

PLEASANT AND UNPLEASANT FEELING

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ABSTRACT

BEN BRAMBLE: Pleasant and Unpleasant Feeling

(Under the direction of Geoff Sayre-McCord)

This thesis is a defence of two views about the nature of pleasant and unpleasant feeling: (1) *The Fallibility Thesis*, according to which we can believe we're experiencing pleasant or unpleasant feeling (or that we're not), and be wrong; and (2) *The Sensation Thesis*, according to which pleasant and unpleasant feeling are two particular sensations.

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1. Introduction

What is it for a feeling or experience to be pleasant, or to feel good? And what is it for one to be unpleasant, or to feel bad? I will defend two claims:

1. *The Fallibility Thesis*: that we can believe we're experiencing pleasant or unpleasant feeling (or that we're not), and be wrong; and
2. *The Sensation Thesis*: that pleasant and unpleasant feeling are two particular sensations.

The fallibility thesis will be important in my argument for the sensation thesis.

2. The Fallibility Thesis

It seems clear we can experience pleasant and unpleasant feeling *without believing we're experiencing it*. We might, for example, be so absorbed in an activity (say, in reading a book) that we notice neither how much we're enjoying ourselves, nor that we're starting to get unpleasantly cold. Even painful feelings (i.e., those that *hurt*), it seems, can go on in us without our being aware of them. It might take us some moments to register the return of our headache. Or we might be so distracted by some thought or event (e.g., all our *other* pains), that we just fail to notice we're hurting in some new way. Or a pain might come to us in dreamless sleep, as suggested by the fact that such pains can wake us up.¹ Such pains are genuine conscious states. There is 'something that it is like' to be having them. It's just that we aren't aware that we're having them. Given the kind of creatures we are, it's tremendously likely that if we're suffering intensely or experiencing great pleasure, we'll be aware of it. But even in the human case, this doesn't seem guaranteed. Not only can we mistake the degree of pleasantness (or unpleasantness) of a given pleasant (or unpleasant) feeling we're having, we can fail altogether to realise we're having it, and this regardless of how pleasant or unpleasant it is. *Our minds might simply be elsewhere*. Let us call pleasant and unpleasant feeling that we're having without believing we're having it 'background' pleasant and unpleasant feeling.

¹ See Dartnall (2001).

But can we believe we're experiencing pleasant or unpleasant feeling (or that we're not), and be *wrong*? Yes. We might, for example, think we're about to feel an intense pain, and so when the moment comes, let out a shriek, fully believing that we're hurting badly, before discovering that it was just a ruse, or that the dentist hasn't turned on his drill yet. Such experiences will be unpleasant, but might fail to be genuinely painful. Or perhaps we have been told by everyone that a certain food (say, caviar) is delicious. And so, upon trying it for the first time, we think that, indeed, it tastes good. But after having it again and again, we might discover (to our embarrassment) that we'd been wrong, and for us it is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Or imagine a hypochondriac who exclaims (sincerely) "It hurts! It hurts!" We might say to him (scoldingly), "Oh, don't be silly, it *doesn't* hurt!". Perhaps (due to his cosseted upbringing) he just doesn't understand the meaning of pain. But perhaps, though understanding perfectly well what counts as his hurting, he has a tendency on certain occasions to misjudge. Given the kind of creatures we are, if we think we're feeling good or bad in some way, we probably are. But this isn't guaranteed. We might believe we're in agony, or ecstasy, and be wrong.

Can we believe we're *not* experiencing pleasant or unpleasant feeling, and be wrong? Gently touch your own arm. Is the experience (affectively) neutral? Or is it ever so slightly pleasant? It might be difficult to tell. You might have to *guess*. And you might guess wrong (something you might discover after doing it over and over, each time with increasing appreciation of the feeling it gives you). Or imagine some brave soul who (in full sincerity) denies he is hurting, when we know – from what he is undergoing, or the expression on his face – that he must be. Or imagine a priest on a censorship board who sincerely denies enjoying reading some erotic fiction, when we can tell (perhaps from his

devotion to the task) that he clearly is enjoying it. Or imagine we get lost on a trip with our friend, believing throughout that the trip has been a disaster, that we're having a lousy time, etc. Later on, we might think, reflecting on our adventure, "Gosh, that was actually the most enjoyable weekend I've had in a long time". Or imagine a slave, or an oppressed worker, who thinks he's feeling fine, when he has really just gotten used to being miserable. Or imagine you're sitting in a room when suddenly the air conditioner (which you hadn't even realised was on) switches off. You might experience this as pleasant, suggesting that beforehand the air conditioner's background hum was causing you some unpleasant feeling. This could be true even if, at the time, you'd have sworn you were feeling fine. Or imagine you have to live in an apartment with a musty odour, constant street noise, and hideous wallpaper. You might get used to living there, so much so that one day you report that you don't find the environment unpleasant anymore. Still, we might suspect, perhaps from your general irritability, that it really is still making you feel bad (albeit perhaps to a reduced degree). Finally, imagine (if you can) being transported into a younger body. Again, you might experience the transition as highly pleasant, suggesting that beforehand you were feeling certain unpleasant feelings (e.g., of lethargy), ones that, at the time, you might have failed to detect by introspection. Let us call pleasant and unpleasant feeling that we're having despite believing we're not having it 'hidden' background pleasant and unpleasant feeling.

Only if we're fully aware of what a feeling or experience we're having is like are we infallible in our judgements about its degree of pleasantness and unpleasantness.

3. The Sensation Thesis

The sensation thesis is the view that pleasant and unpleasant feeling are two particular *sensations*, undefinable in their simplicity, and more or less present in our experiences at various times – like sweetness, or warmth, for example. We might call them ‘*the pleasant sensation*’, and ‘*the unpleasant sensation*’. According to this view, experiences other than the pleasant and unpleasant sensations get to count as pleasant (or unpleasant) if and only if (and to the extent that) they contain the pleasant (or the unpleasant) feeling. What’s pleasant in a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter, for example, is not *the taste of peanut butter* (which itself is affectively neutral), but rather the very same thing as what’s pleasant in, say, a pleasant experience of listening to Beethoven’s fifth symphony.

Rivals to the sensation thesis include:

1. The *preference* theory, according to which pleasant feeling is any feeling that is liked, and unpleasant feeling any that is disliked²;

² Some preference theorists add to “liked” or “disliked” “at the time of experience”, “by the experiencing agent”, “merely as feeling”, or “for its own sake”. But these additions are unnecessary. Is it really possible to *like* a past or future experience of our own? Or to *like* somebody else’s experience? Or to *like* an experience for something other than its phenomenology? We might like *that* we’re having a certain experience (i.e., believe that it’s good we’re having it), but to like an *experience* itself seems to imply that it is ours, and that we’re liking it at the time of experience, for nothing besides its phenomenology. Preference theorists include Parfit (1984), and Hall (1989).

2. The *motivation* theory, according to which pleasant feeling is any feeling we want (or are disposed) to continue, and unpleasant feeling any we want (or are disposed) to avoid³;

3. A form of *representationalism*, according to which unpleasant feelings are those that represent bodily damage in ourselves (and pleasant feelings those that represent bodily health?)⁴.

There are also views according to which pleasant and unpleasant feelings or experiences are not feelings or experiences at all, but rather, for example, *activities*, or *attitudes*.

Gilbert Ryle, for instance, argued that ‘pleasure’ refers to heedfully performed activities.

He writes:

To say that a person has been enjoying digging is not to say that he has been both digging and doing or experiencing something else as a concomitant or effect of the digging...his digging was the pleasure, and not a vehicle of his pleasure.⁵

This is reminiscent of Aristotle’s account of pleasure (in *NE* Book VII) as the unimpeded conduct of activities. Others, like Fred Feldman, think that pleasure is a certain *propositional attitude* itself.

I won’t discuss these latter views, as they seem to be changing the subject. Even if pleasant and unpleasant feeling are not two particular sensations, they are at least *feelings* or *experiences* – i.e., there is ‘something that it is like’ to be having them, even if there is nothing *distinctive* that it is like.

³ See Korsgaard (1996), and Brandt (1979).

⁴ See, most notably, Tye (1995).

⁵ See Ryle (1949).

Let's begin by looking at the preference theory. It has an immediate appeal, as, at first glance, it seems obvious that we necessarily like pleasant feelings and dislike unpleasant ones. What is it that the taste of peanut butter, the sound of Beethoven's fifth symphony, the sight of a beautiful landscape, and the experience of having a back massage, all have in common (when they are pleasant)? Nothing other than that they are *liked*, it might seem. The preference theory has no trouble in accommodating the vast diversity of our pleasant experiences, and this is a considerable asset.

But is it really true that we necessarily like pleasant feelings and dislike unpleasant ones? Unfortunately for preference theorists, it seems not. We can have pleasant feeling we fail to like, and unpleasant feeling we fail to dislike. This is clear when we consider: (a) pleasant and unpleasant feeling can occur in us without our being aware of it (see my discussion of the fallibility thesis above), and (b) we can't possibly like or dislike feelings that we aren't even aware of. Moreover, it seems we can actually *like* unpleasant feeling, and *dislike* pleasant feeling – for we might mistakenly believe of a given unpleasant feeling we're having that it's pleasant, or of a given pleasant feeling we're having that it's unpleasant. To like (or dislike) a feeling, it seems to me, is not for it to *be* pleasant (or unpleasant), but for us to *believe* that it is pleasant (or unpleasant). On this view, only somebody who is fully aware of what he is feeling is guaranteed to like pleasant feeling, and to dislike unpleasant feeling. This theory of what it is to like (or dislike) a given experience preserves what is intuitive in the preference theory, without committing us to thinking that pleasant feeling is necessarily liked, and unpleasant feeling necessarily disliked. Of course, it doesn't provide us with a theory of pleasant and unpleasant feeling. That somebody is fully aware of what he is feeling, and likes it,

entails that it is pleasant, but there might conceivably be pleasant feeling that we cannot become fully aware of. This is because becoming aware of an experience inevitably changes what it is like – certainly in the case of pleasant and unpleasant feeling.⁶ Becoming aware that we're enjoying ourselves can (depending on the activity) heighten, or completely remove, our enjoyment. It is for this reason also that we cannot save the preference theory by simply turning it into an *ideal* preference theory, according to which a feeling is pleasant (or unpleasant) just if it *would* be liked (or disliked) *were* the experiencing agent fully aware of it.

Some philosophers might argue against the theory I have given of what it is to like (or dislike) a given experience that (even fully aware of what we're feeling) we can like unpleasant feeling, or dislike pleasant feeling. They might point, for example, to masochists, as examples of people who like unpleasant feeling. But even masochists, it seems, are not people who (fully aware of what they're feeling) like unpleasant feeling – rather, they are people for whom certain kinds of unpleasant feeling cause *pleasant* feeling, and it is this pleasant feeling they like. (They may like *that* they are in pain – perhaps because it causes them pleasure. But this is not the same as their being fully aware of what they're feeling and liking the *pain*.) Masochists, after all, are presumably people who (upon being whipped or whatever) *feel good*.

The fallibility thesis can also be wielded against the motivation theory. We might be having a pleasant (or unpleasant) feeling, and yet fail to desire its continuation (or avoidance), or have any dispositions with regard to it, simply because *we lack any awareness of it whatever*. Moreover, those who are fully aware of what they're

⁶ Rachels (2000).

experiencing can, it seems, be content that a certain pleasure of theirs has run its course (e.g., the pleasure of a satisfying meal).

Finally, what of representationalism? The problem with it is that it seems there can be unpleasant feeling (even pains) that are neither caused by bodily damage, nor accompanied by beliefs that our body has been damaged. As Rachels notes, ‘cortical stimulation suffices for unpleasant feeling...[and] sorrows and anxieties often accompany worries about others only’⁷.

I’ll now give my argument for the sensation thesis. It goes like this:

1. There can be no change in the pleasantness or unpleasantness of an experience without some change in its phenomenology (i.e., its felt quality).
2. If there can be no change in the pleasantness or unpleasantness of an experience without some change in its phenomenology, then the sensation thesis is true.

Therefore,

3. The sensation thesis is true.

Let’s start with premise (1). Think of an unpleasant experience you’ve had – a migraine, nausea, having your teeth drilled at the dentist, or whatever. Now focus on just the phenomenology of that experience. Can you imagine somebody’s having precisely *that* phenomenology (and being fully aware of it), and its being *pleasant* for him (or his *liking* it)? I bet you can’t. Anyone who has precisely the same phenomenology that I do when

⁷ Rachels (2000).

having my teeth drilled (assuming he is fully aware of it) *must*, it seems to me, dislike it. No creature who is fully aware of this phenomenology in himself, no matter how bizarrely wired he is, could fail to dislike it, let alone like it. If you don't mind having your teeth drilled, or actively enjoy the experience, then it simply couldn't be that your experience is (now thinking of what I experience in the dentist's chair) like *that* (assuming you're fully aware of it). Similarly, take a pleasant experience you've had – a back massage, a cold drink on a hot day, a view from the top of a mountain, or whatever – focus on just its phenomenology, and then try to imagine giving precisely this phenomenology (plus full awareness of it) to somebody who turns out *not* to like it. Again, I bet you'll fail. Of course, some people don't like back massages, don't mind turbulence, etc. But presumably these are people for whom experiences of back massages and turbulence typically involve different *phenomenology* to what they do for most of us (or else these people aren't fully aware of what they're experiencing).

Feldman thinks he can imagine certain kinds of brain surgery, drugs, and even counseling, that could change the pleasantness of a person's experience without changing its phenomenology. Analgesics, for instance, he says, relieve unpleasantness by helping people to not *dislike* their experiences of pain so much, rather than by altering their phenomenology. He cites patients who take analgesics as saying things like: 'It *feels* just the same, but it doesn't *bother* me any more.'⁸ R.M. Hare points to masochists and Indian fakirs as evidence against the first premise. Fakirs, he says, feel exactly what we do when they lie on beds of nails, only they don't *mind* the feeling so much, and so it isn't unpleasant to them. Similarly, masochists feel just what we do when we whip ourselves,

⁸ Feldman (2004).

but for them the experience is positively pleasant, because they *like* this very same experience that the rest of us dislike.⁹ Finally, Roger Trigg has argued against the first premise by reference to acquired tastes. Trigg thinks that when a certain food that used to be unpleasant to somebody starts to become pleasant to him, the phenomenology of eating it mightn't have changed one bit – it's sufficient that his *tastes* have changed.¹⁰

I think Feldman, Hare, and Trigg are all wrong. Analgesics reduce unpleasantness by changing what we *feel* (i.e., our phenomenology). Why is it helpful to get people drunk before pulling their teeth? Because when we're drunk, having our teeth pulled *feels* very different to what it does when we're sober (i.e., less painful). And fakirs do not feel just what we do when they lie on beds of nails. It's not that they have trained themselves to somehow not *mind* the feeling that the rest of us get when we lie on beds of nails. What they have rather trained themselves to do is to *not feel it* (either by blocking it out, or 'transcending' it via meditation, or else possibly by deadening the nerves in their backs). Or perhaps what they've learned is merely the art of faking it, or extreme self-restraint. Or maybe they manage to lose awareness of what they're feeling, and in this way fail to dislike it. Whatever the explanation, it isn't that they feel just what we do, and (fully aware of it) don't mind it. As for masochists, they are people for whom painful experience causes *pleasant* feeling. They feel a certain amount of pain, but feel a whole lot of something else in addition, namely *pleasant feeling*, which is something the rest of us do not generally feel upon whipping ourselves. And it is only in virtue of this something else that their experience counts as pleasant.

⁹ Hare (1972).

¹⁰ Trigg (1970).

Finally, concerning ‘acquired tastes’, isn’t it more plausible to think that when the experience of, say, drinking beer starts to become pleasant to somebody who used to find it unpleasant, what’s happening is that this person’s experience of drinking beer is *itself* changing (and not merely his *attitude* to what is remaining an identical experience)? As Rachels says, ‘As a child, I despised crunchy peanut butter; now I like it, and I think my peanut butter experience itself has changed.’¹¹ Of course there is *something* – and something *significant* – the same about the phenomenology Rachels has when he eats peanut butter thesedays compared to when he was a kid – i.e., the distinctive *taste* of peanut butter. But he seems clearly right that there must also be something significantly different about it. The experience couldn’t be *exactly* the same for him now as it was for him then, given his change in preference (assuming full awareness).

When we acquire a taste, take a panadol, get drunk, or meditate, our *phenomenology changes*. There is something retained of the initial phenomenology (perhaps even a great deal of it), but an important part of it has changed, and it is this change that is responsible for its altered degree of pleasantness, or unpleasantness.

Let’s now turn to premise two of my argument for the sensation thesis (i.e., that if there can be no change in the pleasantness or unpleasantness of an experience without a change in its phenomenology, then the sensation thesis is true).

If there can be no change in the pleasantness or unpleasantness of an experience without a change in its phenomenology, there are several possibilities. One we can immediately discard is that (in general) what’s pleasant in a pleasant experience of X is *the experience of X* – e.g., that what’s pleasant in a pleasant experience of eating peanut

¹¹ Rachels (2000)

butter is the *taste* of the peanut butter, in a pleasant experience of listening to Beethoven's fifth symphony the *sound* of the symphony, in a pleasant experience of watching the sun set the *sight* of the setting sun, etc. If John enjoys peanut butter and Mary doesn't, it isn't that peanut butter necessarily *tastes* different to each of them. It isn't that 'the taste of peanut butter' actually refers to a *set* of distinct tastes (some intrinsically pleasant, some intrinsically unpleasant, and some neither) that are related by being appropriately similar. Rather, *there is a distinctive peanut buttery taste common to both pleasant and unpleasant experiences of eating peanut butter*. Likewise, if Betsy enjoys listening to a recording of Beethoven's fifth and Charlie doesn't, then the recording doesn't necessarily *sound* different to each of them. It might sound exactly the same to each of them, while Betsy enjoys it, and Charlie doesn't.

Of course, when we eat a lot of a certain food, or listen often to a piece of music, the taste or sound of it can change for us (as, for example, when we become better acquainted with it). But it seems that somebody can be very well acquainted with Beethoven, or with peanut butter, and yet fail to get any pleasure from them at all.

So, what's pleasant in a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter, or listening to Beethoven, is something in the experience *additional* to, or *distinct* from, the taste of the peanut butter, or the sound of the symphony, something that is (at least in principle) separable from the rest of the experience in question.¹² What is this additional thing?

There are two possibilities:

¹² There may be other possibilities, like Shelly Kagan's view that pleasantness and unpleasantness are two *dimensions* – comparable to volume – along which experiences can vary. Kagan's view, however, doesn't seem to work. See Crisp, 2006.

1. *The* pleasant sensation (i.e., a particular sensation common to all pleasant experiences, in virtue of which they count as pleasant), or
2. Merely *a* pleasant sensation (i.e., one of a *set* of pleasant sensations, related to each other by, say, family resemblance, inclusion of any of which in an experience will make it count as pleasant¹³).

Philosophers have generally found the latter more plausible, as it is thought to better accommodate the vast diversity of pleasant experience. The former entails that there is ‘a common feel’ to all pleasant (and unpleasant) experiences, and this is considered implausible.¹⁴ Parfit says

Compare the pleasures of satisfying an intense thirst or lust, listening to music, solving an intellectual problem, reading a tragedy, and knowing that one’s child is happy...[They] do not contain any distinctive common quality.¹⁵

And Feldman writes:

Consider the warm, dry, slightly drowsy feeling of pleasure that you get while sunbathing on a quiet beach. By way of contrast, consider the cool, wet, invigorating feeling of pleasure that you get when drinking some cold, refreshing beer on a hot day...They do not feel at all alike.¹⁶

¹³ Sprigge (1988) formulates this relation as that of different shades of a particular colour to each other.

¹⁴ There have been notable exceptions, though. Broad (1930), for instance, says: ‘I do not think that “pleasantness” can be defined, or even described unambiguously by reference to its relations to desire. But I think we can give a fairly satisfactory ostensive definition of it as that characteristic which is common to the experience of smelling roses, of tasting chocolate, of requited affection, and so on, and which is opposed to the characteristic which is common to the experiences of smelling sulphuretted hydrogen, of hearing a squeaky slate-pencil, of being burnt, of unrequited affection, and so on.’

¹⁵ Parfit (1984).

¹⁶ Feldman (2004).

But do we really need to posit a diversity of intrinsically pleasant sensations to explain the undeniable diversity of pleasant experiences? We saw just now that if the first premise of my argument for the sensation thesis is true, what's pleasant in a pleasant experience of X isn't (generally speaking) *the experience of X*, as we can imagine somebody's having the experience of X without its being pleasant. Thus, if the first premise is true, we have at our disposal, in explaining the vast diversity of pleasant experience, the vast diversity of the *affectively neutral* component in pleasant experiences (e.g., the taste of peanut butter, the sound of the symphony, etc.). Moreover, were there just a single pleasant sensation, it might occur (across diverse pleasant experiences) in different intensities, durations, sensory locations, distributions, and patterns of delivery, and this might account for what remains of the diversity. Given all this, *why think that there is a diversity of pleasant feeling?* To do so would seem to violate Ockham's razor (i.e. the rule against multiplying entities beyond necessity).

Consider a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter, and one of listening to Beethoven's fifth. The former is, of course, phenomenologically *very* different to the latter. But this is (at least in part) because it is *an experience of eating peanut butter*, while the latter is *an experience of listening to Beethoven's fifth*. Once it has been granted that what's pleasant in a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter is something other than the taste of peanut butter, and what's pleasant in a pleasant experience of listening to Beethoven's fifth is something other than the sound of Beethoven's fifth, and once we consider the different intensities, durations, sensory locations, distributions, and patterns of delivery in which a single pleasant sensation might occur, why think that what's pleasant in each is something different? Unless we can clearly imagine the pleasant

sensation in a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter *as different* from the pleasant sensation in a pleasant experience of listening to Beethoven, we have no cause to think (at least not from reflecting on the diversity of pleasant experience) that what's pleasant in each is a different sensation. (If you think you *can* clearly imagine this, try to imagine how these pleasant experiences would change were you to *swap* what is pleasant in each. What would a pleasant experience of listening to Beethoven be like if what was pleasant in it happened on some occasion to be that which is more commonly what is pleasant in a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter. *This* imaginative feat, I would suggest, clearly cannot be performed.)

Of course, none of this is decisive proof that what's pleasant in these diverse pleasant experiences is the same sensation. But it does seem to firmly place the burden on my opponent to provide some clear-cut reason for thinking, for example, that what's pleasant in a pleasant experience of eating peanut butter is different to what's pleasant in a pleasant experience of listening to Beethoven.

Here is another reason for thinking that there is just one pleasant sensation: Suppose there really were two different pleasant sensations, sensation A and sensation B. Suppose sensation A is what's pleasant in pleasant auditory experiences, and sensation B is what's pleasant in pleasant gustatory experiences. By hypothesis, though sensations A and B might be phenomenologically similar, there is no 'common feel' to them (at least none that is what's pleasant in them). Now suppose that we were feeling a certain amount of each of these sensations. My question is: how could we determine which amount was *more* pleasant? We couldn't appeal to which we prefer, as we might not be aware of the sensations in question, and can't be said to like or prefer feelings we aren't even aware

of. Nor can we say that the one is more pleasant which we *would* prefer *were we fully aware of them both*. This is because gaining awareness of a feeling inevitably changes it. Finally, it might be suggested that we could simply try to work out which there was *more* of. But what sense can be made of this suggestion? We can make sense of there being more or less of sensation A, or more or less of sensation B. But by what criteria could we possibly judge whether there is *more of sensation A than sensation B*? To ask which of these sensations there is more of would be like asking whether there is more warmth or sweetness in a given experience – i.e., it wouldn't make sense. Is there *more* blue in a dark shade of blue than in a light shade? The answer could be 'yes', but only, it seems, if there is genuinely 'a common feel' to all the various shades of blue. To the extent that we think it implausible that there is a 'common feel' to all the various shades of blue, we will find it incoherent to talk of there being *more* blue in a dark shade than a light one.

The fact that we would be unable to rank groups of different intrinsically pleasant sensations in terms of how pleasant they are is a big problem for those who claim that there is a *set* of pleasant sensations (as opposed to just one pleasant sensation), as there is nothing more common than our ranking often extremely diverse pleasant experiences in terms of how pleasant they are. We might try to work out, for example, whether going to the opera on a certain night will give us more pleasure than staying home and relaxing.

Perhaps the best way to get a sense of the common feel to all pleasant experiences is to consider what we're feeling when we're *just plain feeling good*, or having a sense of well-being without consciously feeling good about anything in particular. In an experience of just plain feeling good, the common feel is least mixed up with confusing other experiences – it has the stage to itself. In such a pleasant experience, to take away

the pleasantness of the experience (or the *good feeling* of it) is to take away its most distinctive part. Kinds of pleasant experience where the common feel tends to come more or less pure include euphoria, orgasm, eating chocolate, quenching a thirst, relieving an intense pain, etc. In such cases, it is easiest to gain a sense of the common feel to all pleasant experiences. Consider the pleasant experience we typically get when we eat chocolate, then mentally subtract from it the peculiar taste of chocolate. Is there not a pleasant feeling remaining? Can't we imagine technology advancing to a point where we could get the very same pleasure hit given by chocolate, only without the peculiar chocolate taste? *This* would be the pleasant sensation.

Likewise, to get a sense of the common feel to all unpleasant experiences, consider an unpleasant experience like depression that is not depression *about* anything, but just chemically induced, all-pervasive unpleasantness (be it mild, or overwhelming). Or consider physical pain as the common feel delivered localised, and explosively. In such experiences, we get the common feel more or less independent of distinctively other experience – i.e., on its own, pure, stark, etc. To remove the awfulness of such experiences is to remove what is phenomenologically most striking about them.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have defended two views about the nature of pleasant and unpleasant feeling. If I'm right, pleasant and unpleasant feeling are two particular sensations, ones we might experience despite believing we're not experiencing them, and ones we might fail to experience despite believing we are experiencing them.

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