsically good consists of *liked* experiences containing a subjective or feeling element."[19] In other writings, Brandt has formulated the hedonic thesis in a variety of ways, but he consistently maintained approximately the same fundamental conception throughout a long period of time.[20]

19. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, p. 307.

20. For example, in "Hedonism," Brandt says that ethical hedonism "is the thesis that only pleasant states of mind are desirable in themselves" (p. 432).

William Frankena apparently understood the hedonic thesis in a similar way. In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article "Value and Valuation," Frankena said: "More accurately, [hedonists] say that only experiences are intrinsically good, that all experiences which are intrinsically good are pleasant and vice versa, and that they are intrinsically good because and only because they are pleasant. These are the hedonistic theories of value."[21]

I have certain quibbles with certain features of this formulation of hedonism. Those are topics for another day.[22] Here I want to focus on the Sidgwickian aspect of the hedonic thesis. We may now state the central element:

SH3: When we say that pleasures are intrinsically good, what we mean is that Sidgwickian pleasures, as defined in SH2, are intrinsically good.

Another component of the interpretation is a principle that specifies the degree of goodness of a pleasure. In *Ethical Theory*, Brandt formulated a view according to which the intrinsic goodness of a pleasure is directly proportional to the extent to which the experiencer wants the pleasure to continue for its own sake.[23] Thus, if I am experiencing two feelings and I want each to continue for its own sake, but I want more for the first to continue, then the first feeling is the greater pleasure and the intrinsically better feeling. The intensities of the feelings themselves are not directly relevant here.

We can state this as follows:

SH4: The intrinsic value of a Sidgwickian pleasure, as defined in SH2, is directly proportional to the intensity of the experiencer's desire for the experience to continue for its own sake.

I think it is fair to say that the core of the Sidgwickian view is embodied in SH1–SH4. A Sidgwickian maintains that the hedonic thesis means that those feelings that we like and wish to prolong for their own sakes have positive intrinsic value. Sidgwickians also hold that the amount of intrinsic value in an experience is determined by the intensity of the desire for the experience to continue (mutatis mutandis for those who specify some other attitude toward experiences).

21. Frankena, "Value and Valuation," p. 231. See also a similar passage in Frankena's *Ethics*, p. 84.

22. I have in mind here especially the failure to take account of the role of basic intrinsic value states. For a discussion of basics, see Gilbert H. Harman, "Toward a Theory of Intrinsic Value," *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 792–804.

23. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, p. 307.

V. WHY THE SIDGWICKIAN INTERPRETATION CANNOT BE TRUE

I think the Sidgwickian interpretation is unsatisfactory. It can't possibly provide an accurate account of the hedonic thesis.

The fundamental difficulty may be described abstractly: according to the first elements of the Sidgwickian interpretation, SH1 and SH2, the feelings that are pleasures are not intrinsically alike. Something is a Sidgwickian pleasure in virtue of the fact that someone happens to have a certain attitude toward it. This is a contingent, extrinsic, relational fact about any such feeling. Yet, according to the third element of the Sidgwickian interpretation, SH3, such feelings are supposed to be good in themselves. They are supposed to have their value in virtue of their own nature. However, if their pleasantness is purely extrinsic and contingent, and their value supervenes upon their pleasantness, then they do not have their value "in virtue of their own natures"; they have it in virtue of the fact that they are liked.

The problem reveals itself in a variety of ways. Let us consider some of the most obvious.

A. An Argument Based on Moore's Principle of Universality

In *Principa Ethica* (and also in "The Conception of Intrinsic Value") Moore enunciated a very plausible principle about intrinsic value.[24] He pointed out that judgments of intrinsic value have a sort of "universality" not shared by judgments of extrinsic value. His view was that if something has a certain intrinsic value, then anything intrinsically just like it must have the same intrinsic value. This is roughly equivalent to the claim that intrinsic values supervene upon intrinsic natures. A corresponding principle about extrinsic value does not hold. Since a thing has its extrinsic value in virtue of its relations to other things, two things might be exactly alike intrinsically but differ in extrinsic value.[25]

24. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp. 23, 27, and "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," in his *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 253–75, esp. p. 265.

25. Moore struggled with the Principle of Universality in "The Conception of Intrinsic Value." There is good reason to be troubled by the principle. It is based upon a somewhat elusive conception of "intrinsic nature." We may say that a thing's intrinsic nature is the combination of all its intrinsic properties. However, if a thing's identity (e.g., in the case of Moore, the property of being identical to G. E. Moore) is one of its intrinsic properties, then no two things share an intrinsic nature. In this case, the principle has no application. If a thing's intrinsic value is an intrinsic property of that thing, then the principle is utterly trivial. An interesting version of the principle would say this: if two things are exactly alike with respect to nonevaluative purely general intrinsic properties, then they must be alike with respect to intrinsic value. Of course, to complete the task, one would have to explain the technical terminology.

Moore's principle is deeply rooted in the classic concept of intrinsic value. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, philosophers have understood this concept in such a way that to say that a thing is intrinsically good is to say that it is good in itself—that it has its value in virtue of what it is, rather than in virtue of how it is connected to other things. If we understand the concept of intrinsic value in this way, we seem to have no choice—we must agree to this supervenience principle (SUP):

SUP: If something, x, has an intrinsic value of n, then anything intrinsically like x must also have an intrinsic value of n.

Now consider two typical Sidgwickian pleasures—the pleasures my brother and I recently experienced while drinking cold beer together. I enjoyed the taste of that beer and fervently wished for the taste experience to continue. My brother, on the other hand, enjoyed the taste far less. He wanted his taste experience to continue, but his desire for continuation was less strong. This happened in spite of the fact that my brother's taste experience was intrinsically just like mine. The difference in reaction was due entirely to the fact that my brother does not share my taste in beer.

Component SH4 implies that my experience of the taste of beer was intrinsically good to a fairly high degree (because my desire for continuation was strong), but that my brother's experience of the taste of beer was intrinsically good to a much lower degree (because his desire for continuation was much less strong). But the experiences are stipulated to be intrinsically alike—my brother's taste experience was intrinsically just like mine; only his attitude toward his experience was different from my attitude toward mine. Hence, the Sidgwickian interpretation of the hedonic thesis conflicts with Moore's supervenience principle, SUP. If Sidgwickian pleasures are intrinsically good, then it is possible for there to be two intrinsically indiscernible experiences that differ in intrinsic value.

Reflection on more extreme examples of a similar sort should make it clear that the Sidgwickian approach allows for the possibility of two intrinsically indiscernible experiences, one of which is a pleasure and the other of which is a pain. Given natural assumptions, the implication is that the pleasure is intrinsically good and the pain intrinsically bad—this in spite of the fact that they are in themselves exactly alike. This points to even deeper conflict with the supervenience principle.

B. An Argument Based on the Foundation of Intrinsic Value

Of course, there is no way to prove that my brother's sensory experience was intrinsically identical to my sensory experience. Maybe beer tastes different to him. Nevertheless, further reflections in this area will secure my point. Consider a Sidgwickian pleasure such as my

experience of the pleasant taste of a cold beer. It is pleasant (according to the Sidgwickian view) because I want to prolong it for its own sake. If I had different likes and dislikes, or if my brain had been wired differently, or if I were bored with the taste of beer, or if I were suffering from depression, I might not have wanted to prolong it for its own sake. Thus, that very taste experience could have failed to be a pleasure. It was a pleasure not in virtue of its own nature, but in virtue of the fact that I took up a certain attitude toward it.

If the Sidgwickian view were true, my taste experience would have been intrinsically good but not in virtue of its own nature. Instead, it would have been intrinsically good in virtue of the extrinsic, relational fact that I reacted to it in the way I did. But this seems impossible. Surely, if something is intrinsically good, it must be good in virtue of the way it is in itself, not merely because of some extrinsic relation it happens to bear to some other thing.

So we see that the Sidgwickian view violates another deep and plausible principle about intrinsic value. This principle says that if a thing is intrinsically good, then it is good in virtue of its own nature.[26] While the meaning of this principle is not entirely clear, it is sufficiently clear for present purposes. If an experience is good entirely in virtue of the fact that the one who has that experience wants to prolong it, then it is not good in virtue of its own nature. It is good in virtue of the fact that it bears some extrinsic relation to some other thing—a person who experiences it.

Perhaps it will appear that I am here appealing to a principle that Sidgwickians would not accept. Perhaps Brandt and the others would just reject the view that intrinsic values depend on intrinsic natures. Perhaps they would say that things get their intrinsic values from their extrinsic relations. In this case, Sidgwickians could try to evade my objection by rejecting this element of the classic conception of intrinsic value.

I think it is interesting to note that Brandt and Frankena both explicitly endorsed the principle. Brandt first tried to identify a thing's intrinsic properties: he said that these are properties of a thing that "do not involve anything beyond the thing or event or state of affairs. . . . They are what they are independently of the remainder of the world, in the sense that it would be logically possible for the rest of the world to be different, but for them to remain the same. . . . Such properties we can call intrinsic, and we can say that some-

26. In "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," Moore goes so far as to suggest that this is a definition of intrinsic value. "We can, in fact, set up the following definition. *To say that a kind of value is 'intrinsic' means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of thing in question*" (p. 260).

thing—an event, state of affairs, or thing—is intrinsically desirable if it is desirable in view of its intrinsic properties alone."[27] Thus, Brandt himself explicitly endorsed the view that intrinsic values depend entirely upon intrinsic natures.

Although Frankena's discussion of this point is not very extensive, he clearly commits himself to the principle when he presents his "official" characterization of intrinsic value. He says: "D. Intrinsic values = things that are good in themselves or *good because of their own intrinsic properties.*"[28]

Surprisingly, just a few pages after saying that intrinsic values depend entirely upon intrinsic properties, Brandt formulated hedonism as the view that Sidgwickian pleasures are the sole intrinsic goods, and on his view these are intrinsically good because they are pleasures, and they are pleasures in virtue of the fact that they stand in a certain external relation to some person. Hence, he seems to have formulated hedonism in such a way as to ensure that it violates his own version of the principle.

This is a subtle and perhaps confusing point. Didn't Brandt stipulate that the experiencer must react in the specified way to a pleasure for its own sake, or intrinsically? And isn't that sufficient to show that the thus-created value is intrinsic?

This question is based upon a confusion. The classic conception of intrinsic value involves the notion that if some experience has an intrinsic value, then it has that value in virtue of its own intrinsic nature. So, if an experience is intrinsically good, it is good because of the way *it* is. But if Sidgwickian pleasures are intrinsically good, they have their intrinsic values in virtue of the fact that their experiencers like them intrinsically. Consider the property of being intrinsically liked. This is *not* an intrinsic property of anything. If anything has that property, it has it in virtue of the fact that the thing stands in certain relations to certain other things. Thus, being intrinsically liked is an extrinsic property of anything that has it. The fact that someone intrinsically likes a certain experience is an extrinsic fact about that experience. Since this is what (according to SH3) makes something intrinsically good, the Sidgwickian approach implies that intrinsic values are determined by extrinsic properties.

C. An Argument Based on a Principle about Necessity

A closely related point concerns the necessity of intrinsic values. Since intrinsic values depend upon intrinsic natures, and intrinsic natures are thought to be essential to the things that have them, each thing

27. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, pp. 302–3.
28. Frankena, *Ethics*, p. 82.

is thought to have its intrinsic value of necessity (NIV). In other words, this is thought to be true:

> NIV: If something, x, has an intrinsic value of n, then it is necessary that x has an intrinsic value of n.[29]

The Sidgwickian view is inconsistent with NIV. For, if SH3 were true, my experience of the taste of beer would be intrinsically good in one possible world but intrinsically worthless in another. It all depends upon whether I want to prolong it for its own sake, and this of course varies from situation to situation.

VI. FURTHER PROBLEMS FOR THE SIDGWICKIANS

Imagine a person enjoying the taste of a cold beer. Suppose the sensory experience remains intrinsically unchanged over a period of time. Suppose that at the outset, the person enjoys the taste and wants it to continue for its own sake. Imagine that his desire for continuation is quite strong—we may arbitrarily rate this desire as a +7. Suppose that as time passes the person gradually becomes tired of the taste of beer. Now his desire has diminished. It is rated at +3. Eventually, though the taste has not changed, the drinker is sated. He no longer wants the taste experience to continue. His desire for continuation is rated at 0.

Recall that Brandt maintained that the degree of intrinsic value of an experience is determined by the degree to which the experiencer wants to prolong the experience. One experience is intrinsically better than another if and only if the experiencer wants more to prolong the one than he does the other.[30] Thus, the relevant intensity here is *not* the intensity of the experience itself. It is the intensity of the desire to prolong that experience. "Of course, 'to the degree that' can refer only to the strength of the desire to prolong or terminate."[31] This component of the Sidgwickian view is formulated in SH4.

If SH4 were true, the drinker's original taste experience would have an intrinsic value of +7. His intermediate taste experience would

29. Roderick Chisholm endorses the principle in *Brentano and Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 95: "For attributions of intrinsic value are necessary. If pleasure is intrinsically good in this world, then it would be intrinsically good in any world in which it might be found." I think a suitably restricted version of the principle is true. I think it does not follow from the principle of universality, since I do not think that each thing has its intrinsic nature of necessity. (My current height is one of my intrinsic properties; I might have been taller.) However, if we take the fundamental bearers of intrinsic value to be states of affairs, and we assume that states of affairs do have their intrinsic natures of necessity, then we will think that the principle of necessity must be true.

30. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, p. 307.

31. Ibid.

have an intrinsic value of +3. And, at the end, his taste experience would have no intrinsic value. In other words, while the experience itself remained intrinsically unchanged, its intrinsic value would gradually decline and eventually fade away.

This example focuses attention on a curious fact about the view under consideration here. According to this view, each intrinsically good experience can be rated on two intensity scales. One scale rates the intensity of the pleasure itself—how strong is the pleasant feeling? The second scale rates the strength of the desire to prolong the pleasant feeling—how much does the experiencer want that feeling to continue? The curious fact is that, according to SH4, the intrinsic value of an experience varies in proportion to variations in the *second* scale, not the first. This seems strange, since the first scale measures an intrinsic feature of the feeling and the second measures an extrinsic feature.

In classic forms of hedonism—such as Bentham's—it was assumed that there is such a thing as the distinctive feeling of pleasure itself. It was furthermore assumed that the intensity of the pleasure itself is relevant to the intrinsic value of the pleasure. Other things being equal, the more intense pleasure is intrinsically better. This makes sense, since if it is the pleasure that is good in itself, it would be better in itself (other things being equal) if it were greater in itself. But SH4 conflicts with this natural view about measurement. Note that SH4 presupposes that there is no such thing as the feeling of pleasure itself. Rather, there are pleasant feelings, which are just feelings that we want to prolong. Though the pleasant feeling is alleged to be the bearer of intrinsic value, its amount of value varies in proportion to the strength of some other thing—the experiencer's desire for the pleasant feeling to continue.

VII. ANOTHER WAY TO FORMULATE THE HEDONIC THESIS

I think the Sidgwickians were right when they rejected the distinctive feeling view. There is no such thing as the alleged feeling of pleasure itself. Thus, it would be a poor idea to understand the hedonic thesis as the claim that experiences of this alleged feeling are fundamental bearers of positive intrinsic value.

The Sidgwickian solution involves saying that certain other feelings are bearers of intrinsic value. These are the various and heterogeneous feelings we like, wish to prolong, or enjoy for their own sakes. I have shown that this approach conflicts with several plausible axioms about intrinsic value. It might appear, then, that so long as we wish to stick with anything like the classic conception of intrinsic value, there is no satisfactory way to understand the hedonic thesis.

I think we can make some headway toward understanding the thesis if we are willing to embrace a novel conception of pleasure. I

turn now to a sketch of this conception and a discussion of its consistency with the classic conception of intrinsic value.

On my view, hedonic phenomena may be identified by appeal to a crucially important propositional attitude. This is the attitude we indicate when we say that someone takes pleasure in or is pleased about some state of affairs. Although I cannot define this attitude, I can say a few words about it. I think that when we take pleasure in a state of affairs, we welcome it in a certain way; we are glad that it is happening; we like it in a certain familiar way. In typical cases, if we take pleasure in some state of affairs, we may want it to continue, although this is not universally true.[32] I call this attitude "propositional pleasure" since it is a propositional attitude.

We may draw a number of distinctions involving this sort of propositional pleasure. For present purposes, the most important is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic propositional pleasure. Sometimes we take pleasure in a state of affairs for its own sake, simply for itself. In these cases, our pleasure is focused entirely on the state of affairs itself and not upon its causes, accompaniments, or effects. In such cases, I say we take intrinsic pleasure in the state of affairs.

In other cases, a person may take pleasure in a state of affairs in virtue of its cause, its expected consequences, what it signifies for the person, or some other feature not intrinsic to the state of affairs. In such cases, I say that the person is taking extrinsic pleasure in the state of affairs. Various combinations of intrinsic and extrinsic pleasure and displeasure are possible.

Suppose a person, O, is experiencing a delightful, pleasurable feeling, B. However, perhaps because of some moral or religious conviction, O is dismayed to find herself having that feeling, and even more dismayed to find herself taking pleasure in it. Then, in order to record the fact that the feeling is a pleasure for O, we can say that O is intrinsically pleased to be feeling B. In order to record the fact that O is dismayed to be feeling B we can say that O is extrinsically displeased to be feeling B. If her extrinsic displeasure is great enough, we may say that O is overall displeased to be feeling B. In the case described, we might also want to say that O is overall displeased about the fact that she is intrinsically pleased to be feeling B. One of the strengths of my proposal is that it is well suited to making these im-

32. When joyfully reminiscing, one may take pleasure in various states of affairs that occurred long ago and are now over. In such cases, one typically does not want to "prolong" the object of his pleasure. The "prolongation thesis" is more plausible when restricted to cases in which one takes intrinsic pleasure in some current feeling. It is somewhat more plausible to suppose that in such cases one always wants to prolong that feeling.

portant distinctions and expressing complex situations such as the one imagined.[33]

Although all these sorts of pleasure and displeasure are important, for present purposes the most important is intrinsic propositional pleasure.

Propositional pleasure is not a feeling. To take pleasure in a fact is not necessarily to have any sensory feelings. A person could take pleasure in various facts even if he were anesthetized. I may, for example, take pleasure in the fact that the war in Bosnia has at least temporarily stopped. I might do this even though I am not feeling any sensory pleasure. I might be feeling no sensations at all. So, from the fact that someone is taking propositional pleasure in some fact, it does not follow that he is experiencing any pleasant feelings.

When one takes pleasure in some state of affairs, one does so for some stretch of time. For example, I might start being pleased about P when I wake up in the morning, and I might continue being pleased about P until lunchtime. In that case, this particular episode of propositional pleasure would have lasted for several hours. Every episode of propositional pleasure is like this. Each has a duration.

When one takes pleasure in some state of affairs, one takes pleasure of some intensity. I may be very pleased that I survived the accident; I may be even more pleased that I was not injured at all; I may be much less pleased about the condition of my motorcycle. For simplicity in exposition, we may assume that we can assign numbers to episodes of propositional pleasure, so that there will be a convenient way to represent relative intensities of such episodes.

I am now prepared to identify the items that serve as pleasures on my view. Suppose that Jeremy is enjoying a cold beer. Suppose that what he likes about the beer is its distinctive taste, which we may call "B." Now consider the state of affairs of

J1: Jeremy taking intrinsic pleasure to degree +3 at *t* in the fact that he himself is experiencing B at *t*.

33. Another interesting sort of case was suggested by an editor of *Ethics*. This editor suggested that my view might go wrong because it is possible to be pleased to be experiencing a certain feeling even though the feeling itself is not pleasurable. But I believe that my theory is adequate to such cases. Suppose a certain chef is trying to make some food taste a certain way. Suppose that the chef himself does not find this taste (which we may call "T") pleasant, but he knows that others will enjoy it. When he finally gets the taste just right and samples the food, it may be true that he takes extrinsic pleasure in the fact he himself is then experiencing T. His pleasure is extrinsic because he takes this pleasure in the taste in virtue of the fact that it signifies that others will enjoy the food he has prepared. He does not take intrinsic pleasure in the fact that he is then experiencing T. That is, his experience of T is not a sensual pleasure for him.

State J1 is a basic hedonic state of affairs. We should take note of some crucial features of J1. First, notice that J1 involves some specific individual (in this case, Jeremy), some specific intensity of intrinsic propositional pleasure (in this case, +3), some specific time (in this case, *t*), and some specific "object" (in this case, Jeremy's experiencing B at *t*). Notice that J1 as a whole says that the specified individual is taking intrinsic propositional pleasure of the specified intensity at the specified time in the specified state of affairs. Notice also that the object of Jeremy's pleasure is a contemporaneous fact about Jeremy's sensory experience—it says that he himself is just then experiencing a certain taste. Notice that Jeremy, the time, the intensity, and the taste are all introduced by names (rather than by descriptive phrases). States of affairs like J1 in these respects are basic hedonic states of affairs.

On my view, the hedonic thesis should be interpreted as the claim that these basic hedonic states are intrinsically good.

The proposed view is like Sidgwick's in this respect: like Sidgwick's view, my view is based on a rejection of the distinctive feeling view. Like Sidgwick, Brandt, Alston, and the others, I think there is no such thing as "the feeling of pleasure itself." So I accept the following conception of pleasure (i.e., Feldmanian hedonism [FH]):

> FH1: There is no such thing as "the feeling of pleasure itself"; a person can take pleasure in a state of affairs no matter what sensory feelings he is experiencing.

But the view is different from Sidgwick's in other important respects. On Sidgwick's view, when Jeremy enjoys the taste of a beer, the pleasure is the taste of the beer. It is a pleasure, according to Sidgwick, because Jeremy apprehends it as desirable. Thus, Sidgwick takes the pleasure to be the *object* of a certain attitude. Brandt's version of the view is relevantly similar. My view is different. On my view, the pleasure is the whole state of affairs that consists in Jeremy's taking intrinsic pleasure in the fact that he himself is experiencing this taste (rather than just the object of this attitude).

The second element in my view is an account of these basic hedonic states. They occupy a central place in the theory.

> FH2: A state of affairs is a basic hedonic state if and only if there is an individual, S, a time, *t*, a positive number, *n*, and a sensory property, P, such that the state of affairs consists in S's taking intrinsic propositional pleasure at *t* to degree *n* in the fact that he himself is experiencing P at *t*.

I am proposing that we understand the hedonic thesis to be the claim that basic hedonic states such as J1 itself are bearers of positive

intrinsic value. These are the pleasures to which we refer when we say that pleasures are intrinsically good. Thus I accept:

> FH3: When we say that pleasures are intrinsically good, what we mean is that basic hedonic states, as defined in FH2, are intrinsically good.

Furthermore, although other more complex options are available, we can illustrate a simple sort of hedonistic view by saying that the intrinsic value of such a state is a function of its duration (indicated by the extent of *t*) and its intensity (in the sample case, this is +3). Other things being equal, more intense and longer-lasting basic hedonic states are intrinsically better.

So the final component of my view is:

> FH4: The intrinsic value of a basic hedonic state, as defined in FH2, is a function of the intensity of its intrinsic propositional pleasure and its duration.

In order to determine whether the proposed conception of pleasures is compatible with the classic conception of intrinsic value, we have to identify the intrinsic properties of things like J1. As I see it, the following properties of J1 are intrinsic to it: being about Jeremy, being a case of someone taking intrinsic pleasure to degree +3, having the fact that Jeremy is tasting B as its object, and so forth. Any state of affairs that did not have these features would not be intrinsically like J1. (Extrinsic features of J1 include such properties as being expressed in English by the sentence 'Jeremy taking intrinsic pleasure. . . .', being an example used in a discussion of hedonism, being deplored by J. S. Mill, etc.)

It is reasonable to say that an item such as J1 bears its intrinsic value in virtue of its own nature. A hedonist would say that it is intrinsically good because it is a case of someone taking intrinsic pleasure in a certain feeling he is then experiencing. Its intrinsic value is +3 because it is a case of someone taking intrinsic pleasure of degree +3. The fact that J. S. Mill deplored this state of affairs has no bearing on its intrinsic value. That is an extrinsic fact about it.

It is also reasonable to say that J1 has its intrinsic value of necessity, since it is reasonable to say that J1 has each of the cited intrinsic properties of necessity. That is, J1 is essentially the state of affairs of Jeremy taking intrinsic pleasure to degree +3 in the fact that Jeremy is experiencing B. If we go to some other possible world and find someone else drinking some beer, or someone taking more or less than three units of pleasure in the taste of beer, or someone taking pleasure in some other experience, then we haven't found J1. We have found some other state of affairs. But if we find this very state of

affairs—J1 itself—at some possible world, we may be sure that it will have the same intrinsic value there that it has here. Those who believe the hedonic thesis will say that this value is positive.

Suppose that Jeremy drinks beer for a long time and gradually gets bored with it. Several relevant states of affairs have taken place. Among these, let us suppose, are J1 and the following:

J2: Jeremy taking intrinsic pleasure to degree +2 at t_2 in the fact that he himself is experiencing B at t_2.

J3: Jeremy taking intrinsic pleasure to degree +1 at t_3 in the fact that he himself is experiencing B at t_3.

Someone who believes that pleasures are intrinsically good might want to say that each of these states of affairs is intrinsically good. And he might want to say that J1 is intrinsically better than J2, which in turn is intrinsically better than J3. This seems reasonable. On my proposal, such differences in intrinsic value depend entirely upon differences in intrinsic natures, since the differences in amounts of propositional pleasure taken are here intrinsic to the states of affairs. This, of course, is consistent with the assumption that the taste of the beer, indicated by the letter 'B', remains exactly the same in the three states of affairs.

Thus, my interpretation of the hedonic thesis is consistent with the classic conception of intrinsic value, according to which intrinsic values supervene on intrinsic natures and are necessary to the things that have them.[34]

34. In his doctoral dissertation "Pleasure and Intrinsic Value" (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1980), Earl Conee briefly discusses the central point of the present article. He says, "For many persons, tasting an ice-cream sundae is a pleasant experience. Yet hedonists do not attribute intrinsic value to events of tasting. They hold that the pleasure of the taste is the intrinsic good in the experience, not the taste that is its object" (p. 63). I think Conee here is too generous. Hedonists in the style of Sidgwick hold precisely the thing he says no hedonist holds. Of course, my aim in this article has been to show that the view is incoherent; they should not hold this view.