

Sidgwick on Pleasure*

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Sidgwick holds that pleasures are feelings that appear desirable qua feeling. I defend this interpretation against other views sometimes attributed to Sidgwick—for example, the view that pleasures are feelings that are desired qua feeling, or that pleasures are feelings with a particular feel that can be specified independently of desire. I then defend Sidgwick’s view against recent objections. I conclude that his account of pleasure should be attractive to those looking for an account suitable for normative work.

Early in *The Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick writes, “I will concede that pleasure is a kind of feeling which stimulates the will to actions tending to sustain or produce it . . . and similarly pain is a kind of feeling which stimulates to actions tending to remove or avert it.”¹ He notes that there are “qualifications and limitations which this proposition requires, before it can be accepted as strictly true,” and that he will consider these later.² When he does, he notes that Spencer defines “pleasure” as “a feeling which we seek to bring into consciousness and retain there” and that Bain writes that “pleasure and pain . . . are to be held as identical with motive power.”³ Sidgwick then raises what are presumably the needed “qualifications and limitations.” He notes that pleasures are not greater or lesser “exactly in proportion as they stimulate the will to actions tending to sustain them.” Sometimes there is pleasure or pain but no stimulus to act, either because one has the experience one wants (a warm bath) or one becomes accustomed to the pain (“a dull prolonged toothache”). One could accommodate these cases by saying that the stimulus is “latent,” in that it would arise if, say, someone threatened to drain the bathwater or offered to end the toothache.⁴ But the pro-

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1. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (1907; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 42–43.

2. *Ibid.*, 43 n. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, 125.

4. *Ibid.*, 126.

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portionality claim is still false. For example, “exciting pleasures are liable to exercise . . . a volitional stimulus out of proportion to their intensity as pleasures.” And “some feelings which stimulate strongly to their own removal are either not painful at all or only slightly painful:—*e.g.* ordinarily the sensation of being tickled.” Sidgwick concludes that “it is obviously inexact to define pleasure, *for purposes of measurement*, as the kind of feeling that we seek to retain in consciousness.”⁵

At this point, Sidgwick asks,

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 indefinable from its simplicity?—like the quality of feeling expressed by “sweet.” . . . 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,” in the sense previously explained. I propose then to define Pleasure—when we are considering its “strict value” for purposes of quantitative comparison—as a feeling which, when experienced by intelligent beings, is at least implicitly apprehended as desirable or—in cases of comparison—preferable.⁶

Sidgwick quickly repeats that pleasure is “a kind of feeling which we apprehend to be desirable or preferable” or “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.”⁷

I take this to be Sidgwick’s considered position.⁸ But I do not think Sidgwick is clear about it. In Section I, I consider the unclarity and give a

5. *Ibid.*, 127, emphasis in original.

6. *Ibid.*, 127.

7. *Ibid.*, 128, 131.

8. J. B. Schneewind, Roger Crisp, Thomas Hurka, and Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer agree, though Crisp and Hurka think Sidgwick also suggests, and may covertly endorse, a different view (see below) (Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1977], 317–18; Crisp, “Pleasure and Hedonism in Sidgwick,” in *Underivative Duty*, ed. Thomas Hurka [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 34–37, and *The Cosmos of Duty* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 68–69; Thomas Hurka, *British Ethical Theorists from Sidgwick to Ewing* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 195–96; de Lazari-Radek and Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 246). Others note in passing that Sidgwick’s view is that pleasures are feelings apprehended as desirable, rather than desired (Fred Feldman, “Two Questions about Pleasure,” in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. D. F. Austin [Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988], 65, and “On

more careful statement of the view. In Sections II, III, and IV, I consider rival interpretations, according to which Sidgwick holds a simple feeling view, a desire (rather than value) based view, or a view according to which Bain and Spencer are right about what it is to feel a pleasure but wrong about judging intensity. I argue against attributing the first and third of these views. I also argue that while Sidgwick gives no good reason to prefer desirability to desires, there may be such a reason—thinking of pleasures as feelings that appear desirable allows a distinctive argument for the goodness of pleasure, one that should be attractive to those who, like Derek Parfit and T. M. Scanlon, both reject a simple feeling view and hold that desires do not give justifying reasons. In Section V, I reply to criticisms of Sidgwick raised by Roger Crisp, Fred Feldman, Tom Hurka, Aaron Smuts, and others; I conclude that his view of pleasure should be very attractive to those looking for a view of pleasure suitable for normative work.

I

Green and Bradley charge that Sidgwick makes it a tautology to say that “pleasure is the ultimate good.” Sidgwick understands “pleasure” to be “desirable consciousness”; “desirable” means, for Sidgwick, “ought to be desired”; and “good,” for Sidgwick, also means “ought to be desired.”⁹ Sidgwick replies, rightly, that it is not a tautology that pleasure is the *only* good.¹⁰ He should add that pleasure is not desirable consciousness, but rather consciousness, or feeling, that is apprehended to be desirable. This would allow him to point out that it is not tautologous to say that feelings I apprehend to be desirable are desirable. But here is what Sidgwick writes:

the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures,” *Ethics* 107 [1997]: 448–66, 450; Stuart Rachels, “Is Unpleasantness Intrinsic to Unpleasant Experiences?” *Philosophical Studies* 99 [2000]: 187–210, 198; Aaron Smuts, “The Feels Good Theory of Pleasure,” *Philosophical Studies* 155 [2011]: 241–65, 243 n. 3; Chris Heathwood, “The Reduction of Sensory Pleasure to Desire,” *Philosophical Studies* 133 [2007]: 23–44, 26 n. 9, and “Desire-Based Theories of Reasons, Pleasure, and Welfare,” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 6 [2011]: 79–106, 91 n. 22). Feldman expresses a doubt in “Questions,” 78 n. 12. Ivar Labukt (and perhaps Rachels, “Unpleasantness,” 198) suggests that Sidgwick thinks of pleasures as feelings that are good qua feeling, but this fits neither Sidgwick’s emphasis on “apprehension” nor his unwillingness to say that it is part of the nature of pleasure to be good (see below) (Labukt, “Hedonic Tone and the Heterogeneity of Pleasure,” *Utilitas* 24 [2012]: 172–99, 189–90).

9. T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883; repr., New York: Crowell, 1969), sec. 366; F. H. Bradley, “Mr. Sidgwick’s Hedonism,” in *Collected Essays* vol. 1 (1877/1925; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), 79–80, 83, 93. The same point is made by T. L. Carson, *Value and the Good Life* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), 28; and Crisp, “Pleasure,” 36, and *Cosmos*, 69, 70.

10. Henry Sidgwick, *Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, H. Spencer, and J. Martineau* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 129.

Green's statement of my view leaves out the further determination of the kind of feeling which is given in the definition of Pleasure. . . . I . . . define Pleasure as "the kind of feeling which, when we experience it, we apprehend as desirable or preferable"—as "feeling that is preferable or desirable, considered merely as feeling, and therefore from a point of view from which the judgment of the sentient individual is final." The statement that Ultimate good is feeling of a certain quality, the quality being estimated by the judgment of value implicitly passed on it by the sentient being at the time of feeling it,—this proposition is certainly not a tautology.¹¹

The first account of pleasure Sidgwick quotes allows the reply just given. But the second account he quotes does not: if pleasure is desirable feeling, Green is correct, regardless of what particular qualities of feeling Sidgwick has in mind.

The same unclarity appears elsewhere. Sidgwick writes that it "should be observed that if this definition of pleasure is accepted [pleasure as feeling apprehended as desirable], and if, as before proposed, 'Ultimate Good' be taken as equivalent to 'what is ultimately desirable,' the fundamental proposition of ethical Hedonism has chiefly a negative significance; for the statement that 'Pleasure is the Ultimate Good' will only mean that nothing is ultimately desirable except desirable feeling, apprehended as desirable by the sentient individual at the time of feeling it."¹² If pleasure is feeling apprehended to be desirable, a positive claim is made when one says that pleasure is desirable. But Sidgwick seems to be conceding that "pleasure is the ultimate good" is significant only in ruling out other goods—perhaps because he has switched to thinking of pleasure as "desirable feeling" rather than feeling "apprehended as desirable." (In the fourth edition version of the paragraph, Sidgwick writes that "it being assumed in the definition of pleasure that it is 'desirable,' the statement that 'Pleasure is the ultimate Good' is only important as far as it affirms that nothing is ultimately desirable except desirable feeling.")¹³

The same failure to distinguish the two accounts of pleasure runs throughout. For example, in the first edition of the *Methods*, Sidgwick defines "pleasure" as feeling that I "judge to be preferable," but then moves to "feeling that is preferable or desirable."¹⁴ In the second edition,

11. *Ibid.*, 130.

12. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 129.

13. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1890), 130.

14. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1874), 114, 115; 118. Bradley quotes five of Sidgwick's first edition claims about the nature of pleasure ("Hedonism," 79). In only one of these places—from the table of contents—does Sidgwick say that pleasure is feeling that is judged desirable (Bradley, oddly, does not note *Methods*, pp. 114, 115). In the other places Bradley cites, pleasure is simply "desirable" or "prefer-

quoted in the reply to Green, he switches from feeling we apprehend as desirable to feeling that is desirable. And even in the final edition, he sometimes identifies pleasure with “desirable consciousness” rather than “consciousness judged to be desirable,” though this may be a matter of saving words.¹⁵

The remainder of the paragraph quoted above does not fit Sidgwick’s concession that “pleasure is the ultimate good” is significant only in ruling out other goods, but does get things right: “This being so, it may be urged against the definition that it could not be accepted by a moralist of stoical turn, who while recognising pleasure as a fact refused to recognise it as in any degree ultimately desirable. But I think such a moralist ought to admit an implied judgment that a feeling is *per se* desirable to be inseparably connected with its recognition as pleasure; while holding that sound philosophy shows the illusoriness of such judgments.”¹⁶ This defends the definition of pleasure as feeling apprehended to be desirable. The Stoic can accept the definition but add that feelings apprehended to be desirable are not desirable.¹⁷ But if this is the correct definition, the earlier part of the paragraph should not claim that “pleasure is the ultimate good” has “chiefly negative significance.”

It is surprising that Sidgwick countenances the view that it is tautologous that pleasure is good. He assumes that the claim “the Pleasure . . . of human beings is their Good” is “a significant proposition and not . . . a mere tautology.”¹⁸ He criticizes others for offering axioms that are tautologous.¹⁹ In formulating his own axioms, he rejects a formulation

able” feeling (*Methods*, 1st ed., 118, 162, 368, 372). A sympathetic reader of Sidgwick would overlook this. But it seems a bit unfair for Schneewind to criticize Bradley for relying on “a misstatement of Sidgwick’s account of pleasure” (*Victorian*, 394). (Bradley also notes that sometimes, Sidgwick identifies pleasure with feeling we actually desire [“Hedonism,” 80; *Methods*, 1st ed., 114].)

15. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 402, 404. He also uses “desirable consciousness” to refer not just to feelings but also to the consciousness (and relation to something outside consciousness) involved in knowledge, virtue, and the contemplation of beauty (*Methods*, 7th ed., xxxv, 398, perhaps 397).

16. *Ibid.*, 129.

17. Schneewind gives this reply to the tautology charge, relying mainly on the Stoic passage (though he does not note the other passages with which it is inconsistent) (*Victorian*, 317–18, 394). Crisp suggests that “the reference to apprehension may in fact not have been essential to his apparently primary definition, and have been an attempt to capture the separate epistemological point about the privileged access of an individual to the quality of her own feelings” (Crisp, “Pleasure,” 35; also *Cosmos*, 69). I think the reference to apprehension (or judging or appearing) is essential for avoiding the tautology charge. Crisp also objects that the Stoic could deny the definition and instead hold a simple feeling view of pleasure (*Cosmos*, 69). I agree. But Sidgwick’s point is that the actual Stoics are not counterexamples to his view. More generally, he is replying to the objection that his view requires agreeing that pleasure is good, not ruling out simple feeling views.

18. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 109.

19. *Ibid.*, 374–79.

that “does not clearly avoid tautology.”²⁰ He spends time arguing that virtue is not the only good;²¹ this is unnecessary if it is tautologous that pleasure is good. It is surely not his considered view.²²

The Stoic passage is helpful in another way. After what I have quoted, Sidgwick continues with “this, in fact, seems to have been substantially the view of the Stoic school.”²³ Sidgwick is considering the objection that Stoics think pleasure exists but do not see it as desirable. His reply is that Stoics think pleasures involve feelings that appear desirable (though are not).²⁴ This shows two things.

First, it is evidence that Sidgwick does not here intend “I apprehend p” to imply the truth of p. Stoics could not say that feelings that are apprehended as desirable in this sense, and so are desirable, are not desirable. (Reading “I apprehend p” as implying p also opens Sidgwick to the tautology charge.)²⁵

20. *Ibid.*, 381.

21. *Ibid.*, 391–95.

22. A referee noted that Sidgwick may object to sham axioms not because they are tautologous, but because they fail to provide guidance. Sidgwick writes that the axiom that “it cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals, and without there being any difference between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment” (*Methods*, 7th ed., 380) is “obtained by merely reflecting on the general notion of rightness” (*Methods*, 7th ed., 208) but provides guidance (*Methods*, 7th ed., 209, 380). Perhaps the same goes for “pleasure is good.” But (a) the axiom makes the substantive claim that differences of identity are not reasonable grounds for difference of treatment; (b) this claim is what makes it action guiding; (c) reference to the “notion of rightness” might be interpreted as noting that the axiom states a synthetic a priori truth about rightness, given that Sidgwick denies that “right” can be analyzed (*Methods*, 7th ed., 32–33); (d) Sidgwick’s rejection of a tautologous understanding of “pleasure is good” at *Methods*, 109, suggests that he does not think “pleasure is good” is tautologous but useful. (For a related treatment of the axiom, see Anthony Skelton, “Sidgwick’s Philosophical Intuitions,” *Etica and Politica* 10 [2008]: 185–209, 199.)

23. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 129.

24. I say “involve,” as Sidgwick says “inseparably connected,” since the Stoic view is not that pleasures just are feelings that seem desirable. One must assent to the appearance for there to be pleasure. For helpful accounts of the Stoics, see Gisela Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 271–74; Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90–110; J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 419–26.

25. A referee noted that Sidgwick sometimes seems to use “apprehend” to imply truth. For example, Sidgwick writes of his axioms that “I regard the apprehension . . . of these abstract truths, as the permanent basis of the common conviction that the fundamental precepts of morality are essentially reasonable” (*Methods*, 7th ed., 383). But elsewhere he notes “right,” “imperfect,” and “truer” apprehension (*Methods*, 7th ed., 234, 464, and *Green*, 351), and even the “apprehension of the Divine Personality in Jewish seers and prophets” as “the sense of a ‘haunting overpowering presence,’” where that seems clearly to refer to the beliefs of the seers (Henry Sidgwick, review of *Essays Theological and Literary*, by R. H. Hutton, *Academy* 1 [1871]: 325–26, 326).

Second, although Sidgwick writes of “implicit” “apprehension” or “judgment,” his view seems best understood as claiming that a pleasure involves a feeling that *appears* desirable qua feeling. This fits his suggestion that the Stoic finds it an illusion that pleasure is desirable: it is false that pleasure is desirable, but there is the appearance that it is desirable.²⁶ By “appearance,” I intend a state, different from belief, that gives prima facie support for a belief. An appearance may fail to support belief by being judged illusory, or by being outweighed by other evidence, and it can remain even when it fails in either of these ways. Like beliefs, appearances need have no distinctive feel.²⁷

II

I turn to consider three rival interpretations.

Roger Crisp argues that although Sidgwick’s official view is that pleasures are feelings seen as desirable qua feelings, he is “best understood” as holding and “at heart” holds the simple feeling view.²⁸ Thomas Hurka agrees.²⁹

Since the analogy to sweetness is explicitly rejected by Sidgwick, and replaced by a link to desirability, I think the simple feeling view should be attributed to him only if one cannot explain away the evidence that might seem to favor it.

Further, Sidgwick writes that “pain must be reckoned as the negative quality of pleasure, to be balanced against and subtracted from the positive.”³⁰ As Chris Heathwood notes, it is not clear how a simple feeling view gives this result. On it, pleasure and pain seem merely to be different feelings, just as the tastes of coffee and apples are different feelings.³¹ Sidgwick’s official view makes sense of how pleasure and pain are opposed: one appears desirable, the other undesirable.

Crisp writes that

Sidgwick speaks of pleasure, in the core of his definition, as “a feeling” (ME 2.2.2.3) and as a “kind of feeling” (ME 2.2.2.4). Fur-

26. For the same interpretation, see Schneewind, *Victorian*, 318. Aristotle seems to have a similar view of pleasure; see, e.g., Jessica Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 2.

27. For helpful discussions of appearances, see Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 99–100; Sergio Tenenbaum, *Appearances of the Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39–42, and “Good and Good For,” in *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218–21; Andrew Cullison, “What Are Seemings?” *Ratio* 23 (2010): 260–74.

28. Crisp, “Pleasure,” 36, 37; also *Cosmos*, 70.

29. Hurka, *British*, 196.

30. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 124; also 125.

31. Heathwood, “Reduction,” 26–27.

ther, he goes on to speak of pleasantness as itself a quality cognizable by the subject (ME 2.2.2.5) and as a “ground” for a judgment of preferability (ME 3.14.4.1). If all we had in play were feelings, non-hedonistically construed, which were then apprehended as desirable, it is hard to see how pleasure could itself be cognizable or a ground for a judgement. Rather, the non-hedonistically construed feeling would be immediately apprehended as desirable, and pleasure would be merely this combination of the feeling and its apprehension.³²

I do not think the simple feeling interpretation gets much support from Sidgwick’s calling pleasure “a feeling” or “a kind of feeling.” One way to express the appearing-desirable view is to say that pleasures are a kind of feeling, namely, ones that seem desirable. Speaking of pleasure as a ground of preferability would help, if Sidgwick says that the ground for preferring one experience to another is that it is more pleasant. The passage Crisp cites runs as follows: “It is no doubt true that in ordinary thought certain states of consciousness—such as Cognition of Truth, Contemplation of Beauty, Volition to realise Freedom or Virtue—are sometimes judged to be preferable on other grounds than their pleasantness: but the general explanation of this seems to be . . . that what in such cases we really prefer is not the present consciousness itself, but either effects on future consciousness more or less distinctly foreseen, or else something in the objective relations of the conscious being, not strictly included in his present consciousness.”³³ “Other grounds than their pleasantness” here seems to mean “on grounds other than what is included in present consciousness.” Sidgwick’s positive view is that I ought to prefer knowledge, say, only if the feelings that knowledge would cause appear more desirable qua feelings than the feelings that lack of knowledge would cause. If so, he does not commit himself to a simple pleasantness feeling.

I think the same holds for the other passages Crisp notes. Sidgwick writes, “if I in thought distinguish any feeling from all its conditions and concomitants—and also from all its effects on the subsequent feelings of the same individual or of others—and contemplate it merely as the transient feeling of a single subject; it seems to me impossible to find in it any other preferable quality than that which we call pleasantness, the degree of which is only cognisable directly by the sentient individual.”³⁴ Sidgwick might seem to be claiming that there is a distinctive feeling of pleasantness. But since he has just denied this, some other interpretation is preferable. Sidgwick is rejecting Mill’s view that pleasures differ in

32. Crisp, “Pleasure,” 36–37; also *Cosmos*, 70.

33. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 399.

34. *Ibid.*, 128; also 94–95.

quality. His point is that Mill is considering the pleasure not merely qua feeling but also qua its “conditions and concomitants.” In this context, reference to a common property or quality of pleasantness seems to be a way of making the point that, for purposes of calculation, pleasures differ in only one dimension—amount, based on considering the feeling qua feeling—rather than further dimensions, as Mill holds.

Hurka gives an objection in a similar vein. Sidgwick claims that we should prefer pleasures in proportion to their intensity or pleasantness. This is “a substantive claim given internalism, but on his official view a pleasure’s intensity just is the degree to which we think we should desire it, which makes his claim tautologous.”³⁵ This is mistaken. Sidgwick’s claim is that we should prefer a pleasure in proportion to its desirability qua feeling, rather than “on the ground of any other qualities that it may possess” such as “distinctions of *quality*” or “something in the objective relations of the conscious being, not strictly included in his present consciousness.”³⁶ That is not a tautology.

Crisp and Hurka have other evidence they take to favor the simple feeling interpretation. Crisp quotes Sidgwick: the utilitarian assumes “that every kind of feeling has a certain intensive quantity, positive or negative (or perhaps zero), in respect of preferableness or desirableness, and that this quantity can be known.”³⁷ Crisp comments that “this passage provides further evidence of Sidgwick’s internalism about pleasure. If the intensity of a feeling is determined by the subject’s judgement of that feeling’s desirability, the intensity will be definite only if the judgement is definite. But few if any of us . . . make definite judgements about the degree of value of our feelings.”³⁸ Intensity must instead be set by something intrinsic to the feeling.

I think, however, that this objection boomerangs. For (as Crisp also notes) Sidgwick *worries* about the claim that each feeling has a definite degree. He supposes that the “belief that every pleasure and pain has a definite intensive quality or degree must remain an *a priori* assumption, incapable of positive empirical verification.”³⁹ If the simple feeling view is a way of ensuring that intensity is definite, this is reason to think that Sidgwick does not hold the simple feeling view. And in raising his worry, Sidgwick notes the role played by my judgment of desirability in determining intensity. The worry goes as follows: a feeling F_1 has a definite

35. Hurka, *British*, 196.

36. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 121, 399; also 127–28.

37. Henry Sidgwick, “Utilitarianism,” an address given in 1873 and published in *The Complete Works and Select Correspondence of Henry Sidgwick*, ed. Bart Schultz (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 1999), 4; also *Methods*, 7th ed., 146.

38. Crisp, “Pleasure,” 41 n. 35. For the same argument, see Hurka, *British*, 196.

39. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 146.

intensity only as compared to other feelings (say F_2);⁴⁰ I cannot compare F_1 and F_2 by experiencing both at once, since this might mush into one (different) feeling or reduce the intensity of the separate feelings;⁴¹ hence I must imagine feeling F_1 and F_2 “precisely as they have been felt separately” and judge that “one would be found more desirable than the other in some definite ratio”;⁴² I cannot check this result against F_1 directly, since F_1 does not exist when not felt;⁴³ hence I cannot verify that F_1 has any particular intensity.

Sidgwick’s positive view seems to be that we assume that, when I experience a pleasure, the feeling appears desirable to me to a certain degree. The “appearing desirable to a certain degree” can be “implicit”—I do not explicitly think “this feeling is desirable to degree x .” What that degree is can be estimated only by comparing representations of different feelings and making a judgment of desirability.

I conclude that one should not attribute the simple feeling view to Sidgwick.

III

There are other readings. These see pleasure as a feeling to which one has an attitude but suppose the relevant attitude is desire rather than an appearance of desirability.⁴⁴ Sidgwick writes, “when I reflect on the no-

40. *Ibid.*, 141, 146.

41. *Ibid.*, 141.

42. *Ibid.*, 146.

43. *Ibid.*

44. James Griffin glosses Sidgwick as thinking of “utility” as “desirable consciousness,” meaning by ‘desirable’ either consciousness that we actually desire or consciousness that we would desire if we knew what it would be like to have it” (Griffin, *Well-Being* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1986], 9). L. W. Sumner quotes *Methods* 127 and 131 as the “best statement” of the view that pleasures are “experiences which we like, or enjoy, or seek, or wish to prolong for their own sake” (Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1996], 91, 90) (though he might not identify liking/enjoying/seeking/wishing with desiring—see 94 n. 29). William Alston attributes to Sidgwick the view that pleasures are experiences “which as of the moment, one would rather have than not have, on the basis of its felt quality” (“Pleasure,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards [New York: Macmillan, 1967], 345). Stephen Darwall takes “desirable” to be explained by the hypothetical desire account of *The Methods of Ethics* 111 (see below) (“Pleasure as Ultimate Good in Sidgwick’s Ethics,” *Monist* 58 [1974]: 475–89, 476). (Oddly, however, Darwall later objects that Sidgwick’s definition of pleasure is inconsistent with his view that experience cannot tell us what we ought to do. “For pleasure is defined by him to be a feeling which is apprehended to be desirable in itself. . . . On Sidgwick’s view the experience of pleasure is not the experience of something we do in fact seek, but rather the experience of something desirable” [485]. If pleasure is defined by the hypothetical desire account, it is not defined in terms of what we ought to seek, but rather in terms of what we would seek.) David Sobel (“Pleasure as a Mental State,” *Utilitas* 11 [1999]: 230–35, and “Varieties of Hedonism,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33 [2002]: 240–56, 248) reads “desirable” as “desired,” though in “Pain for Ob-

tion 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,’ in the sense previously explained.”⁴⁵ One might think that he is referring to one of his earlier discussions of “desirable.” There, “desirable” means “not necessarily ‘what ought to be desired’ but what would be desired, with strength proportioned to the degree of desirability, if it were judged attainable by voluntary action, supposing the desirer to possess a perfect forecast, emotional as well as intellectual, of the state of attainment or fruition.”⁴⁶ The account “does not introduce any judgment of value, fundamentally distinct from judgments relating to existence.”⁴⁷ Applying this to pleasure, a pleasure is a feeling I would desire were I considering it qua feeling. On this reading, pleasure does not involve an appearance of value.

There is textual evidence against this reading. The reading depends on thinking that “desirable, in the sense previously explained” refers to the hypothetical desire account quoted. But Sidgwick does not explicitly say so. The official view of pleasure is that it is feeling “apprehended as desirable,” which could be read as “apprehended as what I would desire in ideal circumstances.” But Sidgwick describes “apprehended as desirable” as a “judgment of value.”⁴⁸ In the fifth edition, he writes that “the only common quality that I can find in the feelings so designated seems to be that expressed by the general term ‘good’ or ‘desirable,’ which we have before examined.”⁴⁹ In the third and fourth editions, he says of his definition of “pleasure” that “the term desirable was [in Book I] explained to mean that which ‘ought’ to be desired or aimed at.”⁵⁰ After noting that “Good . . . is what it is reasonable to seek, or aim at getting,” he adds that “if it be said that Good is pleasure or the pleasant, the same relation to volition and practice comes in when we define pleasure” (and refers to *Methods* 2.2).⁵¹ And Sidgwick does not endorse the hypothetical

jectivists: The Case of Matters of Mere Taste,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8 [2005]: 437–57, 443 n. 13) he expresses some doubt. C. D. Broad, despite seeming to endorse a “hedonic tone” account of pleasure, “throw[s] out” the suggestion that all qualities of an experience are “non-hedonic” but “if its qualities were such that I liked it *for them* it would be pleasant, and if its qualities were such that I disliked it *for them* it would be painful.” He thinks this is Sidgwick’s view (Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930], 238).

45. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 127.

46. *Ibid.*, 111.

47. *Ibid.*, 112.

48. Sidgwick, *Green*, 130.

49. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 5th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1893), 128.

50. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1884), 126 n. 1, and *Methods*, 4th ed., 130 n. 1.

51. Sidgwick, *Green*, 331.

desire account as an account of “good”; he replaces it with an account according to which something is good in virtue of being something we ought to desire.⁵² Nor does he repeat the hypothetical desire account later. It is better, then, to read “apprehended as desirable” as “appears good.”

Sidgwick has good reason to reject a view of occurrent pleasure as feeling I would desire qua feeling in other circumstances. Say that I experience a feeling I take to be morally wrong. Given my belief, I desire the feeling to cease. Say that were I to experience the feeling without believing it to be wrong—concentrating just on the feeling itself—I would desire it. That does not make my experience pleasurable. Thus Sidgwick specifies that it is something present “when experienced,” “at the time of feeling,” that is relevant to pleasure.⁵³

A related account, however, does better. The desire I end up acting on (call this my “final” desire) for a feeling is influenced by, for example, aspects of my present mental state other than the feeling (such as mood), weakness of will, reflexes (perhaps relevant to tickling), and consideration of “objective conditions” that are distinct from the feeling.⁵⁴ The desire relevant to pleasure is not this desire, but rather my desire for the feeling qua feeling. Although on this account actual final desires are irrelevant, this is not the hypothetical desire reading: what is relevant is not the desire I would have for the feeling qua feeling, but rather the desire I do have for the feeling qua feeling. Say I have a feeling that I find morally wrong: I might on balance not desire to have that feeling, but I might desire the feeling qua feeling (even when “the feeling” is tinged by my thought that it is morally wrong).

This account again seems to involve no appearance of value. It is not so clear why Sidgwick rejects it.

His general worry about tying pleasure to motivation is that there are qualities of feeling that influence motivation but are separate from intensity. In the tickling case, it is something about the feeling—not the influence of judgments of quality or the value of things other than feelings—that produces the strong motivation to end the tickling. Sidgwick endorses Bain’s view that “different kinds of feeling [are] more and less ‘volitional’: by which [Bain] means that with an equal intensity as plea-

52. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 112; also 92 n. 1; 381; *Methods*, 4th ed., 110; *Green*, 331.

53. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 127, 131.

54. Sidgwick does not mention weakness of will in later editions, but in the first, he argues that “the intellectual valuation of represented pleasures is continually out of proportion to the volitional stimulus which accompanies the representation” by noting that Mill “points out that men often ‘from infirmity of character’ choose what they ‘know to be the less valuable’ good” (*Methods*, 1st ed., 114).

sure . . . they yet stimulate action some in a greater, some in a less, degree.”⁵⁵

Here is a different example. Sidgwick quotes Bain’s claim that “acute pleasures and pains stimulate the will . . . perhaps more strongly than an equivalent stimulation of the massive kind.”⁵⁶ Directly before this, Bain writes that the “degree or strength of a feeling admits of the two distinct modes, named Intensity or acuteness, and Quantity or mass. The prick of a pin is an acute pain, the depression of general fatigue is massive. The physical fact, in acuteness, is the intense stimulation of a small surface, in massive feeling, the gentler stimulation of a wide surface.”⁵⁷ Massive pains (“depression, gloom, melancholy, despair”) “debilitate and weaken the tone of the system, and are not favourable to voluntary exertion, although their motive force ought to be great.”⁵⁸ Thus two pains can have the same “degree,” “strength,” or (what Sidgwick calls) “intensity” but, because they realize this degree in different ways, they can differ in their motive force. If so, even when concentrating on feelings qua feelings, the intensity of pain is not proportional to motivation.

I do not think this is a convincing argument for preferring appearances of desirability to desires, for three reasons.

(1) It is not clear that Sidgwick’s worry defeats an account put in terms of desire, as above, rather than motivation. While depressed, I may lack a final desire to become undepressed, and so fail to be motivated, but I may still desire that the feeling of being depressed go away.⁵⁹ At one point, Sidgwick raises the objection to the motivation view that “a dull prolonged toothache . . . seems sometimes to lose its felt stimulus to action without losing its character as pain.” He accepts the reply, on

55. *Ibid.*, 1st ed., 114–15. I quote the first edition because it is the most succinct, but Sidgwick endorses Bain’s point in all editions. Sidgwick also notes some of the places in which Bain writes of “disproportionate” or “out of due proportion” motivation that betrays the lack of a “proper frame of mind [that] inspires no endeavours beyond what the genuine charm of the moment justifies” (*Methods*, 7th ed., 126–27; Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* [London: Longmans, Green, 1865], 399–400).

56. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 127.

57. Alexander Bain, *Mental and Moral Science* (London: Longmans, Green, 1872), 217–18. Similarly, Bain writes that almost everyone feels pleasures “that are never enjoyed or contemplated in perfect coolness. They may not be the greatest of our possible delights, it may be something in the quality more than in the amount that makes them tap the fountains of excitement; although it may be fairly supposed that the intensity of them is a principal circumstance” (*Emotions*, 400).

58. A. Bain, *Mental*, 218. Rachels, who notes Sidgwick and depression, gives further examples: for example, embarrassment and anxiety can cause one to “freeze up,” and so not be motivated to end the feelings, but they are painful. See “Unpleasantness,” 192.

59. Rachels separates motivation and desire (or “dislike”) by noting that “one can dislike being depressed but be resigned to it” (“Unpleasantness,” 193).

behalf of the motivation view, that “the stimulus may be properly conceived as latent: since if asked whether we should like to get rid of even a mild toothache, we should certainly say yes.”⁶⁰ A similar reply seems to work for depression: even if the depression takes away the stimulus to remove it, I would, if asked, say that I would like to be rid of it.⁶¹

(2) Sidgwick does not explain how moving to an appearance of value avoids his worry. Presumably his idea is that appearances of value, unlike motivation, are not skewed by experiencing the feeling. When I am depressed, that feeling appears bad, even if the depression saps my motivation to be undepressed. When I am tickled, that feeling (sometimes) does not appear bad, even if I am motivated to stop it.

This faces two difficulties.

First, it is not clear why appearances of value do better than desires. When I am depressed, I desire that feeling to end, even if the depression saps my motivation.

Second, it seems possible that appearances of value (and desires) are skewed just as motivation is skewed.⁶² When I am depressed, depression might not appear so bad (especially if I have been depressed for a long time).⁶³ If depression causes me not only not to be motivated to become undepressed but also causes me to not find depression bad, Sidgwick must say that the depression is not a pain.

I do not, however, think that this is a conclusive objection. It is not clear that depression makes one not find it bad. Some depressives commit suicide. Many more have a desire to commit suicide, although this desire is defeated. And if depression did make one not find it bad, perhaps it really is not painful. One way to reduce some pains is to change one’s attitude toward them.

60. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 126.

61. Sidgwick sometimes puts his point in terms of desire rather than motivation. For example, “the intensity of any pleasure and the intensity of its volitional stimulus seem, as introspectively cognized, to be two different facts: so that on the whole, it seems best to define pleasure, not as the kind of feeling which we actually desire and aim at, but as that which, when we experience it, we apprehend as desirable or preferable” (Henry Sidgwick, *Methods*, 2nd ed. [London: Macmillan, 1877], 114). But Sidgwick may be thinking here of final desire.

62. Crisp suggests that the objection to Bain applies to *any* view that makes pleasure depend on an attitude toward a feeling (*Cosmos*, 67). Whether this is true depends on the attitude: what goes for motivation need not go for desire or appearances of value.

63. See Daniel Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 206, 208. Perhaps some depressions cause me to have no attitude to them, perhaps because they block my ability to represent myself as being in that state. (Thanks to Roger Crisp for this point.) Here appearances of value and desires are on a par. Whether this possibility is a problem for either account is unclear; it is not clear how this state that I have no attitude toward differs from any other state that I have no attitude toward. Depressives might also see an inability to represent one’s state as an improvement (and so, for example, sleep as much as possible).

(3) On some views of desire, there is no issue. If desires are “appearances of the good,” or if to desire *p* is for the thought of *p* to “keep occurring . . . in a favorable light,” there is little difference between appearances of desirability and desires.⁶⁴ Sidgwick does not seem to share this view of desire. A desire is a “felt impulse or stimulus to actions tending to the realisation of what is desired.”⁶⁵ He supposes that, if the more pleasant option is defined as the option we choose, it is tautologous to say that “we desire a thing in proportion as it appears pleasant.”⁶⁶ However, he also identifies desire with an “attractive force on the will,” supposes desires aim at “some positive future result,” tries to explain away most cases of failing to desire what one believes is good, and sometimes treats appearances of desirability and desires as interchangeable (see Sec. V).⁶⁷ Since this topic is large and Sidgwick says little on it, I set it aside.

One might try to support Sidgwick with a different example. Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer argue that Sidgwick is justified in moving from desire to desirability. They take famous cases in which electrodes are implanted in “pleasure centres” to be cases in which the feeling of being stimulated causes a desire for further stimulation, but not pleasure. Pleasure is present only when the subjects view the feeling as desirable (which they do not).⁶⁸

This is a controversial reading of the studies. The subjects report sexual arousal, a desire to drink, alternating hot and cold sensations, anxiety.⁶⁹ The arousal may be pleasant. But suppose it is not. Or suppose an idealized case of the sort de Lazari-Radek and Singer want: the neural instantiation of how the feeling feels to consciousness causes a different neural event that causes a desire for the feeling. Here the feeling might fail to appear desirable qua feeling but still be desired (and not because of any “objective relations”).

In reply, the defender of desires can try to specify the relevant way in which the feeling is desired. To “desire a feeling qua feeling” is to desire that I have a feeling that feels a certain way. In the case above, that seems

64. For the views quoted, see Tenenbaum, *Appearances*, chap. 1; and T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1998), 38–41. See also Dennis Stampe, “The Authority of Desire,” *Philosophical Review* 96 (1987): 355–81, 356–61; and Jennifer Hawkins, “Desiring the Bad under the Guise of the Good,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (2008): 244–64.

65. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 43 n. 2.

66. *Ibid.*, 44.

67. *Ibid.*, 44, 46; Henry Sidgwick, “Unreasonable Action,” *Mind*, n.s., 2 (1893): 174–87, 184–87.

68. De Lazari-Radek and Singer, *Universe* 246, citing K. Berridge and M. Kringelbach, “Affective Neuroscience of Pleasure: Reward in Humans and Animals,” *Psychopharmacology* 199 (2008): 457–80, 470–72.

69. Berridge and Kringelbach, “Neuroscience,” 471.

false: I have a desire caused by the feeling, but the object of my desire seems not to be the feeling, but rather that I stimulate myself by pressing a button. The subjects feel “a compulsion to stimulate themselves”—which need not be understood as a desire for a feeling.⁷⁰ The authors of the study de Lazari-Radek and Singer rely on suggest that stimulating the electrodes “caused ‘wanting’ attribution to the button and the act of pressing it” and “might enhance motivational value in the form of incentive salience attribution to surroundings and stimuli perceived at the moment, especially to the act of stimulating the electrode and the stimuli that surround it.”⁷¹ If stimulating the electrodes causes a state of “wanting” that settles on the button, there is no desire that I have the feeling caused by pressing the button, and so, on the desire account, no pleasure.

In sum, what matters to Sidgwick is rejection of motivation as the measure of intensity. He moves to desirability. He does not give good reasons to prefer this to desires (if they differ). Desire and desirability play similar roles—for example, they explain how the same feeling can be a pleasure for one person, or at one time, and not for another, by making pleasure depend on the reaction of the person. But here is one (very speculative) reason Sidgwick might offer for favoring desirability.

Some think there is a problem justifying the promotion of pleasure. On simple feeling views, it is unclear why I have a reason to promote this feeling rather than others.⁷² Desire views can explain my reason to promote feelings I desire—unless, as some think, desires do not give reasons.⁷³ Sidgwick may have sympathy for the view that desires do not give reasons. He thinks it is possible for me to have reasons not grounded in my present or future desires.⁷⁴ Whether he also thinks my desires fail to give reasons is unclear.⁷⁵ Suppose he did. He would, then, want some

70. De Lazari-Radek and Singer, *Universe*, 246.

71. Berridge and Kringelbach, “Neuroscience,” 472.

72. See Sobel, “Pain,” 444–46; Heathwood, “Desire-Based,” 93–94; Alston, “Pleasure,” 345–46; Irwin Goldstein, “Why People Prefer Pleasure to Pain,” *Philosophy* 55 (1980): 349–62.

73. See, e.g., Scanlon, *Owe*, 41–49; Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1:73–101; Heathwood, “Desire-Based,” 87–88; Joseph Raz, “Incommensurability and Agency,” in *Engaging Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 46–66; Richard Kraut, “Desires and the Human Good,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 68 (1994): 39–54. Warren Quinn argues that a desire does not give a reason unless it involves the thought that its object is good (“Putting Rationality in Its Place,” in *Morality and Action* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 228–55).

74. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 7–8.

75. De Lazari-Radek and Singer seem to assume that since Sidgwick thinks there are reasons not grounded in present desires, he also thinks that neither present nor future desires give reasons (*Universe*, 44–45).

other account of pleasure that explains why I have a reason to promote it.

Suppose a pleasure is a feeling that, while being felt, appears desirable qua feeling. As with at least some other appearances, this appearance gives a prima facie reason for believing its content.⁷⁶ Provided this appearance is not shown to be untrustworthy, I should conclude that the feeling is desirable and so there is a reason to promote it.

It may be that sometimes, the appearance of desirability does not give a prima facie reason for believing its content. T. M. Scanlon gives the example of its appearing desirable to buy a new computer. Perhaps the appearance of desirability does not give me a prima facie reason to buy one. What would give me a reason are benefits the computer would bring.⁷⁷ But in the case of feelings that, while being felt, appear desirable qua feeling, it is harder to see how I could be mistaken. Unlike with the computer, it is implausible to think that what would give me a reason, and what could show that I am mistaken in thinking that the feeling is desirable, is just how the feeling feels, independent of my reaction to it. And unlike the computer, which is presumably valued instrumentally, in the case of feelings valued as an end one cannot object that they are not valuable because they fail to be instrumental to some further end. As Sidgwick claims, my judgment of the desirability of “each feeling . . . at the time of feeling it . . . must be taken as final.”⁷⁸

Sidgwick thinks that mistakes are possible. The Stoics admit that various experiences appear desirable but hold that the appearance is an illusion. Similarly, some give an evolutionary explanation of why some feelings appear undesirable, claim that they would appear undesirable whether or not they are undesirable, and conclude that the appearance

76. For sample discussions of this claim, see Huemer, *Intuitionism*, 99–101; James Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist,” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 517–49, and “What’s Wrong with Moore’s Argument?” *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 349–78; Elijah Chudnoff, “The Nature of Intuitive Justification,” *Philosophical Studies* 153 (2011): 313–33; and many of the papers in Chris Tucker, ed., *Seemings and Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Graham Oddie identifies desires with appearances of value and then argues that the appearances give defeasible reasons for believing their objects to be valuable (see Oddie, *Value, Reality, and Desire* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2005], 50–57).

77. Scanlon, *Owe*, 43–44.

78. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 398; also 141; *Green*, 130. Sidgwick’s view seems to be that I am authoritative about whether a feeling is desirable, at least absent general worries of the sort noted in the next paragraph. I might be wrong about how desirable a feeling is, since that requires unreliable comparisons with feelings not presently felt. Sidgwick stresses that my mood, my current desires, how easy it is to represent the feeling, the opinions of others—each can introduce error (*Methods*, 7th ed., 128, 144–46, 149). But even here I am authoritative in the sense that “no one is in a position to controvert the preference of the sentient individual” (*Methods*, 7th ed., 128; also 108, 144).

of undesirability is no evidence of undesirability.⁷⁹ But in the case of feelings, we need reasons such as these to distrust the appearance.⁸⁰

Sidgwick, of course, says little of this. The point is that his account of pleasure makes for a tight connection between the nature of pleasure and the desirability of pleasure that alternative accounts lack.

IV

Another interpretation is suggested by Sidgwick's comments on Bain and Spencer. Sidgwick might think that to feel a pleasure is to be motivated to keep that feeling, rather than for the feeling to appear desirable. That is, Bain and Spencer are right about what makes a pleasure a pleasure; they are wrong only about judging intensity. When Sidgwick introduces his appears-desirable view, he notes that this is the definition of pleasure appropriate for "considering its 'strict value' for purposes of quantitative comparison," "*for purposes of measurement.*"⁸¹ He does not describe himself as rejecting the definition that pleasures are feelings that motivate when present. He offers "qualifications and limitations."⁸² In some earlier editions, Sidgwick writes that he has "no doubt that pleasure is a kind of feeling which stimulates the will to actions tending to sustain or produce it."⁸³ He has "accepted this definition as adequate for purposes of distinction"; the qualification concerns "purposes of quantitative comparison."⁸⁴

Sidgwick might, then, say that I experience a pleasure when I am motivated to keep a feeling; once it is settled that I am experiencing a

79. See Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 109–66, 150–51; and Guy Kahane, "Evolution and Impartiality," *Ethics* 124 (2014): 327–41.

80. Both Sobel and David Bain object that thinking that a feeling is desirable cannot make it desirable. But that is not the view: it is thinking that a feeling is desirable and the absence of a debunking explanation of this thought that makes the feeling desirable. See Sobel, "Pain," 446; and David Bain, "What Makes Pains Unpleasant?" *Philosophical Studies* 166 (2013): S69–S89, S80.

81. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 127, emphasis in original.

82. *Ibid.*, 43 n. 1.

83. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 3rd ed., 42, 4th ed., 44. In later editions, "no doubt" is replaced by "I will concede that" (*Methods*, 5th ed., 44; 7th ed., 42).

84. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 3rd ed., 122, 4th ed., 126; also 3rd ed., 42 n. 1, 4th ed. 45 n. 1, 5th ed., 126. Crisp notes that in a paper read just before the publication of the first edition of the *Methods*, Sidgwick glosses "pleasure" as "all kinds of feeling . . . which move the will to maintain them when present, and to produce them when absent" ("Utilitarianism," 4). Crisp suggests that Sidgwick goes on to reject rather than qualify this account of pleasure, though he does not give the reasons I give for thinking this (Crisp, "Pleasure," 33, 33 n. 19). Perhaps Sidgwick writes of "qualifications and limitations" in part because he accepts that "pleasure . . . is normally accompanied by an impulse to prolong the . . . feeling" (*Methods*, 7th ed., 43, my emphasis).

pleasure, its intensity is determined not by my motivation but by appearances of desirability.

This is not, I think, Sidgwick's considered view. He notes that the feeling of being tickled is a feeling "which stimulate[s] strongly to [its] own removal" but is "either not painful at all or only slightly painful."⁸⁵ He does not, then, seem to think that my motivation settles whether I am experiencing a pleasure or pain. And if he did, he would face the odd possibility that a feeling is a pain, say, because I am motivated to remove it, but it has no intensity, since it does not appear undesirable.

V

Here are some objections to Sidgwick.

Too Wide

Sidgwick's account includes many sensations we do not ordinarily take to be pleasant. This is a familiar objection.⁸⁶ Sidgwick admits that "the term Pleasure is not commonly used so as to include clearly all kinds of consciousness which we desire to retain or reproduce: in ordinary usage it suggests too prominently the coarser and commoner kinds of such feelings; and it is difficult even for those who are trying to use it scientifically to free their minds altogether from the associations of ordinary usage, and to mean by Pleasure only Desirable Consciousness or Feeling of whatever kind."⁸⁷ If the difficulty here is too great, Sidgwick can replace "pleasure" with "feeling that appears desirable qua feeling," specifying, as he seems to, that "feelings" are anything in "consciousness."⁸⁸ For normative purposes, there is no reason to pick out as special,

85. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 127.

86. See, e.g., Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 493; Sumner, *Welfare*, 102–3. Both give the reply Sidgwick does (see below) (Parfit, 493–94; Sumner, 109). For the reply, see also L. W. Sumner, "Feldman's Hedonism," in *The Good, the Right, Life and Death*, ed. Kris McDaniel, Richard Feldman, Jason Raibley, and Michael Zimmerman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 88; and, for an especially good statement, Heathwood, "Reduction," 42–44.

87. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 402; also 127.

88. Sometimes, Sidgwick suggests that feelings are just one element in consciousness: "it may be urged that our conscious experience includes besides Feelings, Cognitions and Volitions" (*Methods*, 7th ed., 398). But since he takes the ultimate good to be "desirable consciousness . . . of whatever kind," and equates "desirable consciousness" and "desirable feeling," "feeling" seems to cover anything in consciousness. Cognitions and volitions are "fact[s] of an individual's psychological experience" which can be "considered merely as consciousness"—though Sidgwick thinks that they are "seen to be an element of consciousness quite neutral in respect of desirability" (*Methods*, 7th ed., 398, 399). Their (apparent) desirability lies in their relation to something outside consciousness. Sidgwick might be wrong in his claim that cognitions and volitions considered merely as consciousness are neutral in desirability, but if he is, he can simply add them as one more kind of desirable consciousness.

within consciousness, those instances ordinarily called “pleasures.” It is a strength, rather than a weakness, to (for example) not restrict one’s concern to “sensory” pleasures—often thought of as pleasures to which a bodily location or sensory modality can be ascribed.⁸⁹ If you find some nonsensory pleasure more desirable than some sensory pleasure, I have reason to give you the former.

More generally, although in *Methods* 2.2 Sidgwick engages in the project of finding an account of pleasure that fits our ordinary usage, his overall concern is to find what is good as an end. His position in 3.14 is that feelings that appear desirable qua feelings are the only things good as an end. What we call these—“pleasures” or “welfare” or “enjoyment” or “happiness”—does not matter.⁹⁰

Desirability without Desire

Crisp notes that it “seems possible that I should apprehend a feeling as desirable, and yet not desire it, and it is hard to see how this could be a case of enjoyment.”⁹¹

Sidgwick might give one of two replies.

The first reply is to take seriously the idea that when a feeling is a pleasure, it appears desirable to me, where that is (possibly) different from my desiring it. The appearance of desirability might play the same role in making it the case that I feel a pleasure as desire would. Crisp, understandably, thinks of “apprehending a feeling as desirable” as making a judgment, and (I think) worries that making a judgment does not suffice for pleasure. But if this instead picks out an appearance—I am in a state of its seeming to me that the feeling is desirable—it does not seem implausible that being in that state makes for pleasure.

The second reply is that Sidgwick often moves without comment between desirability and desire. He asks whether I “value” a feeling, whether the feeling is “desirable,” or whether it is the object of my “own real likes and dislikes” as opposed to the likes and dislikes of others.⁹² These phrases seem to be used interchangeably. Similarly, Sidgwick

89. For sensory modality, see Murat Aydede, “How to Unify Theories of Sensory Pleasure: An Adverbialist Proposal,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 5 (2014): 119–33, 120–21. For bodily location, see Fred Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 144. Bizarrely, Feldman treats Sidgwick as a sensory hedonist, rejecting Sidgwick on the ground that nonsensory pleasures matter (24–25, 32–34).

90. This applies to one of the main objections to desire accounts raised by Smuts. Smuts argues that we sometimes desire unpleasant experiences for their own sakes, such as the experience of painful art. I think that, in many of these cases, we are not desiring a feeling qua feeling. But if we are, Sidgwick can say that I have reason to give you these feelings, regardless of whether they would ordinarily be classified as pleasures. See Smuts, “Feels,” 246–49.

91. Roger Crisp, *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105.

92. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 141, 144, 145, 147, 146, 149.

moves from “apprehend to be desirable or preferable” to “the preference of the sentient individual”; from “the preference of feeling valued merely as feeling” to “degrees of desirability”; and from what “moves[s] the will” to “preferableness or desirableness.”⁹³ Sometimes he describes his view as holding that pleasures are “all kinds of consciousness which we desire to retain or reproduce” (quickly glossed as “Desirable Consciousness”).⁹⁴ He sometimes settles questions of what is “judged to be preferable” by simply noting what we “prefer,” what we “really prefer,” or “the real object of preference.”⁹⁵ Perhaps, then, Sidgwick holds an “appearance of the good” view of desire. Or perhaps he thinks that factors which in other cases block an appearance of desirability from being accompanied by a desire are absent in the case of feelings. For example, my future good might appear desirable to me, but since I cannot imagine my future self very well, my desires are for my present self. When the appearance of desirability is of present feelings, that problem does not arise.

(A different possibility is that a feeling appears desirable qua feeling *because* I desire it. When I consider whether a feeling is one that appears good qua feeling, I am not considering whether, say, it is a virtuous feeling. I am not considering it “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.”⁹⁶ Nothing seems to be left for me to consider other than whether I desire it. If Sidgwick thinks this, however, my suggestion that he gives a distinctive argument for the goodness of pleasure fails. Part of the attraction of the argument was that one could give it without thinking that desires give reasons. But if the appearance of desirability of a feeling depends on desiring the feeling, it seems that one must think that desires give reasons.)

Desirability without Pleasure

Hurka and Crisp object that, on Sidgwick’s view, “if someone thinks sensations of blue are desirable [qua sensation], that makes them pleasures even if he has no feeling about them.”⁹⁷ The objection seems to be that

93. *Ibid.*, 128, 129; Sidgwick, “Utilitarianism,” 4.

94. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 402.

95. *Ibid.*, 399. Jamie Mayerfeld writes that it “is natural to suppose that a pleasure that we ‘implicitly apprehend’ to be preferable is one that we, quite simply, prefer. (Sidgwick himself equates the two descriptions in a number of passages, and nowhere does he distinguish between them)” (Mayerfeld, *Suffering and Moral Responsibility* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 20 n. 18).

96. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 131.

97. Hurka, *British*, 196; see also Crisp, “Pleasure,” 34, who specifies that “I do not *enjoy* sensations of blueness any more than sensations of redness”; and Thomas Hurka, “Value Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (New York: Oxford, 2006), 359–60. For the same objection, directed at Feldman, see Labukt, “Tone,” 183–84.

there is no distinct pleasure-feeling. But this is just to insist that a simple feeling view must be true. The success of the objection depends on whether the simple feeling view can avoid the standard criticisms of it; it does not stand alone.

Order of Explanation

One might object to the role played by desirability. We think that a feeling appears desirable because it is pleasurable; it is not pleasurable because it appears desirable.⁹⁸ This order of explanation makes sense if pleasure is a distinctive feeling, but not otherwise.

I do not think that this shows the superiority of the simple feeling view. Say bitter tastes appear desirable. We might ask why, in the sense of asking for a justification. On the view that pleasures are feelings that appear desirable, there is no answer other than to describe the feeling of bitter taste. But the same goes for the simple feeling view. Say the distinctive feeling of pleasure appears desirable. We might ask for a justification. Again there is no answer: I could describe the feeling, but that does no more to justify the appearance than describing the bitter feeling does. At best, justifying the desirability by the simple feeling has the advantage that the same feeling would occur in many justifications—but since, like Sidgwick, many deny that there is any common feeling, this advantage is also a weakness.

Granted, Sidgwick cannot say, with common sense, that a feeling appears desirable “because it is pleasant.” The simple feeling view can say that, even if there is no explanation of why the distinctive pleasure feeling is desirable. But common sense might instead say that a feeling appears desirable “just because I like it” (especially when presented with cases in which the same feeling seems pleasant to one but not to another). Or common sense might describe the aspects of the feeling that make it appear desirable (especially when there is a language for doing so, as in wine tasting). It is not clear that common sense is so fine-tuned as to be interpreted as saying “the feeling is desirable because it is pleasant” where this is taken to be a clearly different claim than “the feeling is desirable just because I like it” or “the feeling is desirable because it (say) involves a bitter taste.”

98. Smuts, Aydede, and Goldstein give this objection against the view that a feeling is made a pleasure by my desiring it (Smuts, “Feels,” 249–50; Aydede, “Sensory,” 125; Goldstein, “Prefer,” 352–53); Sobel, “Varieties,” 254, gives it against adverbial views of pleasure. It could equally well be directed at the appears-desirable view, as it is by D. Bain, “Unpleasant,” S80–S81 (though Bain sees the worry as self-verification—see n. 80 above). For different replies, see Heathwood, “Reduction,” 38–40; and Rachels, “Unpleasantness,” 192.

Mistakes

Crisp notes that “there is a question why the judgment of the sentient individual should be taken as final, since value judgments can be false.” Crisp replies that Sidgwick “allows that an individual may be mistaken as to the value of a feeling if she is considering it, for example, in the light of its ‘objective conditions.’”⁹⁹ But this implies that Sidgwick does not allow that I can be mistaken about the value of a feeling qua feeling. If that is a value judgment, and value judgments can be false, the question remains.

If, however, Sidgwick’s view is that pleasures are feelings that appear desirable, this worry disappears. I can be wrong about whether feelings that appear desirable really are desirable (the Stoic thinks I am wrong). So I can be wrong when I make that value judgment.¹⁰⁰

Animals

Sidgwick never worries about whether, on his account, animals feel pleasure. He supposes, without argument, that they do.¹⁰¹ One might worry that feelings do not appear good to animals, since animals do not have the concept “good” or “desirable.”¹⁰²

When Sidgwick introduces his account, he writes that a pleasure is “a feeling which, when experienced by intelligent beings, is at least implicitly apprehended as desirable.”¹⁰³ This suggests either that what makes a feeling a pleasure for an animal is something different, or that animal pleasure is a feeling that, were it felt by an “intelligent being,” would appear desirable. The second option is unattractive. Making my dog’s pleasure depend on what I would find desirable (were I an intelligent dog) has the problem faced by the hypothetical desire account:

99. Crisp, “Pleasure,” 35.

100. Hurka makes the related charge that “contrary to the spirit of Sidgwick’s realism, [the view] makes some judgments of value, given one further assumption, self-validating. Imagine that you judge a certain feeling to be desirable. . . . That makes the feeling a pleasure; and given the hedonist thesis that pleasure is good, it makes the feeling in fact desirable. But surely he did not believe thinking something good can make it so” (*British*, 196). I do not see why Sidgwick would reject this result. Thinking a feeling is good does not by itself make it so; one must argue in addition that pleasure is good.

101. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 414.

102. Hurka, Labukt, and Crisp raise this worry. Crisp suggests that Sidgwick could reply that animals in a sense make judgments of goodness or that animals would (if they were capable) judge some feelings to be good (Hurka, *British*, 196; Labukt, “Tone,” 190; Crisp, *Cosmos*, 68, *Reasons*, 105, and “Pleasure,” 34). For three developments of the former possibility, see Tenenbaum, *Appearances*, 246–48; Hawkins, “Desiring” (which concerns infants rather than animals); and Moss, *Aristotle*, chap. 2.

103. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 127.

my dog's pleasure should depend on something occurring in her at the time of having the feeling. Perhaps, then, Sidgwick should offer different accounts for "intelligent beings" and animals. But it is worth seeing whether his account could apply to animals.

When a feeling appears desirable to me, the feeling appears to count in favor of doing what would promote it. The "count in favor" relation seems available to animals that (presumably) cannot think about goodness or desirability as we do. It does not seem far-fetched to say that when my dog dances around me, tail wagging, as I put her food down, and then consumes it with amazing rapidity, she takes the feeling of eating to count in favor of eating. When she hesitates between coming in response to my call and eating some frozen poop, she seems to be torn between states that she takes to count in favor of opposed actions. When I find her lying beside the destroyed pillow "looking guilty," she seems to feel that there were things that counted in favor of not destroying the pillow. Perhaps, then, there is a "count in favor of" relation common between species. This is compatible with thinking that there are differences in how it is manifested—simpler species than dogs may be limited to "going for" a thing—and in how it can be represented.¹⁰⁴

(I think this reply helps with another objection. Crisp objects that someone "in the flow" of some activity is not thinking of the activity as desirable but is feeling pleasure.¹⁰⁵ We might say of someone in the flow that she takes the activity to count in favor of continuing it, even if she does not think this explicitly.)

Intrinsic Goodness

Fred Feldman objects that "Sidgwickian" accounts cannot make sense of how pleasure is intrinsically good. The feelings are supposed to be good in virtue of their own natures, but on the accounts, they are good in virtue of the attitude taken to them.¹⁰⁶ But this involves two confusions. The first is that there is no Moorean fussing about intrinsic value in Sidgwick. His claim is that pleasure is "ultimately" good, by which he means good as an end rather than merely as a means. There is no difficulty in thinking that {a feeling toward which I have a certain attitude} can be good as an end. The second is that Feldman's argument depends on taking the feeling by itself to be intrinsically good. If what is intrinsically good is {a feeling toward which I have a certain attitude}, *that* is good in virtue of its own nature rather than in virtue of the attitude taken to it.

104. For similar suggestions, see Hawkins, "Desiring"; and Street, "Darwinian," 146.

105. Crisp, "Pleasure," 34.

106. Feldman, "Intrinsic," 456.

Undesirable Pleasures

Stuart Rachels raises an objection to the view that pleasures are feelings liked qua feelings. The objection could also be directed at Sidgwick's view that pleasures are feelings that appear good qua feelings: "Suppose you are in ecstasy, but then your pleasure plummets to a level only mildly pleasant. Of course, you will dislike no longer being in ecstasy, but mightn't you also dislike the mildly pleasurable state—resent it, as it were, for being so mild?"¹⁰⁷ Since attitudes can be skewed by prior states, they are a bad guide to intensity.

It is not clear, however, that Rachels should assume that the feeling is mildly pleasant. Presumably it is a feeling that is, in most contexts, pleasant (and liked); but here I resent it, so it is odd to say that it is a pleasure.

Rachels's strategy here—common in the pleasure literature—is to stipulate that some feeling is a pleasure and then note that some theory of pleasure is refuted since it does not capture this judgment. This strategy is fine in cases of clear pleasures—if my theory of pleasure says that some feeling, seen by everyone as a pleasure, is not a pleasure, my theory is refuted. But the strategy is dubious when we are not sure what to say about the feeling—on the one hand, I resent having it; on the other hand, in most contexts, I would like it.¹⁰⁸

It is also worth separating two projects. One project concerns whether a past or present feeling is a pleasure of a certain intensity. Another—which is Sidgwick's ultimate aim—concerns whether I should aim at having some feeling in the future. As Sidgwick notes, "what we require for practical guidance is to estimate not individual past experiences, but the value of a kind of pleasure, as obtained under certain circumstances or conditions."¹⁰⁹ In the example, it is plausible to say that although the feeling is not a pleasure when felt in the context Rachels gives, the feeling is one I should aim at having in the future, given the rarity of this context.

Ascetics

Feldman, and Aaron Smuts, take it to be an "obvious counterexampl[e]" to Sidgwick that a "committed ascetic may take pleasure from being tossed into a warm bath on a cold morning, but he might not think that the experience is desirable. Given his ascetic commitments, he might prefer to have remained cold."¹¹⁰ As the Stoic passage shows, Sidgwick's view

107. Rachels, "Unpleasantness," 194.

108. Thanks to Joyce Jenkins for this point.

109. Sidgwick, *Methods*, 7th ed., 147.

110. I quote from Smuts, "Feels," 243. Feldman, "Questions," 66, makes the same objection. Sumner directs the ascetic example against Feldman (Sumner, "Feldman," 87). Crisp directs the same sort of example against linking pleasure and desire (*Reasons*, 107 n. 38).

is that the experience appears desirable—which makes it a pleasure—while on reflection the Stoic thinks it is not desirable.¹¹¹ Feldman also makes the converse objection: I might judge my painful feeling of anger directed at an undeserved pain to be good, without its being a pleasure.¹¹² Presumably, however, it does not appear good qua feeling, but rather as virtuous. Feldman takes the example from Moore, who gives it as an instance of virtue.¹¹³

Feldman and Crisp also object that I might (briefly) desire an experience of pain for the novelty of the experience.¹¹⁴ One might reply that the experience is both pleasurable and painful. Crisp stipulates that there is no pleasure taken in the novelty, but it is not clear that the stipulation must be accepted, given that I welcome the experience. It seems another case in which—when not in the grip of a theory that either makes desire irrelevant or decisive—we are unsure what to say. The reply given to Rachels also seems applicable here: Sidgwick could say that the feeling is pleasant, in this context, but is painful in most contexts.

To some of the objections, Sidgwick's reply to Too Wide is also applicable. Sidgwick's point is that he includes feelings not ordinarily seen as pleasures. What matters is the appearance of desirability. The point fits Desirability without Desire, Desirability without Pleasure, and

111. Oddly, Smuts also thinks that it is only later advocates of desire views who restrict the object of desire to the feeling, rather than including "objective conditions or consequences" ("Feels," 244). As a result, he objects to Sidgwick that one might take pleasure from a wine "but when the price is revealed she might not find the experience desirable, since it might interfere with her ability to appreciate the Two Buck Chuck she is currently satisfied with." Similarly, "a reluctant sadist may take pleasure in the cries of injured children, but wish that he were not the kind of person that enjoyed the suffering of others" (244). Drinking the wine and hearing the cries are pleasures because the experiences qua experiences seem desirable, even if considerations apart from the experiences make them on balance (or wholly) undesirable. The Stoic passage also shows how Sidgwick could reply to the objection that his account makes it impossible to find desirable (or desire) pain (for the objection, see Goldstein, "Prefer," 351). I can find desirable (or desire) the state of affairs in which I have a feeling I implicitly judge to be undesirable (or do not desire).

112. Feldman, "Questions," 66.

113. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 217. Smuts and Carson object with a case in which "someone takes pleasure in another person's misfortune but regards her own pleasure in this as inappropriate and shameful. She does not believe that her feeling is desirable and does not experience it as desirable" (Carson, *Value* 31; see also Smuts, "Feels," 244). Again, she seems not to respond to the feeling qua feeling, but rather to whether the feeling is virtuous.

114. Fred Feldman, Review of *Value and the Good Life*, by T. L. Carson, *Ethics* 112 (2002): 604–7, 605; Crisp, *Reasons*, 107. The objection is directed against desire views, but again could equally well be directed at the appears-desirable view. Similarly, Sumner objects that feelings desired because they are "interesting" need not be pleasant. See L. W. Sumner, Review of *Utilitarianism, Hedonism, and Desert*, by Fred Feldman, *Ethics* 109 (1998): 176–79, 177.

Undesirable Pleasures. If a feeling appears desirable qua feeling, then even if I do not desire it, or (as with the blue sensation) it is not ordinarily seen as a pleasure, others have reason to give me the feeling. If a feeling appears undesirable qua feeling (such as the post-ecstasy mild pleasure), and others can give me a feeling that will not appear undesirable, they have reason to do so, regardless of whether the feeling that appears undesirable is ordinarily seen as a pleasure. I have argued that Sidgwick's account of pleasure is defensible. But even if these objections show that it is not, that is irrelevant to the main project of picking out which mental states are normatively significant.

VI

Classical utilitarians need an account of pleasure and pain. So do those who think there are (among other duties) duties of beneficence and nonmaleficence (at least if pleasure and pain are parts of one's good). Even those who deny the need for a theory of well-being and a duty of beneficence aimed at well-being think that facts about pleasure and pain give reasons.¹¹⁵ Those interested in what is good as an end, or in well-being, also need an account of pleasure, even if they give arguments against pleasure as the only end or only source of well-being.

Sidgwick's view, on which pleasures are feelings that appear desirable qua feelings, is a distinctive contribution to the debate about the nature of pleasure. I have argued that it avoids the criticisms directed at it. It also seems superior to some contemporary views. For example, it avoids the objection to the simple feeling view that different pleasures have no common feel, fares no worse than the simple feeling view in terms of explanatory order, and explains, as the simple feeling view does not, how pleasure and pain are opposed. Nor does it make normatively irrelevant distinctions between elements of consciousness commonly called "pleasures" and other elements of consciousness that appear desirable.

Sidgwick does not consider the reply to the no-common-feel objection given (for example) by Broad, Crisp, and Smuts: pleasures involve both a feeling which differs from case to case (for example, the feeling of a hot shower and the feeling of eating bitter chocolate) and a common "tone" attached to the feeling.¹¹⁶ The tone view explains why there is no pleasure-feeling felt by itself. It does not explain why it seems to Sidgwick, and many others, that there is no common feeling, nor how

115. Scanlon, *Owe*, 112, 123, 124, 126–27, 130, 131, 134, 139.

116. Broad, *Five Types*, 229–30; Crisp, *Reasons*, 108–10; Smuts, "Feels," 254–62. For other recent statements, see Aydede, "Sensory"; and Labukt, "Tone."

pleasure and pain are opposed. At best, it suggests that, struck by the differences in the feelings, we overlook what they have in common.¹¹⁷

I have argued that Sidgwick does not give good reasons for preferring his view to the view that pleasures are feelings that are desired qua feelings. But I have suggested a possible advantage: Sidgwick's view allows an argument, from the nature of pleasure to its desirability, that one can make even if one does not think desires give reasons. Sidgwick's view should be attractive to those, such as Scanlon, Parfit, and Heathwood, who make the latter claim.

117. Smuts adds that we are bad at recalling and describing experiences ("Feels," 256–57), but that seems to undercut whatever phenomenological evidence there was in favor of the tone view.