

## Hedonism and asceticism

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**Abstract:** Some philosophers take the ascetic sage as a test case for the plausibility of theories of welfare. They maintain that attitudinal hedonism entails that the sage lives the good life, since he enjoys meditation, solitude, peace and quiet, and so on. Some of the longest-enduring traditions of asceticism, however, deny that the sage takes attitudinal pleasure in these kinds of things. A group of Upaniṣads aptly named the Saṃnyāsa, or Ascetic Upaniṣads, for example, explicitly states that the sage neither enjoys nor despairs in earthly states of affairs. The attitudinal hedonist might argue that the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads lives the good life nonetheless, since he takes immense and constant pleasure in the *ātman* – the eternal, immaterial self. The sage's immense and constant pleasure in the *ātman*, however, also commits the attitudinal hedonist to the stronger claim that the ascetic lives the best life possible. The sage's life seems less than optimal, however, because he enjoys only one thing to the exclusion of all other things.

### Introduction

A number of philosophers take the ascetic sage as a test case for the plausibility of theories of welfare. Certain proponents of attitudinal hedonism, in particular, argue that sensory hedonism is implausible at least in part because it denies that the ascetic lives a good life. They maintain that attitudinal hedonism has no such problem, since the sage enjoys meditation, solitude, peace and quiet, and so on.

My thesis in this article is that this objection is more troubling for the attitudinal hedonist than it seems.<sup>1</sup> Some of the best-known and longest-enduring traditions of asceticism deny that the sage takes attitudinal pleasure in the things that the attitudinal hedonist claims he does. A group of Upaniṣads aptly named the Saṃnyāsa, or Ascetic Upaniṣads, for example, explicitly states that the sage neither likes nor dislikes, neither enjoys nor despairs in earthly states of affairs.

The attitudinal hedonist might argue that the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads lives the good life nonetheless, since he takes immense and constant pleasure in the *ātman* – the eternal, immaterial self. The sage's immense and constant pleasure in the *ātman*, however, also commits the attitudinal hedonist to the much stronger claim that the *saṃnyāsīn* lives the best life. This stronger claim is dubious, for a reason that is at least implicit in a number of well-known objections to attitudinal hedonism.

The strategies that the attitudinal hedonist might employ with some success in avoiding these related objections, however, seem to fail in the case of the ascetic. This suggests that a distinct objection remains unanswered. The sage's life seems less than optimal, despite his great surplus of pleasure, because he enjoys only one thing to the exclusion of all other things, the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life.

### **The First Ascetic Objection to hedonism**

A number of philosophers take the ascetic sage as a test case for the plausibility of theories of welfare. Fred Feldman, for example, argues that sensory hedonism is implausible at least in part because it denies that the sage lives a good life. He offers the story of Stoicus, who

wants to live an unruffled life . . . He prefers not to experience any episodes of [sensory] pleasure. He prefers not to have such pleasures in part because he fears that if he had some, they would ruffle his life. He feels the same way about sensory pain. (Feldman (2010), 50)

Since sensory hedonism claims that the value of a life for the person whose life it is derives exclusively from the intrinsic value of sensory pleasure and pain experiences within that life (*ibid.*, 27), the sensory hedonist must claim that if Stoicus succeeds in living the life that he wants, he fails to live the good life (*ibid.*, 50). Feldman takes this evaluation to be implausible. 'Surely it would be odd to say that whole schools of apparently rational philosophers [namely, the Stoics,] have advocated a life-style that is guaranteed to yield worthless lives!' (*ibid.*). Call this the 'First Ascetic Objection'.<sup>2</sup>

Ish Haji levels the First Ascetic Objection against sensory hedonism as well. He describes the ascetic as a person

who strives to achieve peace and tranquility in her life. Her ideal of a good life for her is a life given up to meditation, a life devoid of sensory pleasure and pain. Suppose this person achieves this ideal . . . [sensory hedonism] implies that this person did not have a good life; her life was low in welfare value. But this seems wrong. (Haji (2009), 15)

Again, the basic point is that any plausible account of human welfare must entail that the sage lives a good life. Since sensory hedonism denies that the sage lives a good life, sensory hedonism is implausible.

Both Feldman and Haji argue that attitudinal hedonism avoids the First Ascetic Objection. Feldman elaborates the example of Stoicus in the following way.

[A]s he receives his daily dose of peace and quiet, Stoicus is content. He is satisfied with his life. Indeed we can even suppose he enjoys the peace and quiet . . . Suppose he is completely satisfied with various facts about his life, including the fact that he is not experiencing any episodes of sensory pleasure. Suppose Stoicus eventually dies a happy man. (Feldman (2010), 50)

Since Stoicus experiences a good deal of contentment, satisfaction, and enjoyment – all types of attitudinal pleasures – and since these episodes are presumably of some significant duration and intensity, attitudinal hedonism ‘yields the result that his life was very good in itself for him’, even though it was devoid of sensory pleasure (*ibid.*, 68).

Haji, too, stipulates that the life of the ascetic contains a good deal of attitudinal pleasure. The ascetic ‘is completely satisfied with various facts about her life, including the fact that she is not experiencing any [sensory] pleasure or pain . . . Our ascetic enjoyed her life’ (Haji (2009), 15). He concludes that according to attitudinal hedonism, the ascetic lives a good life. ‘Since the ascetic takes attitudinal pleasure in the fact that she gets peace and quiet and (we may assume) takes no displeasure in this fact, [attitudinal hedonism] yields the result that her life is high in welfare value’ (*ibid.*).

One problem with this response is that some of the best-known and longest-enduring traditions of asceticism deny that the sage takes pleasure in those things that Feldman and Haji claim he does. One such example is a group of South Asian texts that scholars refer to as the Saṃnyāsa, or Ascetic Upaniṣads.

These texts repeatedly describe the sage as ‘impartial to the opposites (*nir-dvandva*)’ (Schrader (1912), 70, 120, 145, 236, 259). They elaborate the opposites with a set of stock examples that include pleasure and pain (*ibid.*, 47–48, 140, 153, 220, 243) respect and disrespect (*ibid.*, 138, 176, 239), friend and foe (*ibid.*, 212), and so on. Pleasure and pain, in this context, refer to sensory pleasure and pain in particular. This is supported by the extensive restrictions on the ascetic with regard to food (*ibid.*, 18, 33, 117, 174), shelter (*ibid.*, 154, 158, 181, 202), clothing (*ibid.*, 153, 155, 168, 242), women (*ibid.*, 115, 196, 200, 283, 285), and so on, all of which are traditionally understood as especially rich sources of sensory pleasure and/or especially crucial means to the avoidance of sensory pain.

The claim is also supported by the consistent emphasis on the control and ‘abandonment’ of the senses. *Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad* 142, for example, says, ‘with attachment of the senses, [a person] certainly accrues fault. Having restricted [the senses], however, [he] thereby attains perfection’ (*ibid.*, 142). Presumably a person who abandons the senses abandons sensory pleasure and pain in particular.

So when the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads say that the ascetic is impartial to the opposites of pleasure and pain, they say that the sage is impartial to sensory pleasure

and pain in particular. Presumably, as a consequence of his impartiality towards sensory pleasure, the ascetic experiences relatively little sensory pleasure. So to this extent, the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads is consistent with the sage that Feldman and Haji describe. He lives a life in which the sensory hedonist finds little to no value.

If the sage is impartial towards pleasure and pain, however, then presumably he takes no attitudinal pleasure or pain in the presence or absence of sensory pleasure or pain. Indeed, a number of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads explicitly analyse the sage's indifference towards sensory pleasure and pain in terms of an absence of those mental states that are typically included in any list of attitudinal pleasures and pains. *Paramahaṃsa Upaniṣad* 54, for example, says, 'the sage is neither averse to pain (*duḥkhe nodvegah*), nor attracted to pleasure (*sukhe nasprah*) . . . in no case does he care for (*abhisneho*) pleasure or pain (*śubhāśubhayor*). He neither dislikes [pain] nor enjoys [pleasure] (*na dveṣṭi na modam*)' (Schrader (1912), 54).

*Nārada-parivrājaka Upaniṣad* 140 says, 'he who would not enjoy (*abhinandet*) pleasures (*bhogān*) . . . he dwells in the stage of life [aimed at] liberation' (*ibid.*, 140). This suggests that the sage takes neither attitudinal pleasure nor attitudinal pain in the presence or absence of sensory pleasure or pain.

If the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads takes neither attitudinal pleasure nor pain in the presence or absence of sensory pleasure or pain, however, then the sage does not take pleasure in the fact that he is not experiencing any sensory pleasure or pain, as Feldman and Haji claim. And if this is right, then the prudential value of the life of the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads cannot derive from the attitudinal pleasure he takes in the absence of sensory pleasure and pain.

Nor can the prudential value of the life of the sage derive from the attitudinal pleasure he takes in peace and quiet, meditation, or tranquillity. When the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads elaborate the opposites towards which the sage is impartial in terms of pleasure and pain, respect and disrespect, and so on, they intend for these examples to represent opposites more generally. The description of the sage as impartial to the opposites amounts to a description of the sage as indifferent to 'all of the opposites' (*ibid.*, 145).

The opposites, in turn, are typically taken to include every earthly quality.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the sage's impartiality towards all of the opposites amounts to an impartiality towards every earthly quality, and hence, every earthly thing. I argued earlier that the claim that the sage 'abandons the senses' implies that the sage is impartial to sensory pleasure and pain. It also implies that the sage is impartial to sensory qualities more broadly. An ascetic is a 'person who, having heard, having touched, having tasted, having seen, or having smelled, neither enjoys (*hr̥ṣyati*) nor dislikes (*glāyati*)' (*ibid.*, 142). If the sage neither enjoys nor dislikes that which can be heard, touched, tasted, and so on, then he takes neither attitudinal pleasure nor pain in earthly things quite broadly.<sup>4</sup>

If the sage takes neither attitudinal pleasure nor pain in earthly things quite broadly, then he takes no attitudinal pleasure or pain in those other objects that Feldman and Haji claim he does. He does not take pleasure in peace and quiet, meditation, or tranquillity. And if the ascetic does not take pleasure in these things either, then the attitudinal hedonist's reply to the First Ascetic Objection is unconvincing.

Now of course, the attitudinal hedonist might simply deny that a plausible theory of welfare must entail that *this* type of ascetic lives a good life. Indeed, in the full passages in which Feldman and Haji argue that it would be implausible to deny that the ascetic lives a good life, both are careful to describe the sage's life as pervaded with attitudinal pleasure.

At the very least, however, this kind of reply runs into the 'odd' consequence that Feldman mentions. It entails that 'whole schools of apparently rational philosophers' – this time South Asian philosophers who endorse the ascetic ideal described above, rather than the Stoics – 'have advocated a life-style that is guaranteed to yield worthless lives'. It would be better if the attitudinal hedonist could avoid this implication.

In any case, it is more likely that proponents of attitudinal hedonism will reply by pointing out that the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads takes immense and constant pleasure in the *ātman* – the eternal, immaterial self.<sup>5</sup> *Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad* 27, for example, says 'the wise sage always enjoys the self (*ātmārāmaḥ sadā*)' (Schrader (1912), 27). *Maitreya Upaniṣad* 110 says that the sage, '[his] self tranquil, having remained [fixed] in the self (*ātmani*), attains imperishable joy (*sukham avyayam*)' (Schrader (1912), 110). Elsewhere, the same text describes the sage's pleasure as 'unsurpassed, infinite (*saukhyatame . . . anante*)', and 'complete bliss (*akhaṇḍānanda*)' (Schrader (1912), 112, 121). *Nirvāṇa Upaniṣad* 226 says, '[the sage's] bliss is the highest (*paramānandī*)' (Schrader (1912), 226).

Furthermore, the bliss of the *ātman* is certainly attitudinal pleasure, rather than sensory pleasure. Some of these verses clearly describe the sage's pleasure as object-directed. The ascetic takes pleasure *in* the *ātman*. The *ātman* is the object of the ascetic's pleasure. Since attitudinal pleasure is object-directed, but sensory pleasure is not, the sage's pleasure in the *ātman* must be attitudinal pleasure.

If this is right, then according to attitudinal hedonism, the ascetic of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads does live an exceedingly good life – even if not for the reasons that Feldman and Haji cite. Since the sage takes attitudinal pleasure in the *ātman*, and since his pleasure is of significant duration and intensity, the sage's life is intrinsically valuable for the sage himself. So attitudinal hedonism does indeed avoid the First Ascetic Objection.

### The Second Ascetic Objection to hedonism

According to attitudinal hedonism, the value of a person's life for the person whose life it is derives exclusively from the intrinsic values of the person's attitudinal pleasures and pains. Since the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads takes pleasure in the *ātman*, his life has significant prudential value. Hence the sage lives a good life, according to attitudinal hedonism.

The attitudinal hedonist claims more than this, however. Since the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads takes constant and unsurpassed pleasure in the *ātman*, the attitudinal hedonist must claim that he lives the optimum life – the best life possible. It seems dubious, however, that the sage lives the optimum life, at least in part because his life is devoid of a great range of enjoyments, at least some of which seem essential to the good life.

The sage takes no joy in friendships or family, career, hobbies, or diversions, for example. He does not enjoy the beauty of a sunset, the rhythm of a rainfall, or the sight of children playing. All of these things are among the earthly things towards which the sage is indifferent. A life entirely devoid of every pleasure of this sort, however, seems importantly deficient. The sage's life would be better if it included some pleasures such as these. This suggests that the sage does not live the best life possible. If the sage's life is not optimum, however, then attitudinal hedonism – at least as it is ordinarily formulated<sup>6</sup> – is false. Call this the 'Second Ascetic Objection'.<sup>7</sup>

An intuition of this sort contributes to the strength of a number of better-known objections. The 'Objection from Worthless Pleasures' that Feldman develops from G. E. Moore (1903) is one example. As the title of the objection implies, Feldman takes Moore's basic point to be that hedonism is implausible because it implies that a person might significantly improve his life by enjoying things that seem of little value – things like sex with pigs. Many of my most open-minded undergraduate students, however, side with the hedonist as far as this goes: 'If Porky loves sex with pigs, who are we to doubt that his life is good for him?' (Cf. Feldman (2010), 118).

The intuition that Porky's life is deficient gains significant strength, however, when Moore stipulates that Porky's indulgence in bestiality is 'perpetual'. Feldman explains that Porky 'spends all his time in the pigsty', and 'has no human friends, has no other sources of pleasure, and has no interesting knowledge' (*ibid.*, 40). Now at this point even those who think that pleasure in sex with pigs might have significant prudential value think Porky's life falls short, not because it contains too little pleasure, but because it contains only one kind of pleasure, to the exclusion of so many others.

Feldman replies to the Argument from Worthless Pleasures 'by incorporating an adjustment of value to reflect [the] pleasure-worthiness and pain-worthiness of objects' (*ibid.*, 120). Since the pleasure-worthiness of the objects of Porky's pleasures is relatively low, they contribute relatively little intrinsic value to Porky's

life. Hence the 'desert-adjusted' form of attitudinal hedonism implies that Porky's life is not especially good for him (*ibid.*). So this form of attitudinal hedonism avoids the objection that hedonism implies that a person might significantly improve his life by enjoying sex with pigs.

But this reply makes it look as if all that is wrong with Porky's life is that he enjoys something unworthy of enjoyment. It conceals the distinct objection that hedonism implies that a person who enjoys only one thing, to the exclusion of all others, might live a sufficiently good life. And yet, it is the latter implication that many find most objectionable. As I said, my students do not object to Porky's bestiality, necessarily – at least not on prudential grounds. They object to his single-minded obsession with it.

The example of the ascetic is useful in drawing the distinction between these two objections more clearly, since the object of the ascetic's enjoyment is typically taken to be more valuable than anything else. This means that the adjustment for desert that Feldman proposes to explain the deficiency in Porky's life cannot explain the deficiency in the sage's life. The intuition that the ascetic's life is sub-optimal remains, however, even if it is granted that the object of his pleasure is most pleasure-worthy. His life would be better for him if he enjoyed a wider range of pleasure-worthy things, even if his pleasure in the *ātman* is intense and long lasting, and even if the *ātman* is a highly pleasure-worthy object.

The strength of other objections to attitudinal hedonism seems to depend on the same intuition. Michael R. DePaul, for example, offers what he calls 'The Glory Days Objection' to attitudinal hedonism. He describes two people: Jim Bob and Betty Ann. Jim Bob hits a home run to win the high school state championship. The rest of Jim Bob's life is devoid of significant accomplishments. His life is filled with attitudinal pleasure, however, because Jim Bob takes regular pleasure in having hit the winning home run (DePaul (2002), 630).

Betty Ann aces a serve to win the high school state championship in tennis. The rest of her life contains 99 other, equally significant accomplishments, each of which she enjoys, along with the first, 1/100 as much as Jim Bob enjoys his single accomplishment. Hence, Betty Ann's life is filled with the same amount of overall pleasure as Jim Bob's. DePaul points out that the attitudinal hedonist evaluates these two lives as equally good, but rejects this assessment. 'Surely Betty Ann has a much better life than Jim Bob' (*ibid.*, 630–631).

At first the point of this objection seems to be that Jim Bob's life is not very good for him because he enjoys only one thing to the exclusion of all others. Betty Ann's life is better, because her enjoyments are not limited in this way. If this is right, then the Glory Days Objection roughly parallels the Second Ascetic Objection. It also supports the claim that the ascetic's life is suboptimal. Indeed, if Jim Bob's life is not only suboptimal, but not very good for him, because he enjoys only one thing to the exclusion of all others, then surely the ascetic's life is at least sub-optimal. Perhaps it is not even very good for him.

It is not clear, however, that DePaul takes the problem with Jim Bob's life to be that he enjoys only one thing to the exclusion of all others. Having described the scenario above, DePaul says,

[h]ere's a variation on the same theme. One good thing happens to Jim Bob and one good thing happens to Betty Ann. The good thing that happens to Jim Bob lasts a short time, but he enjoys it for a long time. The good thing that happens to Betty Ann lasts as long as Jim Bob enjoys his one good thing, and Betty Ann enjoys it for all that time. (*ibid.*, 631)

In this second version of the objection, the difference between the two lives is not a difference in the number of their objects of pleasure. Each enjoys only one thing. So if this version of the objection is a 'variation on the same theme' as the first, then presumably DePaul does not take the lack of diversity in objects of pleasure to be the fundamental problem with Jim Bob's life in the first scenario.

Once the initial interpretation of the objection is abandoned, however, it is difficult to derive a cogent objection from the examples. One possibility is that DePaul takes Betty Ann's life to be better in both cases, not because she enjoys more things, but because that which she enjoys is more contemporaneous with her enjoyment.

If this is the objection, however, then the attitudinal hedonist has at least two straightforward responses. First, he might point out that the intensity of pleasures is typically greater when the object of pleasure is more contemporaneous with the pleasure itself. If Betty Ann's pleasures are more intense than Jim Bob's for this reason, then Betty Ann's life is indeed better than his, but only because it contains more pleasure. If, instead, Betty Ann's pleasures are no more intense than Jim Bob's, despite their closer contemporaneity, then the intuition that Betty Ann's life is better than Jim Bob's is significantly weakened.

Second, the attitudinal hedonist might reply that the pleasure-worthiness of an object generally diminishes with time. Betty Ann's life is better than Jim Bob's, even if their pleasures are equal in duration and intensity, because, in the first example, her recent achievements are more pleasure-worthy than Jim Bob's long past achievement, and in the second example, because the good thing that happens to her is concurrent with her enjoyment of it, and hence more pleasure-worthy than the good thing that Jim Bob enjoys from long ago. This too, however, is consistent with relevant forms of attitudinal hedonism – namely, forms of desert-adjusted attitudinal hedonism like the one described above in the context of Porky. So if the point of the Glory Days Objection is that Betty Ann's pleasures contribute more intrinsic value to her life because they are more contemporaneous with their objects, then the objection does not pose any serious problem for attitudinal hedonism.

A second possibility is that DePaul takes the Glory Days Objection to demonstrate that the intrinsic value of a life for the person whose life it is derives not only from the intrinsic values of the pleasures and pains within that life, but also from the intrinsic values of the events in that life, regardless of whether



these events are objects of enjoyment. Since Betty Ann has more intrinsically valuable events in her life, her life is better than Jim Bob's.

The problem with this version of the objection is that it amounts to little more than an assertion of the claim that the hedonist rejects from the outset: namely, the claim that there is a plurality of sources of intrinsic value (Feldman (2010), 113). If this is the sense of the argument, however, then DePaul is simply talking at cross-purposes with the hedonist, and the hedonist can reply in typical fashion, by insisting that accomplishments improve a person's life only insofar as the person enjoys them.

In any case, the point of the Glory Days Objection does not seem to be that Betty Ann's life is better than Jim Bob's because she enjoys a wider range of objects. And yet, the initial strength of the first version of the Glory Days Objection seems to depend on the intuition that a life that includes episodes of pleasure in only one object, to the exclusion of all others, is deficient.

The best evidence of this is that the strength of the intuition that Betty Ann's life is better than Jim Bob's is considerably weaker in the second scenario, in which both take pleasure in only one thing, than it is in the first scenario, in which Jim Bob enjoys only one thing to the exclusion of all others, but Betty Ann enjoys many things. Suppose that Jim Bob walked across Canada in a single year. He enjoyed it while he did it, and then enjoyed it for the next nine years. Betty Ann also walked across Canada, but it took her 10 years. And she enjoyed it the entire time. Once Betty Ann is finished, she never takes pleasure in walking across Canada again. In this scenario, it is not obvious that Betty Ann's life is significantly better than Jim Bob's, all other things being equal. At the very least, the intuition is weaker in the second scenario than it is in the first. Betty Ann's life is less obviously better than Jim Bob's when both enjoy only one good thing than it is when Betty Ann enjoys 100 accomplishments to Jim Bob's one.

If Betty Ann's life is clearly better than Jim Bob's in the first scenario, but less obviously better in the second scenario, then presumably Betty Ann's life is better in the first scenario than it is in the second. The divergence in the values of Betty Ann's lives in the two scenarios cannot be explained in terms of the intensity or duration of the pleasures, since DePaul stipulates that they are equal.

Nor can the difference be explained in terms of the contemporaneity of the objects of pleasure, since DePaul says, in the second scenario, that Betty Ann enjoys the one good thing that happens to her while it occurs. Indeed, the object(s) of her pleasures are more contemporaneous with her pleasures in the second scenario than they are in the first.

Nor, however, can the difference in value be explained in terms of pleasure-worthiness, since the good thing that happens to Betty Ann might be just as pleasure-worthy as all of her achievements combined. It might just be some grand, long-lasting achievement that took a long time to complete (like walking across Canada).

The only obvious explanation, then, for the intuition that Betty Ann's life is better in the first scenario than it is in the second, is that Betty Ann's life in the second scenario contains pleasure in only one thing to the exclusion of all others, whereas her life in the first scenario contains pleasure in many things (albeit all things of the same type). This means that the intuition that best explains the initial strength of the first version of the Glory Days Objection is just the intuition that underlies the Second Ascetic Objection.

The Second Ascetic Objection isolates this objection. It does not leave room for the attitudinal hedonist to explain the deficiency in the sage's life by citing other factors, such as the non-contemporaneity of his pleasures with their objects. (The *ātman*, after all, is eternal.) It does not leave room for the hedonist to say that Jim Bob's object of pleasure, while pleasure-worthy, is not as pleasure-worthy as some of those objects he fails to enjoy (since the *ātman* might be the most pleasure-worthy object). Nor does it simply beg the question against the hedonist, by insisting that things other than pleasure contribute intrinsic value to a life. The problem for the ascetic is not obviously that he lacks things other than pleasures that might increase the intrinsic value of his life. The problem seems to be that he lacks certain pleasures.

It is tempting to take the Second Ascetic Objection to be equivalent to an objection that Feldman considers explicitly – an objection that might be called the 'Argument from Variety'. Feldman says, '[i]t might be suggested . . . that it is better for a life . . . for the pleasures to be taken in objects that display greater variation' (Feldman (2010), 140; cf. Velleman (1991), 72, fn. 9).

In response, Feldman poses a familiar dilemma. If the person whose life displays greater variation takes pleasure in this fact, then his life is better, not as a direct result of the variation, but as a direct result of his pleasure in the variation. This is consistent with attitudinal hedonism. If, instead, he does not take pleasure in this fact, then the intuition that his life is better as a result of the variety of his pleasures is significantly weakened (Feldman (2010), 140–141).

It would be a mistake, however, to diagnose the deficiency in the sage's life simply in terms of a lack of sufficient variation in objects of pleasure. Noah Lemos makes this point with the example of Constance. Constance is taking significant pleasure in a virtuous action she has just performed, when suddenly she 'is hit by a freakish burst of cosmic radiation. Her mental states become fixed. She experiences a kind of "hedonic lock," taking occurrent attitudinal pleasures in her virtuous action' (Lemos (2007), 420–421; cf. Lemos (2010), 41). For the next sixty years, Constance remains frozen in this state of pleasure.

Lemos concludes that even though her life is highly pleasurable, 'Constance's life is not a terribly good one' (Lemos (2007), 421). The problem with Constance's life is not simply a matter of a lack of variety in her objects of pleasure, however.

Suppose the radiation caused Constance to cycle between pleasant recollections of a variety of pleasure-worthy objects. For example, on Monday she takes pleasure in some virtuous act. On Tuesday she takes pleasure in some other virtuous act. On Wednesday she is pleased that she had a dog. (*ibid.*)

Even in this revised scenario, the intuition remains that Constance's life is not very good for her. Hence the problem in this case is not simply a matter of a lack of variety in the objects of Constance's pleasures.

Likewise, it is not obvious that a mere increase in the variety of the sage's objects of pleasure is enough to resolve every deficiency in his life. Suppose it is stipulated that the sage takes pleasure in other things, but that none of these other things include friendships or family, career, hobbies, diversions, and so on. Instead, all the sage enjoys are facts about the *ātman*, basic mathematical facts – for example, that 9 squared is 81 – and basic astronomical facts – for example, that Jupiter is the fifth planet from the sun. In this case, the intuition remains rather strong that his life is deficient.

Instead, the objection is that the sage's life is deficient because it contains only one kind of pleasure, to the exclusion of so many other pleasures, at least some of which are essential to the good life. In order for this deficiency to be remedied, increased variety is necessary, but not sufficient. The more varied objects of pleasure must also be among those the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life.

The difference between these cases is that the example of Constance fails to isolate this objection. Constance's life is deficient because she fails to enjoy a wide range of things, the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life. Her life might also be deficient, however, because her pleasures are not contemporaneous with their objects, or because her objects of pleasure are not as pleasure-worthy as many of the objects she fails to enjoy, or because her pleasures are unfree (Haji (2009), 21–33).<sup>8</sup>

As in the Porky case, this kind of ambiguity leaves the hedonist a number of options for explaining the conclusion that Constance's life is deficient, many of which leave the central objection unresolved. In order to isolate the objection that Constance's life is deficient because she fails to enjoy a wide range of things, the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life, the example of Constance has to be modified significantly, so that she freely enjoys contemporaneous objects, the pleasure-worthiness of which approximates the pleasure-worthiness of most other objects. In other words, the example of Constance has to be made to resemble the example of the sage.

Lemos comes closest to emphasizing the central objection when he suggests the reply that the low value of Constance's life is a result of 'missing certain sorts of important goods, perhaps like . . . friendship' (Lemos (2010), 41). As I said above, however, to assert that the shortcoming in a life is a consequence of the absence of something other than pleasure is simply to talk at cross-purposes with the hedonist.

To claim instead that Constance's life is deficient because she no longer *enjoys* friendship is at least initially more productive. And to claim instead that Constance's life is deficient because she no longer enjoys a wide range of things, including friendship, the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life, is even less controversial than insisting that a life must contain pleasure in any one particular thing, such as friendship. It allows that a life might be very good even without friendship, so long as it includes attitudinal pleasures in some of these other things.

Once the Second Ascetic Objection is put this way, it might seem to mirror another objection that DePaul advances: the 'Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll Objection'. DePaul begins with the example (taken from Feldman) of Hugh, who enjoys sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll and little else (Feldman (2002), 613). He argues that the problem with Hugh's life is not that he takes pleasure in things that are not pleasure-worthy. Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, after all, are indeed suitable objects of pleasure. Instead, the problem is that

Hugh is neglecting other things in which he could be taking pleasure, e.g., exercising his creative intellectual or artistic capacities . . . [P]art of a good life for a person who has such capacities involves exercising them and experiencing the related pleasures. To the extent that such a person does not exercise such capacities, his or her life is thereby, to that extent, blighted. (DePaul (2002), 632)

The objection here seems to be that there is a range of objects, the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life. To this extent, it seems to mirror the Second Ascetic Objection.

One possible difference between the two objections is that DePaul does not explicitly say whether he takes those things that Hugh neglects to be distinct, fundamental sources of intrinsic value. The final line of the quotation simply says that a person's life is deficient insofar as he 'does not exercise such capacities'. This might imply that while the enjoyment of the exercise of such capacities increases the intrinsic value of a life, the exercise of the capacities itself does as well, even if it is not enjoyed. If this is the view, however, then this example also seems to talk at cross-purposes with the hedonist.

A second difference between the two objections is that DePaul specifies not only that the exercise of certain capacities is among the objects the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life, but also that the enjoyment of the exercise of certain capacities is itself essential to the good life. The Second Ascetic Objection, in contrast, leaves this question open. Again, it allows that a life might be very good for the person whose life it is, even if the person does not enjoy the exercise of certain capacities, so long as the person enjoys some of the other things, the enjoyment of at least some of which are essential to the good life.

At first it might seem plausible that a person must enjoy the exercise of certain capacities – and perhaps his creative capacities in particular – in order to live a good life. Much depends, however, on how broadly these objects of pleasure are

construed. To begin with the narrowest possible meaning, it is certainly false that a person cannot live a good life unless he takes pleasure in the very specific fact that he is exercising some relevant capacity. Once I take pleasure in the fact that I am playing music, or the fact that the music is good, it seems silly to insist that I also must take pleasure in the fact that I am exercising my capacity to play music as well.

If, instead, enjoyment of the exercise of a capacity is simply equivalent to enjoying doing something, so that enjoying my capacity to make music is simply equivalent to enjoying making music, then the claim seems more plausible. Still, it seems possible that a person might live a very good life without enjoying such things for their own sakes. Indeed, the consequentialist might not be strictly prohibited from counting actions among those consequences that have intrinsic value, but he generally does not. Instead, he takes the value of an action to derive exclusively from the goodness of its results, and hence takes the value of an action to be entirely instrumental. If this is a sensible view, then it might be that actions do not have intrinsic value. It would seem strange, then, that a person must take intrinsic attitudinal pleasure in things that are devoid of intrinsic value in order to live a good life.

A third possibility is that the notion of exercising a capacity is meant to encompass the results of actions as well, so that enjoying my capacity to make music includes enjoying the music itself. DePaul says, after all, that a person must exercise certain capacities and 'enjoy the related pleasures'. Even this very general criterion, however, might not be a necessary one. The life of the exceedingly modest person, who refuses to take intrinsic pleasure in any of his own actions or their consequences, would almost certainly be better off if he were a little less modest, but the claim that his life cannot be very good for him seems implausible. Alternatively, a person might take pleasure in the results of his actions – that he has strong friendships, for example – and yet not conceive of them as such. It seems enough that he enjoys his friends. He need not also enjoy that the friendships are a consequence of his own actions. Again, he simply might not think in these terms.

At least one central claim of the Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll Objection, then, is implausible. It is not the case that a person's life is inevitably deficient if he fails to enjoy exercising his capacities – no matter how broadly the exercise of his capacities is understood. A person might live a sufficiently good life without enjoying this particular range of things.

The Second Ascetic Objection, in contrast, is based on the more plausible claim that a person's life is deficient if he fails to enjoy a wide range of things, the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life. This leaves room for the possibility that no particular object of enjoyment is necessary, while preserving the intuition that the life of a person who enjoys only one thing (or a very narrow range of things) to the exclusion of every other is deficient. The sage's life is deficient, but

not necessarily because he does not enjoy exercising his capacities. It is deficient because he does not enjoy anything other than the *ātman*.

As in the case of the other objections, the Second Ascetic Objection is unambiguous where the Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll Objection equivocates. DePaul denies that the problem with Hugh's life is that the objects of his pleasures are insufficiently pleasure-worthy, since sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll are indeed pleasure-worthy. The attitudinal hedonist might still claim, however, that the intuition that Hugh's life is deficient is grounded in the relatively low pleasure-worthiness of these things. This kind of reply is not available in the case of the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads, however, since he takes attitudinal pleasure in a highly pleasure-worthy object.

#### **Four Replies to the Second Ascetic Objection**

The attitudinal hedonist might reply to the Second Ascetic Objection in a number of ways. First, he might try to avoid the Second Ascetic Objection in a rather straightforward way, simply by adjusting for the pleasure-worthiness of the objects of pleasure. In order to do this, however, he must claim that the sage, in enjoying the *ātman* to the exclusion of everything else, fails to enjoy things that are more pleasure-worthy than the *ātman*. The intensity and duration of the sage's pleasure, after all, cannot possibly be increased.

As I said, however, the *ātman* is almost invariably characterized as more valuable, and hence, more pleasure-worthy than anything else. One thought might be that scepticism about the value – and even the existence – of the *ātman* grounds the intuition that the sage's life is deficient. Even if the example of the *ātman* is substituted for an object the value and existence of which are not in doubt, however, the intuition remains. There is little doubt that personal achievements, for example, are highly pleasure-worthy – and perhaps as pleasure-worthy as anything. And yet, the life of Betty Ann (in the first scenario), when considered more carefully, seems deficient, despite all of the pleasure she takes in her many achievements, just because she enjoys achievements to the exclusion of so many other things. She too does not enjoy friendships, family, and so on (at least not under any description other than that of an accomplishment). The problem, then, is not obviously that the objects of these pleasures are insufficiently pleasure-worthy.

I mentioned earlier that Feldman considers the objection that the objects of a person's pleasures must exhibit sufficient variety, and that he replies to this objection with the familiar strategy of posing a dilemma. If the person enjoys the fact that he takes attitudinal pleasure in a variety of things, then his life is better for him, but only because it contains more pleasure. If, instead, he does not enjoy the variety of his pleasures, then the intuition that this variety of pleasures makes his life better is considerably weakened.

I argued that the Second Ascetic Objection is not simply equivalent to the objection that a good life must contain a sufficient variety of pleasures. The example of Constance demonstrates that mere variety is not enough. Feldman's response seems easily adapted to the Second Ascetic objection, however. While the Second Ascetic Objection does not claim that mere variety is a necessary condition of the good life, it does claim that variety of a particular sort is a necessary condition of the good life. It claims that in order to live a good life, a person must enjoy at least some of those objects the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life – where 'some' seems to refer to more than just one. Call this type of variety 'variety\*'.

So a second reply to the Second Ascetic Objection might run as follows. If the person whose life displays variety\* cares about this fact, and takes pleasure in it, then his life is better, not as a direct result of the variety\* of his pleasures, but as a direct result of the pleasure that he takes in the variety\* of his pleasures. This is consistent with attitudinal hedonism. If, instead, he does not care about this fact, and hence takes no pleasure in it, then the intuition that his life is better as a result of the variety\* of his pleasures is significantly weakened.

It is not obvious, however, that the value of a variety\* of pleasures derives entirely from the pleasure the person takes in the variety\* itself. Compare this case with another that Feldman considers – the case of the two businesspeople (which he adapts from Nagel (1979)). Each businessperson takes an equal amount of pleasure in the same states of affairs – that his spouse is loyal, that his children adore him, that his colleagues appreciate him, and so on. These states of affairs obtain in the case of the first businessperson, but do not obtain in the case of the second. The second businessperson, unbeknownst to him, is despised by everyone around him (Feldman (2010), 42). It seems that the life of the first businessperson is significantly better than that of the second. No one would choose the life of the second businessperson over the life of the first for himself or anyone he cares about.

Feldman responds to this case in a number of preliminary ways, but admits that the intuition that the second businessperson's life is worse than that of the first businessperson might persist. He then develops what he calls 'Truth-Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism', according to which the contribution that an episode of pleasure makes to the intrinsic value of the life of the person whose pleasure it is depends on the truth-adjusted amount of pleasure that the episode contains. Since the objects of the pleasures of the first businessperson obtain, his truth-adjusted amount of pleasure is greater than that of the second businessperson. The value of the life of the second businessperson is still low, despite his many pleasures, on account of their falsity (Feldman (2010), 109–114).

It should seem at least initially strange, however, that Feldman allows that the truth of pleasures increases the value of a life regardless of whether the agent takes pleasure in the fact that his pleasures are true, but insists that a variety of



pleasures can increase the value of a life only if the agent takes pleasure in the fact that his pleasures are various.

There are at least two reasons for this apparent double standard. First, consider how this kind of reply would go in the case of the businesspeople. Either the first businessperson enjoys that his pleasures are true or he does not. If he enjoys that his pleasures are true, then his life is indeed better than the second businessperson's, but only because it contains more pleasure. If he does not enjoy that his pleasures are true, however, then the intuition that his life is better is significantly weakened. This might be taken to show that an adjustment for truth, like an adjustment for variety, is unnecessary.

There are problems with this response, however. First, suppose that the first businessperson does indeed enjoy that his pleasures are true. This cannot be the only reason his life is better, since the intuition that his life is better remains even if the second businessperson also takes pleasure in the truth of his pleasures (despite their being false). The two are equally convinced, after all, that their pleasures are true.

Second, if it is stipulated that neither businessperson takes pleasure in the fact that his pleasures are true or false, the life of the first businessperson still seems much better, just because the increased value of true pleasures does not seem to depend on an agent's actual attitudes towards them. That Feldman at least sympathizes with this intuition is supported by the fact that he develops Truth-Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism in the first place.

Obviously Feldman cannot deny that things can have value independent of an agent's attitudes towards them, since he admits that pleasure itself has value independent of an agent's attitude towards it. A person need not enjoy pleasure in order for pleasure to have intrinsic value (*ibid.*, 204–205). Likewise, the fact that the businessperson's children in fact admire him increases the intrinsic value of his pleasure in this state of affairs (and hence the intrinsic value of his life) regardless of whether he enjoys the fact that the state of affairs obtains. So Feldman admits that truth might affect the intrinsic value of pleasures regardless of whether the agent takes pleasure in truth, even though he insists that variety cannot.

The only seemingly relevant difference between truth, on the one hand, and variety, on the other, is that the intuition that pleasures increase the value of a life more if they are true is stronger than the intuition that pleasures increase the value of a life more if they exhibit variety. Indeed, the stronger claim that the truth of one's pleasures is *essential* to the good life seems highly plausible. The intuition that mere variety is essential to the good life, in contrast, is much weaker. As a result of the relative weakness of this latter intuition, the claim that the value of the variety of pleasures depends on the agent's attitude towards it seems plausible.

The strength of the intuition that a variety\* of pleasures is essential to the good life, however, might be closer to the strength of the intuition that true pleasures are



essential to the good life than is the strength of the intuition that a mere variety of pleasures is essential to the good life. The example of Constance shows that the latter intuition is false. If Constance enjoys an increased variety of objects, but not enough of these objects are among those the enjoyment of at least some of which is essential to the good life, then her life remains deficient. If the ascetic enjoys an increased variety\* of objects – friendships, hobbies, and so on – however, his life does indeed seem sufficiently good.

If this is right, then it makes more sense to concede that the value of a variety\* of pleasures does not depend on whether the agent enjoys this variety\* or not, just as the value of true pleasures does not depend on whether the agent enjoys the fact that his pleasures are true. If the variety\* of pleasures does not depend on whether the agent enjoys this variety\*, then Feldman's reply to the 'Variety Objection' cannot be applied to the Second Ascetic Objection – just as it cannot be applied to the case of the deceived businessperson.

A third strategy is to insist that the pleasure-worthiness of objects diminishes the more an agent enjoys them. Consider the case of Jim Bob again. The first time he enjoys hitting the home run, he is still rounding the bases, and the crowd is cheering. This state of affairs is certainly highly pleasure-worthy. Suppose the second time he enjoys hitting the home run is later that night. He is sitting with some friends at the local hangout retelling the story, and he enjoys hitting the homerun for the first time since he did so. Still a highly pleasure-worthy state of affairs, but perhaps not as pleasure-worthy as it was while he rounded the bases. And then, of course, the homerun seems much less pleasure-worthy when Jim Bob enjoys it for the 100th or 1000th time, retelling the story to the same friends once again.

Again, the issue is not obviously the mere passage of time. If, while running the bases, Jim Bob had somehow gone into a daze that prevented him from enjoying hitting the home run, and a year had passed before he understood what he had done, the homerun would be more pleasure-worthy than if he had enjoyed it every day in the meanwhile. If he had already enjoyed hitting the homerun 100 times before arriving at the local hangout that night, the pleasure-worthiness of hitting the homerun is plausibly less than if he had not enjoyed it since hitting it.

If this is right, then it is easy to see how Jim Bob's life could be deficient, despite the frequency, intensity, duration, and initial pleasure-worthiness of his object of pleasure. Indeed, it is possible to see how Jim Bob's repeated enjoyment of this state of affairs eventually adds little value to his life. And if friendships, romantic relationships, success at work, and interesting hobbies are also highly pleasure-worthy, it isn't hard to imagine that at some point the pleasure-worthiness of Jim Bob having hit the homerun sinks lower than the pleasure-worthiness of these other things.

If this is right, then even if the *ātman* is the most valuable thing, and hence, initially the most highly pleasure-worthy object, its pleasure-worthiness might diminish as the sage enjoys it. Here too, there might be a point at which the sage's

enjoyment of the *ātman* improves his life less than other enjoyments would. The solution, then, might be to adjust pleasures for wear.

Even this last reply seems problematic, however. It might be that a person's relationship with his child, for example, is more pleasure-worthy the more he enjoys it. Since the relationship is an object of so much enjoyment, it is more pleasure-worthy than it would be if the parent didn't appreciate the relationship in the first place. A person's wedding day seems more pleasure-worthy the more he has enjoyed it, as does the cottage on the lake.

If this is right, then some argument is needed to explain why the sage's enjoyments are not like this. It seems at least initially plausible, however, that the pleasure-worthiness of the *ātman* does not diminish for the same reason that the pleasure-worthiness of the parent-child relationship does not. It too is an object of great enjoyment, and maybe it is all the more enjoyable for this reason. And yet, the life of the sage seems deficient.

A fourth strategy might be to insist that the Second Ascetic Objection refutes the summation principle that most versions of attitudinal hedonism assume, but does not refute attitudinal hedonism more generally. Attitudinal hedonism is the view that the intrinsic value of a life derives exclusively from the intrinsic values of the attitudinal pleasures and pains within that life. The Second Ascetic Objection is consistent with this claim, since it does not entail that something other than pleasure contributes intrinsic value to a life. The problem with the sage's life has to do with an absence of pleasures, not an absence of some other good.

The summation principle, however, states that the intrinsic value of a life is simply the sum of the intrinsic values of the pleasures and pains within that life. The Second Ascetic Objection does seem initially inconsistent with this. If the value of a life were determined simply by summing up the value of its parts, then the life of the sage would be much better than almost any other life. And yet, the life of the sage is not better than almost any other life. This suggests that the summation principle is false.

Attitudinal hedonism might be true, however, even if the thesis of summation is false. An account might claim that the intrinsic value of a life derives exclusively from the intrinsic values of the pleasures and pains within that life, and yet allow that the intrinsic value of a life is not simply a sum of the intrinsic values of the pleasures and pains within that life.

Feldman considers this possibility, and takes it to be disastrous. If the summation principle is rejected,

it would be hard to explain why any life has its value. At best we could struggle to describe a really good life, and then hint that the value of another life is to be assessed in some highly intuitive way by appeal to the extent to which it resembles the ideal life. That would be unfortunate. (Feldman (2010), 205)

It might be thought that Feldman is overly pessimistic here, however. If it turns out that the intrinsic value of a life is a function of the attitudinal pleasures and pains within that life, then attitudinal hedonism is true. If it also turns out that the summation principle is false, then hedonism will still be a more plausible theory than any of its competitors. It might not be ideal to face so much trouble in assessing and explaining the value of a life, but if hedonism is true, this is something that welfare theorists will have to accept.

This response seems overly charitable, however. If the summation principle is false, then the intrinsic value of a life is not simply the sum of the values of the pleasures and pains within that life. If the intrinsic value of a life is not simply the sum of the values of the pleasures and pains within that life, then it will indeed be very difficult to determine how much value a life has, whether a particular life is sufficiently good, how one life compares with another, and so on. This is more than a mere inconvenience or annoyance. Indeed, it might be taken to imply that hedonism is false, since it is not generally very difficult to determine how much value a life has, whether a particular life is sufficiently good, how one life compares with another and so on. And all of this suggests that Feldman's worry might be justified.

There are no doubt other replies that the attitudinal hedonist might offer. Perhaps the summation principle will turn out equally problematic on any account of the good life. J. David Velleman, among others, suggests that well-being is not additive in the way most welfare theorists assume, regardless of the account of welfare under consideration (Velleman (1991), 49). If this is right, then hedonism might not be any worse off than its competitors.

### Conclusion

Attitudinal hedonism entails that the life of the sage of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads is good for him. It also entails, however, that the sage's life is the best life possible. This seems implausible, since the sage enjoys only one thing, to the exclusion of so many other things, the enjoyment of at least some of which seems essential to the good life. This intuition grounds a number of well-known objections, but has not been appreciated in its own right. Replies that might be used against similar objections seem to fail in the case of the ascetic.<sup>9</sup>

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### Notes

1. A secondary goal of this article is to begin the project of outlining and assessing conceptions of the good life in South Asian traditions.
2. Feldman calls this objection the 'Argument from Non-Existent Pleasures'.
3. If the opposites are understood as ends on a spectrum, then the sage is impartial to the opposites and every quality that falls between them. He is not only impartial to cold and heat, but lukewarm as well. It might be that not every earthly quality has its opposite, but it does seem that every earthly quality falls on some spectrum between opposites.
4. For a more thorough review of the evidence for the claim that the sage takes no attitudinal pleasure in earthly states of affairs, see Framarin (2017).
5. As a means of remaining consistent with the language of the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads, I talk as if the *ātman* itself might be an object of attitudinal pleasure in what follows. This talk is easily translated into talk of states of affairs.
6. It might be tempting to understand the Second Ascetic Objection as an objection to the summation clause implicit in most versions of hedonism, rather than as an objection to hedonism *per se*. See the section 'Four replies to the Second Ascetic Objection'.
7. I think it makes sense to set aside questions about how the Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads themselves might reply to this objection. Suffice it to say that the cogency of most of these replies depends on the plausibility of a number of claims that the attitudinal hedonist probably does not want to defend – claims, for example, about the relationship between earthly enjoyments and earthly desires, the role of earthly desires in prolonging the cycle of rebirth, and so on. I consider these replies in Framarin (2017).
8. My thanks to Nalanda Barber for this final suggestion.
9. My thanks to David Dick and students from my Value Theory courses in 2013 and 2015 for helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this article.