# PLEASURE IN PRACTICAL REASONING*

Practical reasoning often strikes philosophers as ungrounded. It seems to them that desires are to be justified by reasoning that proceeds from, *inter alia*, further desires, and these further desires are to be justified by reference to still further desires. Avoiding circularity and infinite regress requires justification to terminate in desires that are themselves unjustified, and thus, from the point of view of reasons, simply arbitrary. If techniques of justification merely *transmit* reason-giving force from premises to conclusions, then if the premises are arbitrary, not different in this respect from whims, the conclusions will be arbitrary as well.

I'm going to argue that practical reasoning is no worse off than theoretical reasoning, as far as the arbitrariness of its premises goes. Philosophers, unless they are skeptics, are generally not worried about theoretical reasoning being ungrounded. One important reason why they are not is the role of observation in acquiring beliefs—even though it's notoriously difficult to say precisely what that role is. I will argue that practical reasoning can avail itself of an analog of belief formation underwritten by observational circumstances, so that practical reasoning has no *more* cause for embarrassment than theoretical reasoning.

In arguing this, I'm going to identify an element of practical reasoning that accompanies the analog of observational belief formation, and I'm going to *call* this element "pleasure." Then I will argue that this element *is* pleasure. I will provide a new argument against hedonism, and finally, I'll briefly discuss the consequences of these arguments for instrumentalist views of practical reasoning.

## I

Here is an illustration of the relation between observation and pleasure in practical reasoning, borrowed from the experience of an acquaintance:[1]

> Michelle works for a company that provides and maintains indoor plants for offices. Faced with a tree that was almost completely defoliated, she decided to try to bring it back to life, rather than go to the expense of replacing it. She pruned it back, cleaned off the dead material, watered the tree carefully, and applied rooting hormone. The tree, which had looked dead, revived, and "is today a beautiful tree."

> Michelle describes bringing the tree back to life as having been "a big thrill." She says that meeting the challenge gave her real satisfaction: "It's really fun to see trees come back, go from bare branches to being covered with beautiful green leaves again." She has learned that she likes challenges that involve improving and reviving living things through her own perseverance, intelligence and skill, and that her next job will involve treating, nurturing, and learning about living things.

There is a good deal in this example that deserves careful attention. First, Michelle began her work on the dying tree for reasons that had nothing to do with the intrinsic rewards of caring for trees: she felt that an important part of her job was keeping expensive plant replacements to a minimum. Through her experience, Michelle came to have, first, a desire to care for trees, and second, a more general desire for the challenges and rewards of bringing living things back to a state of health. That is, in the course of the experience, Michelle acquired new ends; ends, moreover, for which she was able to adduce reasons.

Second, central to the process was Michelle's finding the challenge of reviving the dying tree to be *fun*. She found herself enthusiastic about what she was doing, engaged by it, wanting to do it. We are all familiar with the feeling of our work (or other things) going well, eliciting our attention and energy in a way that makes hard work seem almost easy. When one finds a task pleasant, one engages in it willingly, even eagerly; there is no need to force oneself to it, even when it is difficult. It is this feeling that I will call *pleasure* (begging whatever questions it is, for now, necessary to beg); and I will take this kind of case as the central or paradigmatic instance of pleasure.

I mean to distinguish feelings from sensations, so in calling pleasure a feeling, I am not suggesting that it is a sensation; in fact, I am implying that it is *not* a sensation. On this way of speaking, it is a central feature of sensations that having them involves being aware of them. Feelings, however, may be had unawares; a familiar example is the depressed person who does not realize that he is depressed. Unlike sensations, the feeling of pleasure may sometimes be recognized only in retrospect, or when one's attention is called to it by others. Feelings can *involve* sensations, sometimes in a way that makes it tempting to say that the sensations are part of the feelings; we often identify feelings by the sensations they involve (that sinking feeling). But feelings do not always involve the same sensations: a feeling of elation may be accompanied by a sensation of light-headedness in one case, by a sensation of butterflies in the stomach in another, and by no special sensation in a third; and I may be too intent on what I am doing to notice that I

am elated. While pleasure often involves some sensation or other, there is no particular sensation, or class of sensations, that it necessarily involves.[2]

A third point to notice about the Michelle example is that something very like induction (or whatever pattern of reasoning it is that philosophers are trying to characterize when they talk about induction) is taking place here. Michelle learned from experience, first, that bringing a tree back to life is pleasurable, and second, that it is pleasurable *because* of the challenge it involves. This suggests that just as theoretical reasoning includes not only deductive reasoning (which does not itself respond to experience) but inductive reasoning (which does), practical reasoning includes an analog of induction, through which one can acquire new ends by learning from experience.

It might be objected that while there is something very much like induction going on here, that is because what is going on just *is* induction—that is, theoretical rather than practical reasoning. Michelle is out to attain pleasure, and learns inductively that certain things give her pleasure. Her decision to pursue these things is merely a matter of instrumental reasoning; now that she knows that tending trees is a way to get pleasure, she decides to tend trees. Michelle hasn't acquired any genuinely new ends; she has learned ways to address an end she already had.

We will see later just why this construal of the case is mistaken. For now, notice how alien this reading of the case is to the first-hand description. What Michelle (claims that she) wants to do is tend trees (which she has found to be pleasurable)—not to obtain pleasure *by* tending trees. This is a subtle but real difference, one which it is not obvious that an instrumentalist account can reconstruct.

Before going on to the account of pleasure, here is an example illustrating the use of its contrary, displeasure or unpleasantness, in practical reasoning:

> Pat[3] had been supporting herself as a waitress in New York while pursuing a dancing career. As she went from job to job, the time she remained in each grew shorter and shorter. Although she began each job with a good deal of enthusiasm, she would soon find things to hate about the job, would fight with the boss, and get fired.
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> Over the course of this period, she found herself ever more unable to cope with the day-to-day details of living. She was unable to pay her rent or run her errands; she wasn't getting dates; and at one point she realized: "I'm crying all the time, so I must not be doing the right thing." She describes the time as dominated by "a feeling of complete despair. I just couldn't do it. There were these basic things that very stupid people could do, that I couldn't do."
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> Although she felt miserable, it took a long time until she understood what was making her feel that way. Eventually she realized that while some things

> were going very badly, "the things that were good for me were going well and easily." Finally, on the first day of a new job waiting tables, she quit. "I couldn't bring myself to do it. I didn't even get as far as taking the first order." At that point she was resolved not to waitress anymore. She now works for an architect and dances in the evenings.[4]

If the central case of pleasure is the feeling that things are going well, that one is performing smoothly and successfully, and that difficulties are manageable and can be overcome, the central case of displeasure is the converse: one must force oneself to engage in the unpleasant activity, and going ahead with it is like pulling teeth. In extreme cases, one cannot cope, simple tasks become impossible, doing what one is doing becomes unbearable.

Again, one might suppose that Pat's decision was taken on the basis of instrumental reasoning, the goal of which was to avoid displeasure. But this would misconstrue the example. Pat herself describes her feeling of despair and dysfunctionality as telling her that she was doing something wrong. She distinguishes her choosing to avoid waitressing (which was unpleasant and even painful) from a possible choice which she denies having made, that of choosing to avoid displeasure and pain by not waitressing. This is a distinction that most of us can discover in our own experience. It is quite often the case that decisions that attend to pleasure (and its contrary, displeasure) use pleasure (and displeasure) as signs or symptoms, evidence as to how well things are going. One then often chooses the more pleasurable (or less painful) option, but this is not because pleasure is one's *goal*: rather, pleasure is an indication of something else. Saying what that is will require discussing an analogy between beliefs and desires.

## II

Just as someone's believing that $p$ commits him to $p$'s being true, so someone's desiring $X$ commits him to $X$'s being desirable. Imagine someone saying "I desire $X$, but $X$ is in no way desirable"—gloomily insisting that obtaining $X$ would bring only disappointment and regret, etc. If he continues to insist that he anticipates no benefit whatsoever from satisfying the desire, portraying its object in unrelievedly dark tones, we will find ourselves hard-put to keep saying that he *desires* it.[5] (Note that I'm *not* suggesting that the benefit has to be the agent's *own*; one may expect not to regret an action that benefits only others. The claim is not meant to preclude altruism.)

Now what does being committed to something's being desirable come to in practice? There is a point that used to be made by coherence theorists,

that one is never in a position to compare one's beliefs with the world as it really is: all one is ever in a position to do is to check whether one's beliefs stand in inferential relations of conflict, compatibility, support, and so on, with *other* beliefs that one has. Being committed to something's being true cannot *in practice* be manifested in anything beyond one's inferential commitments. And a very important part of these inferential commitments amounts to anticipating *other* beliefs. (I do not mean to suggest that believing that *p* does not commit one to *p itself* being the case, nor to claim that *p*'s being the case must amount to facts about my present, future or possible beliefs; I am not endorsing a form of verificationism. The words 'in practice' are meant to carry this qualification.)

Let's see an illustration of this. Suppose I inform you that I believe that there is milk in the refrigerator. I am committed to the milk's in fact being in the refrigerator: if it is not there, I am wrong. I expect that if I go and look, it will be there. Now what does going and looking amount to? I put myself in appropriate circumstances (by walking up to the refrigerator and opening the door): in these circumstances, I come to have a belief that there is a carton of milk on the top shelf. This belief is a *rock-bottom* belief, that is, it is not inferred from further beliefs. I may or may not be able to give further reasons for relying on this belief. But the belief is not *inferred* from these further reasons. It is clear that, on pain of an infinite regress, there must be such beliefs.

We can type this belief more tightly. There are rock-bottom (i.e., non-inferred) beliefs very different from this one: hunches or gut feelings, or the axioms of Euclidean geometry, understood the old-fashioned way, as self-evident truths. In contrast, the rock-bottom belief I acquire by looking in the refrigerator is *experiential*: I come to believe that there's milk in the refrigerator *by* looking in the refrigerator.

A belief's being rock-bottom carries no implication of indefeasibility: no matter how "observational" my belief, I may later retract it. Also, a belief's being rock-bottom carries no denial that there are necessary conditions of its acquisition that must be described in terms of further beliefs. A good deal of background is typically required for coming to have a rock-bottom belief. For example, if I were unacquainted with milk cartons and their contents, my opening the refrigerator would not have led to my believing that there was milk in the refrigerator. Beliefs whose acquisition requires such background may be, nonetheless, non-inferentially acquired, and be accordingly rock-bottom beliefs.[6]

The commitment to *p*'s truth involves, *in practice*, the expectation that various beliefs, some experiential and rock-bottom, and some not, will be

compatible with my belief that *p*. To be sure, I cannot specify just which beliefs these are, but since I am not making a reductionist claim, this is not a difficulty. Now rock-bottom beliefs highlight a feature that beliefs have more generally. If my rock-bottom belief is impugned, I cannot fall back on the premises from which I inferred it, for what makes it a rock-bottom belief is that I acquired it non-inferentially.[7] In these circumstances, I may find myself becoming aware of a *feeling* (*not* a sensation) of belief, which I will call *a feeling of conviction*. "I just *looked* in the refrigerator. What do you mean, 'How do I know?' Of *course* I know." If I stop myself in the middle of such a tirade, the feeling I find there is typically a feeling of conviction.[8]

The feeling of conviction (or, as I will just say, *conviction*) plays an important role in one's epistemic economy—particularly when it is of the rock-bottom, experiential variety. If, on considering a proposition, I find it unconvincing—if I lack the *feeling* of conviction—I may decide that I am on the wrong track (or that someone else is). If I do not feel conviction in situations in which I'm face to face with the object of my would-be belief (that is, when experiential rock-bottom belief is at issue), then it's going to be very difficult to convince me. And if in such situations I *do* feel conviction, my views on the subject will be difficult to dislodge. Seeing is, often enough, believing; experiential rock-bottom conviction is the familiar feeling that goes along with believing because you're seeing.

I now want to argue that pleasure is practical reasoning's analog of experiential rock-bottom conviction. I claimed that when one desires *X*, one is committed to *X*'s being desirable. But what does that commitment amount to in practice? Often, to the expectation that when one puts oneself in the appropriate situations, e.g., that when one actually *gets X*, one will not be horribly disappointed and wish that one had never heard of *X*. Rather, one expects that when one gets *X*, *X* will *turn out* to be desirable. Now a primary indicator of whether *X* is desirable or not is *pleasure*. Pleasure is the rock-bottom judgment of desirability of (an object of) present experience—one's experiential rock-bottom judgment that, yes, this is desirable. Conversely, displeasure is the rock-bottom judgment of undesirability, directed towards present experience. That is, each is a response to an object of present experience that amounts to a (defeasible) estimate of the object's desirability.

Pleasure is not, of course, the sole indicator. Other indicators of whether or not *X* is desirable may be inferences regarding *X*'s desirability, or rock-bottom judgments of desirability that, like hunches, are not experiential. It is therefore not the case that taking something to be desirable

*entails* expecting it to be pleasurable, any more than believing something entails expecting face-to-face confrontation with it to produce conviction. (I believe that the earth revolves around the sun, but I don't expect it to *look* that way. I may think the policies I support to be for the best, even though I expect that I will only *see* the unfortunate side-effects I know they will have.) Even when one comes face to face with $X$, one may mistakenly think it is desirable, or one may be mistakenly disappointed. Like experiential rock-bottom conviction, pleasure is not infallible. The drug addict is a trite case of pleasure not properly corresponding to desirability. Perhaps another is the altruistic act. The fallibility of both pleasure and the evidence of one's own eyes is relied upon by magicians, pickpockets, and con artists. That fact does not, however, make either dispensible.

It may sound peculiar to identify a feeling with a judgment. Possibly this is because one feels that there must be more to a judgment than a feeling; possibly because one can make judgments that do not *feel* like much at all. But recall that I am not using 'feeling' as a synonym for sensation: because it is not a sensation, a feeling is not precluded from having cognitive content in the way one might think sensations were; and, as I remarked earlier, one can have feelings of which one is hardly, or not at all, aware. I am avoiding distinguishing feelings from judgments because the distinction seems too forced here to be useful. But one can just as well think of these feelings as *aspects* or *accompaniments* of judgments.

Finally, there is a terminological asymmetry between conviction and pleasure. Conviction is to be found across the spectrum of belief; we do not have a word that picks out conviction specifically arrived at in the course of experience. Pleasure, on the other hand, is restricted to experiential judgments of desirability. But I do not believe that the asymmetry is more than terminological. Just as there are non-experiential judgments, rock-bottom and otherwise, that play important roles in theoretical reasoning (for example, the judgment that a particular step in a mathematical proof is correct), so there may be non-experiential judgments of desirability (rock-bottom and otherwise) that play equally important roles in practical reasoning.

## III

Practical reasoning tends to take one from a position of lesser pleasure to a position of greater pleasure. When I decide on Korean scallion pancakes instead of another round of marinated tofu, the likely upshot is that my subsequent life will be more pleasant than otherwise. Some philosophers

have noticed this tendency, and concluded that pleasure is one's sole and necessary goal. In this they could not be more mistaken. Hedonists err in roughly the way that someone who thinks that the goal of enquiry is to maximize conviction might err. Normally, one's enquiries tend to take one from a position of lesser conviction to a position of greater conviction: after the inquiry, one has more beliefs, and believes things more strongly. However—and this is very important—in general one's goal is *not* conviction: one's goal is truth. Conviction is epistemically important as a guide to truth, but conviction *per se* is not the object of my efforts.

To conclude that because one tends to move to positions of greater conviction one's goal is *the conviction*, rather than *true and relevant belief* would be seriously to misconstrue the normal case of epistemic endeavor. One's feelings of conviction guide one's changes of belief, but this does not make them one's goal. Hedonists assume that because desires and goals change in response to experienced pleasure and displeasure, these must be the actual goals. But this view is naïve: pleasure and displeasure are indications and signs of desirability we use in determining what our goals should be. Michelle did not become devoted to trees as a way of pursuing pleasure (if she were only interested in pleasure, she would not have genuinely cared about the trees); rather, her pleasurable experiences helped her decide that one of her (non-instrumental) ends ought to be tending trees.

Similarly, time spent with my friend is, by and large, pleasurable; and were this not the case, eventually we should cease being friends. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to construe the friendship instrumentally—to conclude that I befriend him solely in order to obtain pleasure. The correct account of the counterfactual is, rather, this: if time spent together becomes, by and large, unpleasant, I shall start to wonder whether something is wrong with the friendship.

Notice that the argument not only cuts against egoistic hedonism, but against universal hedonism, or pleasure-utilitarianism, as well. If pleasure is a kind of estimate of desirability, the utilitarian's Good consists in maximizing the number and force of these estimates. This is a quite unlikely conception of the Good.

Earlier I claimed that it would be a mistake to construe the Michelle case as amounting to induction (i.e., theoretical reasoning about what produces pleasure) plus instrumental reasoning directed toward the goal of pleasure. We're now better positioned to say just what is wrong with that construal.

Such inductive reasoning can of course take place: one can learn that tending trees produces pleasure in much the way one can learn that one

can't help finding well-groomed and sincere-sounding young men with attaché cases convincing. But this conclusion is theoretical rather than practical; it does not underwrite subsequent action in the way that a very similar-*looking* inference (say, from '$A_1$ is desirable', '$A_2$ is desirable', '$A_3$ is desirable' . . . to 'All $A$s are desirable') would.

Normally, the conclusion about what tends to produce pleasure is related, more or less directly, to the desirability of objects of pleasure. But suppose that one is instead interested simply in the pleasure produced, and not in any further desirability the pleasure may indicate, and that one proposes to use the knowledge of what gives one pleasure to put oneself in situations that one will find pleasurable, without regard to the reliability of one's judgments of desirability in those circumstances. That would be a little like putting oneself in the way of lots of well-groomed and sincere-sounding young men with attaché cases, without too much regard to what they are likely to persuade one of, just in order to acquire convictions. It is evidence of the strategy's motivational incoherence that knowingly putting oneself in the way of acquiring convictions in this manner will impede one's ability actually to acquire them. Similarly, if one puts oneself in situations where one takes it that one's pleasure fails to be responsive to actual desirability, one's ability to make the judgments of desirability that pleasure consists in will be corroded.[9] (The realization makes pleasures seem hollow; and hollow pleasures are very soon no longer pleasures at all.) This suggests, first, that acting on the hedonist proposal would end up giving you not more pleasure, but less.[10] Second, the inability of a pattern of reasoning to survive awareness in this way strongly suggests that there is something seriously wrong with it. And finally, it is in any case clear that this is not what is going on in the Michelle example; her reasoning is quite able to survive her own scrutiny, and that is because it is directed toward the desirability of tending trees, rather than her own pleasure.

In developing an account of pleasure that construes it as a guide to the choice of ends, rather than an end itself, we have addressed the problem of the ungroundedness of practical reasoning. If a form of reasoning is just the manipulation of arbitrary desires, the question remains: why should the outcome of such manipulation guide action? Attention to the role of pleasure in determining those desires allows us to understand them as reflecting (more or less) informed estimates of desirability, and so as being not merely arbitrary.

Theoretical reasoning that did not attend to the world—say, solely deductive reasoning—would be useless; thinking that matters has to be informed by the way things are. If practical reasoning is to be useful, if it is to

matter, it too will have to be informed by the way things are. Instrumentalist views of practical reasoning take it that the world has its say only by determining what is a means to what; but this is not enough. Attention to the role of pleasure shows how the world is enabled to have a further say in practical reasoning. Practical reasoning is informed by something that can be considered the practical analog of observation.

## IV

The objection likely to be pressed most strongly against the foregoing is this: what does what I am calling 'pleasure' have to do with *pleasure*? Now the claim that practical reasoning is no more the manipulation of arbitrary desires than theoretical reasoning is the manipulation of arbitrary beliefs does not depend on my successfully identifying experiential rock-bottom judgments of desirability with pleasure. But my argument against hedonism does depend on this identification. So I will try to show how the observationalist account I have presented accommodates the insights that motivate competing theories of pleasure, as well as the objections that have been traditionally urged against them. Showing how those insights are accommodated by my account will show it to be an account of that very thing into which they are insights—*viz.*, pleasure.

I have been developing the observationalist account of pleasure in opposition to the instrumentalist construal, on which pleasure serves the function of an ultimate goal or end. The insight that makes the instrumentalist view seem plausible is nicely rendered by Anscombe.[11] She remarks that

> 'It's pleasant' is an adequate answer to 'What's the good of it?' or 'What do you want that for?' I.e., the chain of 'Why's' comes to an end with this answer.

This point seems to support the instrumentalist or hedonist view in the following way. It is taken that the chain of 'Why's' is a series of requests for further goals. "Why are you going shopping?" "To get some more moong dal." "Why do you want more moong dal?" "To make cucumber soup." "Why are you going to make the soup?" (And so on.) It is presumed that the final answer ("It's pleasant") states the final goal, that the reason it terminates explanation is that there is no further goal.

On my view, 'It's pleasant' does indeed terminate explanation, but it does so in much the way that 'I just believe it' terminates explanations in the theoretical realm, or rather, recalling the experiential aspect, the way 'That's just how it looks to me' does. 'It's pleasant' more or less amounts

to: 'In experiencing it, I find it desirable'. One is not adducing a further goal, but affirming that the goal one has just mentioned is desirable.

Anscombe continues the passage we just quoted:

> a claim *that* 'it's pleasant' can be challenged, or an explanation asked for ('But what *is* the pleasure of it?') . . .

The instrumentalist must explain just *how* the final answer ('It's pleasant') can be challenged. And he seems to have only two choices: the challenge could consist in a denial that pleasure is one's goal (not an option for the hedonist), or in a claim that the penultimate goal is not in fact a satisfactory or efficient means of attaining pleasure. This latter is an unlikely gloss on "But what is the pleasure of it?"; however, I will not press this point now. Perhaps the instrumentalist can find a way to handle challenges like this one. The observationalist account, however, is able to explain the possibility of a challenge without undue forcing. Just as "I just believe it" can (in appropriate circumstances) be challenged by "Well, you shouldn't," so "it's pleasant" can be challenged by, "No, it isn't," or "Well, it shouldn't be": roughly, by claiming that it's *not*, after all, desirable.

The observationalist account, then, accommodates one of the two insights most partial to the instrumentalist view. (The other is the already discussed fact that "You wouldn't have chosen it if it weren't pleasant" is so often true.) But pleasure also seems plausible as a primary goal because it is closely connected with the good—closely enough to be identified with it, or confused with it. Anscombe, for example, criticizes the hedonist account herself, on the grounds that pleasure seems to involve a prior judgment about good.[12] John Stuart Mill famously equates happiness with pleasure, pleasantness with desirability, 'happiness' again with 'desirable', and these with utility. Bentham calls utility "that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) . . . ".[13] Three famous philosophers can't all be wrong: there must be some kind of very close tie between the notions of pleasure, of an object of choice, and of what is good.

Being able to explain this tie is thus a demand legitimately made of an account of pleasure. Conveniently enough, this connection lies at the heart of the observationalist account. From the first-person point of view, they are tied together in just the way that *p* and 'I believe that *p*' are. First, a rock-bottom judgment of desirability immediately directed towards the experienced object—that is, on the present account, *pleasure*—just *is* taking it to be desirable. Second, one desires only what one thinks desirable, that is,

what one anticipates will turn out to be desirable. But expecting something to turn out to be desirable is, usually, expecting it to be pleasurable.

The roles of pleasure as a terminator of explanation, and as something supposedly invoked by all desire, have been taken as objections to construing pleasure as a sensation: as Anscombe remarks in one of her more authentically Wittgensteinian moods, "Pleasure cannot be an impression; for no impression could have the consequences of pleasure."[14] Nonetheless, philosophers have often been tempted to understand pleasure on the model of sensations. One motivation may have been the instrumentalist's need for a detachable (yet always available) goal. Another may have been linguistic reflex: we talk about something's *feeling* pleasant, for example, and feelings are often confused with sensations. And I think there is a further point. Pleasure seems subject to something like first-person privilege: who to know better whether and how the experience is pleasant than the experiencing individual himself? The experiencing individual *just knows*—he does not have to investigate, or find out, the way one must with other matters of fact. Traditionally, sensations were thought to be the home of this kind of privilege and of privacy, so it is not surprising that pleasure was assimilated to sensation.

On closer examination, neither first-person privilege nor privacy have turned out to be nearly as philosophically robust as it used to be acceptable to assume. Nonetheless, what remains is accommodated by my account. Pleasure plays a role in many ways analogous to that of certain facets of belief. Now belief naturally carries with it a certain first-person privilege; the modest one of being able, usually, to know what one believes without asking or otherwise investigating, and to know how strongly one feels one's beliefs. (There is, of course, no claim of infallibility being made here.) The analogy should make it unsurprising that pleasure exhibits similar features.

It is often objected to sensation accounts of desire that pleasure is too heterogenous to be plausibly taken to be a sensation. What, it is asked, do all the different pleasurable sensations—those experienced while skiing, while reading poetry, while dozing in the sun, and so on—have in common save the trivial property of being pleasant? As Aristotle noticed, there are diverse pleasures proper to particular activities and senses (*EN* 1175a22ff). This fact is a problem for a view that would identify a *single* sensation or quality as the objective of rational deliberation and action; for in what sense is pleasure a *single* objective?[15] Again, rather than consider whether advocates of sensation accounts can parry this objection, I will just note that the fact it adduces is accommodated comfortably by the observationalist account. What do all convictions have in common (what could they be ex-

pected to have in common) save the property of being convictions? Beliefs are very different from one another because what each belief is, is mostly a matter of what it is about; and beliefs may be about very dissimilar things. If pleasure is the practical analog of conviction, we should expect pleasures to be very different from one another, and to share only apparent desirability. This is why pleasures are so diverse.

Philosophers uncomfortable with sensation models of pleasure have often adopted adverbial accounts. These philosophers recognize that pleasure is normally experienced in the course of doing something, and they take pleasure to be something about the manner in which the activity is done. This view has its problems: It is hard to say just what it is that all pleasurable activity has in common. (Words like "exuberance" turn up in what are correctly taken to be the central cases; but these are ill-suited to describe naps on a warm summer day.) And it is hard to explain the role of pleasure in justification and choice under this construal.[16] Once more leaving aside the question of whether adverbial views can be defended against these objections, note that on the view I am defending it is clear why pleasure taken in activity seems relatively central. Not only do we make our rock-bottom judgments in the course of whatever it is we are doing, but our deliberative attention to pleasure will be most importantly focused on our activities: we want to know whether what we are doing is going well, if we ought to be doing it, and so we pay special attention to the pleasure or displeasure we take in it. But there will be no adverb (save the uninformative ones, 'pleasurably' and, possibly, 'enjoyably') sure to characterize all pleasurable activities, for activities of the most various kinds may be found desirable.

It should now be far more plausible that when I say "pleasure," I mean *pleasure*. The apparently incompatible motivations of competing theoretical views of pleasure are jointly accommodated by the account developed here. What better indication that this is a theory whose subject matter is that of the other theories of pleasure—that is, pleasure? Perhaps, however, I should acknowledge that there is one motivation for theories of pleasure that I have chosen not to try to make room for. That is this thought that there must be some commensurable quantity to be maximized if rational choice is to be always possible. (There may be a further thought, that our moral life would be much simpler if there were such a commensurable quantity.[17]) I believe the conception of practical reasoning expressed by this thought to be seriously mistaken, and I do not feel that I need to be concessive toward it.

## V

I will now examine three further objections. First, consider someone who desires a piece of chocolate cake because it will be pleasurable. On my account, the anticipated pleasure just is the experience of finding the cake desirable; so I must say he desires the cake because he wants to find it desirable. But this is unenlightening, peculiar-sounding, and simply misses the point of the appeal to *pleasure*.[18]

The way out of this problem requires not accepting too quickly the claim that he desires the cake because he wants the pleasure he gets when he eats it. Rather, what the person desires are the *sensations* he will get when eating the cake, and these will be pleasurable—that is, the kind of sensations he will find to be rock-bottom desirable. Normally one does not have to distinguish feelings from the sensations they involve, but here we have no choice. Pleasure is not a sensation, and what the man wants from the chocolate cake is sensations, sensations that will be desirable when he gets them.[19]

I have been arguing that pleasure permits the analog, in practical reasoning, of observation: that is, that reasoning that involves pleasure is a practical form of *empirical* reasoning. But it might be objected that the theoretical and practical versions of empirical reasoning differ fundamentally, and that this is displayed in the fact that theoretical empirical reasoning exhibits convergence, whereas practical empirical reasoning does not. The difference, it will be suggested, is this. Genuine observation is intersubjective, but pleasures are idiosyncratic. This raises the question whether our initial worry regarding the ungroundedness of practical reasoning has in fact been addressed.

The objection needs to be qualified before it can be answered. First, there is not quite as much convergence in theoretical empirical reasoning as the objection seems to suppose; observation is not always as intersubjective as all that. Science converges, but not all empirical reasoning is science. In Almodovar's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* there is a character who looks like a Picasso: as though her face were one of those figures both of whose eyes are on the same side. I see the resemblance, and so do some other people I have spoken to; but not everyone, even among those familiar with Picasso, does. And I am not quite willing to insist that anyone who does not see the resemblance is wrong. Not all observation is properly understood on the model of identifying the colors of medium-sized dry-goods under good light.[20] Second, there is somewhat more convergence in

judgments of desirability than the objection supposes. After all, many pleasures are sufficiently standardized to support large industries.

But even with the contrast between theoretical and practical empirical reasoning muted by these qualifications, there still seems to be a remainder of tolerated nonconvergence unaccounted for. We are more tolerant of disagreement as to what is pleasurable than of disagreement in observation: "There's no accounting for taste." "*Chacun son goût.*"

There is, however, a simple way to accommodate this toleration. It is an unmysterious fact that different things are desirable for different people. To the extent that pleasure covaries with these differences, variation in pleasure may be accounted for in terms of the reliability of (the practical analog of) observation. True, there will be cases in which we do not want to say that differences in desirability account for differences in pleasure, and in which we are unwilling to correct the pleasures of either party. But these are likely to be cases in which the disagreement does not matter very much. Here the toleration may be on a par with the toleration of diverging beliefs that we do not think matter very much.

A further difficulty lies in the transience of pleasure. As identical rock-bottom beliefs accumulate, conviction strengthens, but as identical "observations" of desirability accumulate, pleasure—it will be objected—gives way to boredom. Pleasure cannot be, consequently, a proper analog of conviction.

This objection, however, rests on a simple confusion. If I look twenty times for the milk in the refrigerator, each time I find it confirms a constant fact: that the milk has been in the refrigerator throughout. In contrast, the twentieth cup of milk is not as desirable as the first; that I find it less pleasurable is a sign of the reliability of my judgment. In this, it is no different from belief: were I to make repeated observations of some changing state of affairs (say, a state of affairs that was changing *because* I was making repeated observations of it) I should find that my convictions changed with it. For example, I can request a record of my checking account's activity, for a three dollar charge. If I do this repeatedly, I shall find less and less in my account.[21]

I have argued that pleasure plays an important role in practical reasoning, but not the role the hedonist supposes it has: pleasure is not (usually) the goal of instrumental reasoning; rather, it makes possible a practical analog of induction to be used in deliberation of ends. In so arguing, I have proposed an account of pleasure: pleasure is a rock-bottom judgment of desirability immediately directed towards (objects of) present experience. As the objections just treated show, my account involves some forcing. (For

example, we must say that what I desire of the chocolate cake is not pleasure, but sensations, which are pleasurable.) But I think the forcing is not excessive, and I think the account does better than competing accounts. Each of these is developed around one insight regarding pleasure, and has its strength in its ability to represent that insight; but each is vulnerable to attack by an account developed around a competing insight. The account I have proposed tries to accommodate the central insights of the other competing accounts of pleasure jointly. To the extent that it succeeds in this, it is a plausible theory of pleasure in its own right.

## VI

If my account of pleasure is correct, it provides reasons for thinking that instrumentalist views of practical reasoning, that is, views on which all practical reasoning consists in choosing means to given ends, are mistaken. First, the inductive or empirical practical reasoning in which pleasure figures is not a technique for determining means to given ends, but a way of determining the ends themselves. Our discussion of pleasure thus provides us with a counterexample to the instrumentalist thesis by exhibiting an alternative form of practical reasoning.

Second, instrumentalist views tend to transform themselves, when pressed, into positions that attribute to agents single and necessary goals. Consider a train of reasoning which begins with my desire for a blender, and which ends with my deciding that I want a food processor instead—even though getting a food processor is not a way of getting a blender. Instrumentalist construals of such cases typically posit background desires to which both my initial and terminal desires stand in relations of instrumental justification: my real desire, the instrumentalist will claim, is for (say) a glitzy counter appliance, and acquiring a food processor is a better way of satisfying that desire than acquiring a blender.

The instrumentalist wishes to posit background desires in a way that does not seem simply *ad hoc*. But the attribution of a particular desire (such as a desire for a new counter appliance) can be called into question in various ways. For example, I can continue the train of reasoning: upon further deliberation, I discard the desire for a food processor in favor of a new assortment of expensive spices. Now the posited background desire cannot be for a counter appliance; it will have to be for something more general, e.g., excitement in the kitchen.

As the instrumentalist is pressed toward more general desires, he is like-

ly to look for a desire whose ascription cannot be dislodged in this way; and he is likely to look for desires to ascribe that will resist the charge of *ad hoc*-ness. Very general desires, with objects like pleasure, happiness, or desire-satisfaction, tend to get invoked at this point: they are a natural resting place. (Appeal to these desires can also address the problem of the apparent arbitrariness of one's ultimate ends: even if they are not instrumentally justifiable, they may be supposed to be psychologically necessary, and at least in that sense not arbitrary.)

Attempting to save instrumentalism by construing happiness as an ultimate goal has the following problem: While it is plausibly said that everyone does desire happiness, happiness is a dummy goal, one that itself has no content. Happiness cannot be used as a starting point for instrumental reasoning without determining in what happiness would consist; the components of happiness must be identified, and arranged into a coherently organized goal that can be pursued.[22] Attempting to use happiness to save the thesis that all practical reasoning is instrumental has the effect of implausibly declaring the reasoning by which one arrives at one's conception of happiness to be theoretical rather than practical reasoning.[23]

If happiness is shown to be an unpromising option for the instrumentalist, he is likely to turn to pleasure, which has the advantage of appearing to be a more substantive notion than happiness.[24] But to take pleasure as one's ultimate and necessary end is just to adopt some form of hedonism. In short, if I am right about the ways in which instrumentalist views of practical reasoning can be pushed towards hedonism, then the account of pleasure developed here, by showing that hedonism is mistaken, provides a further reason for thinking that instrumentalist accounts of practical reason are mistaken.

In dismissing the instrumentalist's appeal to happiness, I invoked an occasionally discussed alternative to means-ends reasoning, the specification of ends; I will conclude by considering briefly the role of pleasure in exercising this alternative.[25] Deliberation consists, on the specificationist account, not, or not only, in determining what would be a means to one's already given ends, but in coming to understand what would constitute realizing a vaguely specified end, such as *eudaemonia*, having an entertaining evening, a good constitution for the body politic, or a cure for an illness.[26]

Now while it is clear enough that we do engage in mental activity of this kind, it may be less clear that this activity is subject to the normative constraints that would allow us to regard it as reasoning or as deliberation, properly so-called. In fact, two of the four just-cited expositors of the specifica-

tionist view deny that specification of ends is a form of reasoning. Kolnai describes it as "shot through with arbitrariness," and "an inherently deceptive, not to say deceitful operation . . . ";[27] and Broadie, in a passage that perhaps clarifies Kolnai's qualms about the specification of ends, presents an argument to the effect that such specification cannot be "inferential": because the specification of an end

> is a move from the less to the more determinate, which latter, precisely because it is more determinate, cannot be entailed by what is less so. It might seem that with suitable extra premises there could be a logically acceptable inference from the indeterminate to the determinate end. After all, there is no acceptable inference from the determinate end to the means except via additional [empirical] premises. . . . But . . . what additional premises would do the trick? (a) Factual premises, whether particular or general, would not help; nor (b) would any purely logical propositions. The addition (c) of some formal propositions about *eupraxia* [the particular end whose specification Broadie is discussing], such as that it is 'self-sufficient' or 'lacking in nothing', would not logically enable one to interpret the pursuit of *eupraxia* as the pursuit of *S* (where *S* is something more specific); whereas (d) inserting a premise that specifies *eupraxia* substantially might of course sustain the inference to a no less substantial conclusion, but only by thrusting back to an earlier stage the problem of how such propositions are obtained in the first place.[28]

Suppose I am faced with the problem mentioned by Williams, that of deciding what would make for an entertaining evening. Mummenschanz is at the McCarter Theater, and I have not seen them, nor, I gather, anything like them, before. I have factual premises, in the form of a friend's description ("they mime inanimate objects"), and these premises do not help. Logical and formal propositions do not help either. What I need is a premise of Broadie's type (d), one that specifies my end of being entertained substantially and in the relevant respects: I need to know whether Mummenschanz will *count as* entertainment, that is, whether it will *be* entertaining.

As Broadie insists, the demand for such premises raises "the problem of how such propositions are obtained in the first place." She evidently intends mention of the problem to have the force of a rhetorical question, since she concludes that no such premises are available. But consideration of a concrete situation in which the demand arises makes it obvious how such premises *are* obtained: I can *go* to McCarter, and discover, by *observation*, whether Mummenschanz is entertaining or not. That is, specification of ends can be understood to be a form of rational deliberation, but one that, like the practical analog of induction, relies essentially on practical experience. (Testimony may of course take the place of experience, as when I

am told not only that the performance is mime of such-and-such a kind, but that it is vastly entertaining. But here I rely on experience indirectly.)

The example reminds us that actual judgments of desirability, experiential or otherwise, are normally a good deal richer than those to which I have, for expository convenience, largely confined myself. To attend the performance and thereby discover that Mummenschanz is vastly entertaining is of course to discover that attending the performance is in certain respects desirable, and it is to have taken a good deal of pleasure in the performance, but my response, and what I have found out, is not exhausted by these descriptions. A more adequate account of practical observation would take up the task of characterizing these richer experiences.

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## NOTES

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1. I'm grateful to Michelle Desaulniers for the example.
2. On this point, see Gosling, 1969, pp. 46f, and below, sec. 5.
3. Real name withheld on request.
4. Although traditionally 'pain' has been used to mean the converse of pleasure I will use words like 'displeasure' and 'unpleasant' instead, since, first, while pain is generally unpleasant, many things are unpleasant but not painful, and second, we need a name for the sensations we normally call 'pain', and since pleasure is a feeling rather than a sensation, its contrary should be a feeling as well. The example makes the traditional usage understandable; it is all too natural to describe Pat's experience as painful. Because physical sensations of pain typically make it difficult or impossible to continue doing what one is doing, physical pain occupies much the same role as the more central cases of unpleasantness that we are now considering. This explains why it is natural to extend the word 'pain' to instances such as this one.
5. For related considerations, see Anscombe, 1985, pp. 70ff. Notice that I am not claiming that one cannot desire something under one aspect while failing to judge it desirable in another respect, or even while judging it undesirable, all things considered.

I have found that it is still difficult for some philosophers to believe the claim put forward in the text. For their benefit, it is worth noting that its role here is heuristic: it is used to introduce my account of pleasure, but the account itself does not depend on it.

6. It may be argued that inference *must* have taken place, perhaps unconscious-

ly. But if unconscious inference is taking place in cases like these, then we can either restrict the term 'rock-bottom belief' to cases in which not even unconscious inferences occur, or we can allow it to apply where unconscious inferences are found. I will be using the notion of rock-bottom belief to help the reader pick out a certain kind of experience or feeling. Since distinguishing between cases in which unconscious inferences are being made, and those in which they aren't, wouldn't be useful for this purpose, adopting the restriction wouldn't be helpful.

7. Or, at any rate, I am not aware of the unconscious inferences by which I acquired it. I may be able to provide arguments from other (background) beliefs from which I *could* have inferred it; and sometimes I will actually fall back on these. The situation I am now interested in is one in which I do not fall back on further beliefs.

8. This technical use of the word 'conviction' is not as far a cry from its ordinary use as might be thought. When asked to list one's convictions—the things about which one has this feeling—one normally produces, say, points of religious or political or moral doctrine, rather than beliefs about what's in the refrigerator. And this might suggest that conviction is rather rare. But I am claiming that conviction is a feeling, rather than a sensation, which is to say that one is not always aware of it. One may be made aware of the feeling by a challenge; if someone exerts pressure on my claim to know where I live, I shall become aware of a feeling of conviction as deeply-rooted as those attached to any of my political views. One may be inclined to say of cases in which one may have conviction on a particular point without being aware of it that one has the conviction without the feeling. Similarly (to anticipate) one may take pleasure in an activity without being aware of it; in such circumstances one may be inclined to say that one is having pleasure, but not a *feeling* of pleasure. (Cf. Gosling, 1969, pp. 47–53). But since I am distinguishing feelings from sensations in part by the claim that one can be unaware of one's feelings, I will use 'conviction' and 'feeling of conviction' indifferently (and 'pleasure' and 'feeling of pleasure' as well).

9. See Millgram, forthcoming, for related discussion.

10. I am tempted to think that a partial explanation for the paradox of hedonism (that is, the fact that many of the activities we engage in could not yield pleasure if their goal were understood to be pleasure) may be found here. Cf. Sidgwick, 1907/1981, pp. 48ff.

11. Anscombe, 1985, p. 78.

12. If I am correct, this is not quite right: the judgment is not *prior*; rather, the pleasure just is the judgment.

13. Mill, 1863/1973, pp. 407, 440, 443, 472, Bentham, 1789/1973, p. 18.

14. Anscombe, 1985, p. 77.

15. On this point, see Gosling, 1969, pp. 28–53.

16. For a fuller discussion, see Gosling, 1969, pp. 54–85.

17. Cf. Nussbaum, 1986, pp. 89–121.

18. This objection is due to Alyssa Bernstein.

19. More generally, it may be experiencing the desirable features of the cake that one is looking forward to; one need not think of oneself as a consumer of sensations.

This distinction, incidentally, makes masochism conceptually unproblematic. Masochists are people who take pleasure in pain, and the existence of such people presents a problem for philosophers who hold pain to be the converse of pleasure. (Athletes might be a less exotic case of people who can find painful sensations

pleasurable.) But if the pain masochists allegedly take pleasure in is a *sensation*, then it is not the converse of pleasure, since pleasure is not, on my account, a sensation. What sensations are found pleasurable is not a matter of the logic of the notion of pleasure: while there may be good reasons for pain being not *normally* pleasurable, there is no reason in principle why sensations of pain could not engender rock-bottom judgments of desirability, that is, be pleasurable.

20. There is no general, nontrivial account of what makes observation, observation: the explanation of what makes seeing that a chair is brown an observation will have precious little in common with the explanation of what makes seeing that a face looks like a Picasso an observation. So we should not expect a general, nontrivial account of what makes a practical observation, a practical observation.

21. The objection is also in error in its claim that repeated pleasures always become less pleasurable: repeated wine tasting, or sexual experiences with a particular partner, or encounters with an exotic cuisine, may make those things much more pleasurable than they were found to be at first acquaintance.

Notice that although Nature has equipped us with rock-bottom dispositions to judge this or that desirable—say, to find food desirable after a moderately lenghty fast—pleasure depends in large part on one's tastes. Now tastes, when educated, amount to taste (if not necessarily to good taste), and taste plays much the same role in our rock-bottom judgments of desirability that certain kinds of background beliefs play in our acquiring rock-bottom convictions. For example, while I do not *infer* that I enjoy the painting from my knowledge of its merits, the pleasure I take in it does depend on my having that knowledge. This is why taste can be both spontaneous and informed by belief, discrimination, and so on. Explaining how this can be the case is one of the problems a theory of taste must address. (Cf. Schaper, 1987.) That the present account of pleasure provides means of addressing this difficulty suggests that it may be on the right track.

22. Desire-satisfaction theories must address this problem as well. Given that one's desires typically are too much at cross-purposes to be thought of as a single, coherent goal, before embarking on instrumental reasoning proceeding toward the goal of desire-satisfaction, a way must be found to rank, arrange and organize the desires that one proposes to try to satisfy.

23. This is not to say that the notion of happiness plays *no* role in practical reasoning: of course it does. I am inclined to think that its function is very like that of what Kant called regulative ideals. One must act on the assumption that it is possible to arrange one's central (and, maybe, not-so-central) goals into a coherent and (in principle) satisfiable goal or life-plan: taken together, the things one (really) wants make up a picture of a life well-lived. This may not in fact be the case; having to act as though one's ends allow this does not entail that they actually do. (Kant distinguished regulative ideals from the necessary preconditions of the possibility of experience.)

24. This advantage may be only apparent. We remarked on the diversity of pleasures above. If pleasures are so different from one another that they are not immediately commensurable, organizing one's pleasures into a single coherent goal is also a precondition of using pleasure as a starting point for instrumental reasoning.

25. Prominent advocates include Kolnai (1978), Richardson (1986; 1990), Wiggins (1980) and Broadie (1987).

26. For these examples, see *EN* 1095a16–21, Williams, 1981, p. 104, Kolnai, 1978, pp. 44f.

27. Kolnai, 1978, pp. 54, 58.

28. Broadie, 1987, pp. 238f. Her argument involves a problematic premise: that the more determinate cannot be inferentially extracted from the less. After all, if the determinateness of one's starting point is not *stipulatively* linked to the determinateness of one's conclusion, we may expect to find any number of counter-examples in which determinateness increases as the inference is traversed. (Turning over several indistinct and obscure recollections of the previous day, I suddenly realize *exactly* what Sandra is up to.) I believe that the problematic premise may be defended; however, I will not further consider the issue here.

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