What Makes the Good Life Good?

A Comparison Between Ancient and Contemporary Conceptions of Pleasure and Eudaimonia

By

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ABSTRACT

“The happy life is the pleasant life” is a statement that both many ancient and contemporary philosophers would agree to. However how they understand it to be true can differ greatly. In this thesis, I am interested in investigating the role of pleasure in the good life from both an ancient and contemporary perspective. I will first examine how Aristotle characterizes pleasure as a necessarily morally appropriate and objective feature of a good life. I will then contrast Aristotle’s understanding with contemporary philosopher Fred Feldman’s subjective hedonistic eudaimonic thesis. Where Aristotle’s description integrates various goods such as pleasure and virtue to come to a complete description of the good life, Feldman’s thesis focuses on only the one good of subjective pleasure as what accounts for human well-being. In this way, Feldman avoids problems of elitism and perfectionism found in Aristotle’s writings, but fails to account for how various goods should integrate and relate within a good life and thereby fails to satisfy a demand for a complete description of living well. Whether or not we should make this demand upon a eudaimonic thesis may be where ancient and contemporary thinkers differ most greatly and is where I will leave this thesis.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.................................................................................................................................ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...........................................................................................................iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS.............................................................................................................iv

CHAPTER 1: Introduction........................................................................................................1

CHAPTER 2: It Feels Good to Be Good...................................................................................5

CHAPTER 3: A Contemporary Perspective...........................................................................21

CHAPTER 4: The Value of Completeness in a Eudaimonic Theory......................................38

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion.........................................................................................................66

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....................................................................................................................70
Chapter One: Introduction

The topic of happiness has come a long way since the puzzlings of Socrates and Protarchus. It is now a huge interdisciplinary body of literature of interest to politicians, psychologists, economists, and philosophers alike. However, in many ways, our ideas about happiness have come full circle, back to the conception Socrates was so adamant to reject. Now it is the popular view among politicians, psychologists, economists and some philosophers that what makes the good life good is what is pleasant to the individual. It is my goal in this thesis to contribute to the growing body of happiness literature by challenging and drawing out the ramifications of this popular contemporary view that the happy life is the purely subjective pursuit of pleasure. I am interested in finding out what is at stake, and what we have lost in our contemporary emphasis on subjectivity and pleasure and the abandonment of objective goods.

Although I will be looking at a philosophical account, it is interesting to me that support for the idea that the happy life is the one that is most pleasant to the individual can be found in various disciplines. In politics, for example, one of the defining features of a liberal democratic society is that it be governed by a neutral state which is anti-perfectionist in its willingness to provide the background conditions for a good life, but not prescribing a particular conception of it. Since liberal democracies are a dominant political system in much of the Western world, this political view leads to an institutionalized understanding of the good life as something best left open to the individual to decide. There is no necessarily right or wrong idea about what the good life is; there may only be better or worse choices for an individual. It is not my goal in this work to try to critique this thesis from a political perspective. However, I do think it is interesting to

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investigate what we are giving up philosophically by refusing to objectively describe the features of the good life and instead characterizing it by focusing on subjective choices by an individual.

Similarly, subjective views of well-being are becoming increasingly popular within economic calculus. Economists are now major contributors to happiness research and so it is worthwhile to question the implications of their understanding of the concepts involved. For example, recent contributions of economics to the study of individual happiness are based on a subjective view of utility which recognizes that “everyone has his or her own ideas about happiness and the good life and that observed behaviour is an incomplete indicator of individual well-being”. On this view, an individual’s welfare is captured and analyzed by asking the person how satisfied he or she is with her life. “It is understood that economic activity is certainly not an end in itself, but only has value in so far as it contributes to human happiness.” Subjective systems of measurement are becoming preferable in the field of economics because it is thought that “both social comparison and hedonic adaptation mediate the influence of objective circumstances - such as an increase in income - on well-being.” What results from these economic ways of thinking is that well-being is an essentially subjective concept, influenced by objective factors and conditions only insofar as our objective circumstances penetrate our subjective reality. Thus, the best way to see how well a person’s life is going is to ask them. However, although this thinking certainly feels prevalent and maybe even intuitive, I think it is worth asking from a philosophical perspective if it is true that a person’s well-being is an entirely

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3 Ibid.

subjective feature of his or her life, and if it is, does a subjective conception of well-being offer a complete description of what a good life is?

It is one question to ask if a subjective understanding of well-being is accurate, but another to ask if a completely subjective understanding of happiness is good for us, or completely fulfills our ideas about well-being. When pursuing our own understanding of the good life is up to us, we are left without any formal restrictions or structure about how to pursue it. Instead of basking in the new light of subjective understanding, some researchers caution about pursuing pleasure and happiness at every turn.

Historian Darrin McMahon argues that “with the passing of the communist illusion, and as globalization raises expectations of a better life, even where it cannot immediately fulfill them, men and women throughout the world are searching restlessly for better feelings and more satisfaction, more of the time.” Whether or not our well-being is really made up of pleasure is a question that economists and proponents of subjective understandings of the good life take for granted, and thus blur the distinction between what is good for us and what is good to us. McMahon cautions that the “desperate longing for good feeling is a symptom of the evaporation of meaning, or the belief in meaning, in other ends...pleasure seekers who find no happiness in their pleasures.” McMahon’s observations raise an important issue about the assumption that pleasure can fulfill the role of the good in our good life. It is not necessarily the case that because pleasure is good to us that it is also good for us, or more specifically, the only good, or sufficiently good to be what makes the good life good. Questions about the relationship between what is good for and what is good to are something I hope to take up in this thesis.

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6 McMahon, “What Does the Ideal of happiness Mean?” 486.
7 Ibid.
Ancient philosophers, however, do not take such distinctions for granted. Instead of focusing on subjectivity, they emphasize the fulfillment of objective goods in a eudaimonic thesis, or theory of the good life. It is therefore my plan in this thesis to compare and contrast ancient objective and complete views about the good life with contemporary, subjective hedonistic accounts to see what gets lost when objectivism and perfectionism are discarded in favour of subjectivity and pleasure.

I will investigate Aristotle’s characterization and placement of pleasure in his eudaimonic theory as an example of an ancient account of the good life. I will contrast Aristotle’s objective understanding of pleasure and the good life with a contemporary example offered by philosopher Fred Feldman who argues for a subjective hedonistic account of happiness and well-being. Broadly construed, I will argue that what we have lost is not a universal conception of the good life. A universal eudaimonic thesis remains intact but is understood as composed of specific mental states instead of objective goods. Rather, what we have lost is an understanding of how various goods such as virtue and pleasure should interact within a good life since the good life is constituted by the single good of pleasure. Moreover, this single good of subjective pleasure fails to capture everything we have in mind when we think of well-being and a good life. Thus, we are left with an incomplete account of what it means to live well. Whether or not we are satisfied with an incomplete account of the good life is a point of tension between ancient and contemporary theories and so I will leave it to my reader to decide if completeness is a feature we desire in a eudaimonic theory in our contemporary context.
Chapter Two: It Feels Good to be Good:  
The Moral Role of Pleasure in Aristotle’s Good Life

Introduction

“The best life is the most pleasant”8 is an interpretation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* espoused by Aristotelian scholar Terence Irwin, and one which I would like to forward in this chapter. For hedonists, such a statement would clearly indicate that pleasure is our greatest good. Aristotle, however, is not a hedonist, and therefore the role he gives to pleasure in living well is more subtle. In this chapter, I will unpack Irwin’s reading that “the best life is the most pleasant” in order to understand how Aristotle intends pleasure to fit among the goods that make up the good life. I will argue that pleasure plays an inherently moral role in Aristotle’s description of the good life, not as the source of all motivation or as our greatest good, but as a concept that derives its moral appropriateness from both its subject and its object. I will also investigate the connection between Aristotle’s description of pleasure and his naturalistic principles in order to understand pleasure’s role as a tool in moral education the result of which makes the best life the most pleasant. I will then entertain two problems that arise when pleasure is moralized in this way: first, the problem of pleasure’s worth in the good life when it is dependent upon other goods, and second, the problem of Aristotle’s hierarchy of pleasures and goods, and the possibility of a perfectly pleasant but shallow life.

The Best Life is the Most Pleasant - Pleasure’s Relation to Other Goods

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In order to understand how Aristotle can simultaneously hold the views that “the best life is the most pleasant” and that pleasure is not the greatest good, but only one good among many, I will begin by unpacking Aristotle’s arguments against hedonism. He remarks that we can see that what is pleasant is not identical to what is good because we can see that there is a difference between the motives of a friend and a flatterer. When giving a compliment, the friend aims at what is good, and the flatterer aims at what is pleasant.\(^9\) Thus, what is pleasant and what is good are not necessarily the same thing. Furthermore, if we could live an entirely pleasant life, but it meant that we would have to always live with a child’s level of thought, we would not choose the pleasant life, but would choose to be a fully functioning adult, even if this prevented a life of pure pleasure.\(^10\) This is because there are many goods that we would choose for themselves, even if we were to derive no pleasure from them, such as seeing, remembering, knowing, being virtuous, etc. Aristotle thinks it clear from this discussion that pleasure is not the good and that not every pleasure is choiceworthy.

Yet it remains that the best life is the most pleasant and that an account of the good life lacking pleasure would be seriously defective.\(^11\) In order to understand how this can be so, it is important to understand that it is not the goodness of pleasure that Aristotle rejects, but the claim that other goods are only good insofar as they promote pleasure.\(^12\) For Aristotle, pleasure is not the ultimate motive of action, but a characteristic of its performance. We do not make choices only to promote pleasure, but when we make good choices because they are good, we will take pleasure from them. This makes him immune to complaints against hedonism while allowing

\(^11\) Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 129.
\(^12\) Ibid.
pleasure to enter into the content of the good life in a significant way. For Aristotle, the morally right action is done with inclination, not because of it. Thus, although pleasure is not the greatest good or ultimate motive of action, it nonetheless plays a significant role in what makes a life good because it comes with performing the activities of the good life well. Understanding how pleasure fits in among the other goods in a good life will help to understand the role that it does play.

An interesting feature of pleasure’s relation to other goods in a good life is that it does not stand alone, independently of other goods, but is a supervenient or consequent end of other activities. Aristotle remarks that pleasure is complete at any length of time, meaning that it cannot be a process: pleasure is something whole and complete and not coming to be. Moreover, every perceptual capacity is active in relation to its perceptible object and completely active when in good condition in relation to the finest of its perceptible objects; when this is the case, the activity is the most pleasant. Every perceptual capacity, and every sort of thought and study has its pleasure, thinks Aristotle, and the most pleasant activity is the most complete. Thus in this way, pleasure completes the activity. However, pleasure does not complete the activity in the same way that the object and capacity complete the activity by being present in it, but as a sort of consequent end “like the bloom on youths”. Aristotle suggests that as long as objects of understanding or perception and the subject that judges are in the right condition, there will be pleasure in the activity. Aquinas understands Aristotle to be assigning pleasure the role of a “supervening good”. Beauty supervenes on the young not as the essence of youth, but as

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14 Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 261.
15 Aristotle, NE, 1174b10.
16 Aristotle, NE, 1174b15.
17 Aristotle, NE, 1174b20.
18 Aristotle, NE, 1175b25.
19 Aristotle, NE, 1175a.
something that follows from the good disposition of the causes of youth.\textsuperscript{20} Pleasure is not the essence of the thing, but is caused by the thing’s essential principles.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, over and above the good that an action itself is, there supervenes another good, pleasure.\textsuperscript{22} “Pleasure, in short, is a property of an act of awareness in which a cognitive power and a congenial object to which it is directed are both excellent.”\textsuperscript{23} Pleasure does not stand alone as a good in the good life, but always coincides with the completion of a good activity done perfectly.

There are three components to pleasure that I would like to draw attention to. Firstly, the subject and secondly, the object have to be in the right condition. For example, in order to enjoy the sight of a landscape, both my perceptual capacity and the landscape itself must be in good condition. Thirdly, Aristotle’s pleasure encompasses a wide variety of psychological states such as sensation, perception, feeling, mood or attitude, and includes moral attitudes as well as intellectual activities.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, a difference in either the subject or the object can change the nature of the third attitude. The state of my soul and the nature of the activity I am performing can change the quality of the pleasure I enjoy. This will be an important relation to understand when understanding the moral standing and role of pleasure in the good life.

**How the nature of the Subject and Object Make Pleasure an Inherently Moral Concept**

One way in which Aristotle ensures that pleasure’s role in the good life is morally appropriate is by relating it necessarily to good activity. For Aristotle, pleasures differ in species because activities that differ in species will be completed by different things, and each pleasure is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Kevin White, “Pleasure, a Supervenient End,” in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Tobias Hoffman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 235.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{22} White, “Pleasure, a Supervenient End,” 237.
\item \textsuperscript{23} White, “Pleasure, a Supervenient End,” 236.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 257.
\end{itemize}
proper to the activity it completes.\textsuperscript{25} He says that “since activities differ in decency, badness, choiceworthiness, so do pleasures, for each activity has its own proper pleasure”.\textsuperscript{26} It follows that pleasure proper to an excellent activity is decent and the one proper to a base activity is vicious.\textsuperscript{27} In this way, Aristotle is tying the goodness of pleasure to the goodness of the activity it completes. This is important for how we understand the role of pleasure in the good life, “for not pleasures as such are good, but only good pleasures.”\textsuperscript{28} When we attempt to understand what it means for the best life to be the most pleasant, we must keep in mind that pleasure derives its moral appropriateness from the activities it completes. Pleasure will only be morally appropriate if the activity it supervenes upon is morally appropriate. Thus, whatever kinds of activities that produce pleasure in the best life must also be good, because the good life is one of virtuous activity according to Aristotle. One way to understand the relation is that proper pleasure stimulates our performance of the activity, and so the pleasure that accompanies good activity will be good.\textsuperscript{29} Moreover, Aristotle also says that disgraceful pleasures are not really pleasures, but only appear pleasant to people in bad conditions.\textsuperscript{30} It is impossible to live a flourishing life of morally inappropriate pleasure according to Aristotle because it is impossible to flourish when performing morally inappropriate action, since flourishing for a human being is living according to virtue. Moreover, there is no such thing as a morally inappropriate pleasure since a person who takes pleasure in a morally inappropriate activity is mistaken. This leads me to the second way in which Aristotle ensures that pleasure in the good life will be morally appropriate: the subject.

\textsuperscript{25} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1175b10.
\textsuperscript{26} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1175b 20.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 260.
\textsuperscript{30} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1173b20-25.
In order for pleasure to be good, or even pleasure at all, the person who decides what pleasures are pleasant must also be a good person. For Aristotle, each kind of animal has its own proper pleasure, just like it has its own proper function, for the proper pleasure will correspond to the activity. Thus, the proper pleasure of the human being will correspond to the activity of our function: living according to virtue. It follows for Aristotle, that to find what is really pleasant, we must look to the best kind of human being. He says, “But in all such cases it seems that what is really so is what appears so to the excellent person. If this is right, as it seems to be, and virtue, i.e. the good person insofar as he is good, is the measure of each thing, then what appear pleasures to him, will also really be pleasures, and what is pleasant will be what he enjoys”. Moreover, Aristotle repeats that pleasures agreed to be shameful are not really pleasures at all except to corrupt people. Thus, pleasure is not really pleasure, unless it is morally appropriate, or what the virtuous person enjoys. This idea that pleasure for the good person is true pleasure presupposes Aristotle’s conception of the good life, and if this is taken as a whole, provides explanation for his thinking so. Pleasure’s role in the good life is tied to the goodness of the virtuous, flourishing person. It is impossible to say that a bad person, taking pleasure in bad things, is living well, because she is not living according to her human function, and is therefore not flourishing, but in some kind of corrupt state. Thus, bad pleasures are never possibly permitted into the good life. Pleasure is only ever permitted a role in living well if it is morally appropriate.

31 Aristotle, NE, 1176a1-5.
32 Aristotle, NE, 1176a15-20.
33 Aristotle, NE, 1176a20-25.
34 Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 263.
Pleasure as a Moral Tool: The Importance of Aristotle’s Naturalism in Understanding

Pleasure and the Good Life

In order to understand how Aristotle understands pleasure to derive its goodness from both the subject and object, it is helpful to locate the role of pleasure within Aristotle’s naturalism. Dorothea Frede understands Aristotle’s treatment of pleasure to be a reminder that what is good in a person is also what is good for a person and that it should be felt so by that person.\(^{35}\) Aristotle says that “For what is proper to each thing’s nature is supremely best and most pleasant for it”.\(^{36}\) In his writings on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas responds to this idea with the belief that nature fails only rarely, not always or usually. What is always or usually the case seems to be from an inclination of nature, and nature does not incline to what is bad or false.\(^ {37}\) Aristotle espouses this same kind of naturalism insofar as he thinks that we will find what is best for the human being by looking at the features of the human being, and that what is best for the human being should feel so for us. In this way, naturalism is very important to Aristotle’s conception of pleasure because of the way in which pleasure corresponds to the proper state of the subject’s soul. He says “to each type of person the activity that accords with his own proper state is most choiceworthy; hence the activity in accord with virtue is most choiceworthy to the excellent person (and hence is most honourable and pleasant)”.\(^ {38}\) The idea here is that because we take pleasure in activities that come naturally to us, the virtuous person will enjoy virtuous activities.\(^ {39}\) Thus, pleasure can serve as a kind of litmus test for a virtuous soul.\(^ {40}\) If a person is

\(^{35}\) Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 260.

\(^{36}\) Aristotle, *NE*, 1178a5.

\(^{37}\) White, “Pleasure, a Supervenient End,” 226.

\(^{38}\) Aristotle, *NE*, 1176b25.

\(^{39}\) Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 259.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
good, she will take pleasure in good things. In this way, pleasure is an indicator of what is good in a person, because what is good for a person should be good to that person.

Not only does Aristotle’s naturalism allow pleasure the role of indicator of a virtuous soul, it reinforces the prohibition of bad pleasures in the good life. Our highest activity, eudaimonia, perfectly fulfills the necessary conditions for pleasure, an excellent subject perfecting an excellent activity, and should therefore yield the highest pleasure, making the best life indeed the most pleasant. However, it is important to note that the highest pleasure cannot be reached by just anyone. In order to reach the highest pleasure, the subject must be aware of the moral norm.\footnote{Van Riel, Pleasure and the Good Life, 61.} It is therefore impossible to flourish while living a life of morally inappropriate pleasures because living according to virtue is the proper human function. Thus, living against virtue would be to live against our nature, or in an improper state of the soul, and would therefore fail to yield true pleasure. If the best life is the most pleasant then, it is because the best life feels most pleasant to us because it is good for us.

Furthermore, in keeping with the spirit of his naturalism, Aristotle harnesses pleasure as a tool for moral education, giving it a moral function within his conception of the good life. He says that we should teach children by steering them with pleasure and pain. Enjoying and hating the right things are most important to the virtues of character and the happy life because “pleasure and pain extend through the whole of our lives” and because “people decide on pleasant things and avoid painful things.”\footnote{Aristotle, NE, 1172a20-25.} Aristotle here recognizes that we have a natural inclination toward what is pleasant, and so, this inclination should be harnessed in the cultivation of what is good for us, i.e. virtue. This is in keeping with the emphasis he places on the importance of habituation in attaining virtue. He remarks that even though some believe that
nature is what makes us good, others think habit, and still others teaching that the soul of the student must be prepared by habit. Nature is not up to us, and teaching and arguments do not prevail for everyone, so habituation into virtue must be cultivated and continued into adulthood.\textsuperscript{43} The more we become habituated to an activity, the more pleasant and easy it becomes for us. Morally right and wrong attitudes are the products of the corresponding kind of habituation from early on.\textsuperscript{44} We should steer children toward what is good by harnessing the draw of pleasure as a moral tool so that children become habituated into practicing good activity with inclination, and thus take pleasure in doing what is good. Through habituation, the virtues become pleasant, and thus, Aristotle’s best life becomes the most pleasant.

There is another fundamentally naturalistic way in which pleasure is tied to the good life for Aristotle: pleasure completes the activity of living itself. In response to the question of why everyone desires pleasure, his answer is that it is because everyone also aims at being alive. Living is a type of activity and each of us is active towards the object in ways he likes most. Pleasure completes the activity, and hence life, which we all desire.\textsuperscript{45} It is reasonable then, that we also all aim at pleasure, since it completes life and is choiceworthy.\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, Aristotle opts to set aside the question of whether or not we choose life because of pleasure or pleasure because of life because he thinks the two are so combined as to allow no separation, for pleasure never arises without activity, and it equally completes every activity.\textsuperscript{47} We are naturally inclined to what is pleasant, according to Aristotle, because pleasure is inherently linked to the activity of living. Therefore, if we are living well, for Aristotle, we will also be living pleasantly, and it is

\textsuperscript{43} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1179b20-30.
\textsuperscript{44} Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 260.
\textsuperscript{45} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1175a15.
\textsuperscript{46} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1175a15-20.
\textsuperscript{47} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1175a20.
our natural inclination to desire to do so. The desire to live well and the desire for pleasure are, in this way, inseparable desires.

I have attempted to articulate two ways in which pleasure in Aristotle’s good life must be morally appropriate. Firstly, pleasure adopts a morally appropriate character in Aristotle’s good life by being bound to both good activities and good souls, and must be good in these ways in order to be considered true pleasure. Secondly, pleasure performs two moral functions. In the spirit of naturalism, pleasure indicates how what is good for a person should be good to a person, thereby acting as a kind of litmus test for what is good in a person. Aristotle also indicates that pleasure can be used as a pedagogical tool in habituating a moral character. The result of this careful placement and characterization is that the pleasure in a good life will always be morally appropriate. Moreover, pleasure’s role in a good life never stands as an isolated good, but is integrated with aspects of one’s character and activities. Dorthea Frede describes morally appropriate pleasure to be like good taste in judgement of works of art: it presupposes some natural aptitude, training, experience, deliberation, and hard thought.\(^{48}\) Pleasure’s role in the good life must be in harmony with the other aspects of it, and because of the virtuous character of Aristotle’s conception of the good life, pleasure must take on a morally appropriate character of its own in order to work in harmony with the other goods. Aristotle’s conception of the good life is like an organic whole. In order for a body to be healthy, it must be made up of healthy parts.\(^{49}\) Because of its supervenient nature, pleasure touches on all aspects one’s life. If the activities of our life are good, then our pleasures will be good too, and since we naturally incline toward what is pleasant, if we want to be good, we best habituate ourselves into taking pleasure in what is good. As Aquinas remarked, happiness is called pleasure from the point of view of its

\(^{48}\) Frede, “Pleasure and Pain” 262.
\(^{49}\) Irwin, The Development of Ethics, 130.
completion, rather than from the point of view of its beginning.\textsuperscript{50} Once we have fully and truly habituated ourselves into virtuous living, or flourishing as a human being, we will be able to call our lives not only the best, or happy, we will also be able to call them pleasant.

**Problems with Moralizing Pleasure’s Role in the Good Life**

Many scholars have made various criticisms and found flaws with Aristotle’s treatment of pleasure in the good life. Within the confines of this chapter, I will limit myself to a few criticisms I find most pertinent to my interest in what I call Aristotle’s “moralization” of pleasure in the good life. I will first entertain an objection made by Gerd Van Riel, that the link between pleasure and activity makes pleasure essentially a by-product, making its role as a good in the good life less clear than when it is treated as a “stand alone” good. Secondly, I will object that Aristotle’s account of pleasure, and in particular his association of true or proper pleasure with the life of study, is both elitist and exclusive. I will support this position with a criticism by Fred Feldman that objects to “persuasive high redefinitions” of happiness that, he argues, mistakenly associate pleasure with particular, morally “high” or “deep” activities.

Although Van Riel is largely supportive of Aristotle’s view of pleasure in the good life, he finds that Aristotle’s account has its imperfections. One imperfection he remarks upon is the relation between activity and pleasure. Van Riel thinks that Aristotle’s description of a direct link between perfect activity and pleasure implies that an unimpeded activity necessarily yields pleasure.\textsuperscript{51} Van Riel thinks that such a position is untenable because it seems very possible, and even likely, that one could be performing an activity perfectly and be in the correct state without any feelings of pleasure being produced. A woman in the throws of childbirth may be a good

\textsuperscript{50} White, “Pleasure, a Supervenient End,” 237.
\textsuperscript{51} Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 74.
example of a person performing an activity perfectly, and in the perfect state to do so, but who feels no pleasure at the moment of the activity. In fact, she might become quite angry if you were to ask her if she was feeling pleasant at that particular moment, since it would be quite insensitive to do so. Thus, a question arises about the relationship between perfect activity and pleasure.

Pleasure is essentially a fortunate by-product thinks, Van Riel. There is no clear answer to when and how we will attain pleasure and we can only hope to attain it without even being sure how to behave in order to guarantee it. The perfection of an activity is not enough to explain the occurrence of pleasure, giving us no direct access to it. Thus, the accidental quality of pleasure is a characteristic of its very essence. The best life is therefore accidentally the most pleasant, and we may feel that “accidentally” does not quite capture the importance of pleasure to the good life. It is hard to say that if my life is perfectly virtuous, and I have health, enough wealth, and friends, but I take no pleasure from these things, that I am really flourishing. If it is feasible to say that I am not, then it may be beneficial to stress that a pleasant life is choiceworthy for itself, and we may want to secure pleasure’s place in the good life more concretely than as a supervenient good upon others.

A further problem with Aristotle’s characterization of pleasure as supervenient upon good activity is that it results in an elitist view of pleasure since he equates the highest pleasure with the activity of theoretical study. He reasons that if happiness is activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable for it to accord with the supreme virtue, which will be the virtue of the best thing. The best is understanding, or whatever else seems to be the natural ruler and leader.

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52 Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 75.
Thus, the activity of study completes happiness.\textsuperscript{54} In addition to thinking that understanding is the most supreme element in us, Aristotle also thinks that the activity of study is the most continuous activity, the most self-sufficient, and liked because of itself alone and its own proper pleasure. Moreover, because he thinks happiness is mixed with pleasure, he thinks it agreed that activity in accord with wisdom is the most pleasant of the virtuous activities.\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, Aristotle believes that such a life is superior to the human level. Someone will live it not insofar as he is a human being, but only insofar as he has some divine element in him.\textsuperscript{56} Because the goodness of pleasure depends on the goodness of the activity it completes, Aristotle is able to create a hierarchy of pleasures that corresponds to a hierarchy of activities in the good life.

The good life therefore must contain very specific kinds of activity: living according to virtue, and more specifically, wisdom. This means that the pleasures that make the best life the most pleasant must be specific kinds of pleasures i.e. those of theoretical study. In this stipulation, Aristotle goes beyond simply moralizing pleasure, he prioritizes some moral pleasures over others. Thus, Aristotle’s characterization of pleasure as a supervenient good upon good activities limits the pleasures of the good life to not only being moral pleasures, but with the caveat that certain moral pleasures are better than others, and so the scope of what counts as the best and most pleasant life becomes very narrow. We might take issue with Aristotle’s hierarchy of pleasures in a good life on the grounds that it is elitist and perfectionist. Not only are some pleasures better than others, but only a select few are capable of enjoying them, and therefore capable of enjoying the best life.

Feldman, who thinks that happiness just is pleasure, challenges views of happiness and pleasure, like Aristotle’s, that claim that there is a connection between happiness and something

\textsuperscript{54} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1177a20.  
\textsuperscript{55} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1177a25.  
\textsuperscript{56} Aristotle, \textit{NE}, 1177b25-30.
“deep in human nature”. He thinks that philosophers like Aristotle are succumbing to a
“persuasive high redefinition of happiness”. Feldman says that it is often claimed that there is
an essential connection between happiness and other good things like rationality,
meaningfulness, wisdom, humanity, and virtue. He cites Phillippa Foot as a contemporary
philosopher who thinks that great happiness must be something related to something deep in
human nature. Feldman however, thinks that these views are false. A person can be happy, or
take pleasure in things, that are not based on anything “deep in human nature”. In support of
this position, Feldman offers the example of two brothers named Timmy and Tommy. Timmy is
a fun-loving, happy go-lucky guy who loves parties, loud music, and spicy food. He does not
reflect much on his life as a whole but takes much pleasure in its activities. His brother Tommy
is an academic who has been seeing a psychiatrist for years. Tommy dissects every element of
his life with a psychoanalytic scalpel. However, his depression will not lift and he remains glum.
Feldman thinks that maybe Timmy is not as admirable as Tommy, but he is the happy one. If
we find ourselves thinking that Timmy’s happiness is not real or authentic, we may be falling for
a persuasive “high redefinition” of happiness.

What I hope to do by invoking Feldman’s criticism and example is to put pressure on the
idea that we have good reason to create a hierarchy among pleasures that belong in the good life.
It seems that there is a wide variety of lives that could properly be called flourishing that do not
include the pleasures of theoretical study. Among these flourishing lives, it seems difficult to
justify the claim that the flourishing life of theoretical study is somehow superior to a good life
without it. Feldman takes his claim a step further and questions the legitimacy of evaluating

58 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, 147.
59 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, 149.
60 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, 148.
61 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, 149.
aspects of the good life, much less evaluating pleasure, based upon its relation to something “deep” in human nature since it seems possible to lead a perfectly pleasant life full of pleasures which are neither moral nor related to anything deeply seated within us. Feldman’s criticism puts pressure on Aristotle’s naturalism and the intuition that what is good for us should be good to us and vice versa. However, advocating that the good life is the most pleasant without stipulating that these pleasures must, in some way, be morally appropriate, like Feldman does, has its own problems, which I will address in the following chapter.

**Conclusion**

For Aristotle, the best life is the most pleasant, but as I have attempted to illustrate, this statement requires a careful characterization of pleasure combined with a principle of naturalism. Pleasure is not the good, or the ultimate motive of actions, but a good supervenient on good actions. Pleasure is inherently a good thing because only pleasure derived from good actions and by a good person is true pleasure. Thus, the pleasure of a good life is inherently morally appropriate for Aristotle. Only true, or morally appropriate, pleasure is admitted into the good life. Moreover, because of Aristotle’s principle of naturalism — that what is good in a person should be good for and to that person — what a person finds pleasant can serve as a kind of litmus test for the state of her soul. A good person will take pleasure in good things, and thus her pleasures will indicate the state of her soul. Because we all incline toward pleasure because we desire to be alive, pleasure should be harnessed as a pedagogical tool. We must habituate the young into taking pleasure in what is good so that the good person will do what is good from inclination and with pleasure.
However, there are problems with moralizing pleasure in this way. Firstly, characterizing pleasure as a good supervenient upon other activities denies it the status of independent good. It may be felt that pleasure is more important to flourishing than Aristotle makes room for, and characterizing it as essentially a by-product to other goods does not do it justice. Furthermore, making pleasure inseparable from activity allows Aristotle to create a hierarchy of pleasures in the good life, and results in him making the elitist claim that the life of theoretical study as the best and most pleasant life. Fred Feldman finds this kind of reasoning to be an inaccurate, “persuasive high redefinition” of happiness that, again, fails to capture the possible scope of pleasure in the good life. I have not yet attempted to meet these criticisms, nor have I evaluated the alternative view they espouse: hedonism. My next step will be to examine the merits and difficulties of Feldman’s hedonistic view, and then to compare the merits and faults of Feldman’s and Aristotle’s conceptions of the good life and the respective roles they assign to pleasure.
Chapter Three: A Contemporary Perspective:

Feldman’s AHH

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the view that the good life is the most pleasant life from the perspective of contemporary hedonistic philosopher, Fred Feldman, as described in his book *What is This Thing Called Happiness?* Although Aristotle also believes that the good life is the most pleasant, Feldman’s position stands in stark contrast to Aristotle’s insofar as Feldman’s description of pleasure and the good life is an entirely subjective account that values pleasure above all other goods. Pleasure is what makes the good life good. I will begin by explaining Feldman’s conception of the nature of happiness as the subjective mental state of attitudinally “taking pleasure in,” and the resulting relation between pleasure and the subject. I will then describe how Feldman makes the evaluative claim that the pleasant life is the good life and his justifications for so doing. Taking up Feldman’s description of welfare, I will assess pleasure’s relation to other goods within this account of the good life and the different ways of measuring a life within Feldman’s view. After examining how Feldman grants us controlling authority over our happiness, I hope to draw out the full implications of a hedonistic eudaimonic view and what this means about other goods we hope to pursue in a good life. Finally, I will assess some case studies offered by Feldman in support of his view dealing with the problems of adaptive preferences, inauthentic happiness, and disgusting happiness, and his arguments for why his theory of happiness handles these problematic cases better than alternative theories.

My hope is that this chapter will lay the groundwork for comparing Feldman’s subjective hedonistic view of pleasure and the good life with Aristotle’s objective view of pleasure and the good life. Throughout this chapter, I will compare the two views on the main points of the nature
of pleasure, how pleasure relates to other goods, and how pleasure relates to the subject and object. By the end of this chapter, I will be in a position to compare how the two views handle the problematic cases and therefore illuminate some of the problems with an entirely subjective understanding of the good life as the most pleasant.

**Attitudinal Hedonism About Happiness**

In his description of the philosophical literature about happiness, Dan Haybron recognizes two main senses of how we use the word “happiness”. He says that we either use happiness to describe a mental state, or to describe how well life is going for the person leading it.\(^6^2\) Feldman’s project is to show how, if properly understood, the two senses are inextricably related. Thus, the first step to understanding Feldman’s hedonistic eudaimonic position is to understand his view of happiness as a hedonistic mental state.

Feldman defines happiness as “Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness” or AHH for short. He offers a reductive account of happiness where happiness is to be on balance attitudinally pleased about things.\(^6^3\) The first important point to take from Feldman’s description is his equation of happiness with pleasure. Happiness just is attitudinal, so not strictly sensory, pleasure, and attitudinal pleasure has certain specific features. Firstly, Feldman describes attitudinal pleasure as a “pro attitude”. When we are attitudinally pleased about something we are in some sense in favour of it or the situation.\(^6^4\) Secondly, we can be both occurrently pleased about something in particular, and dispositionally pleased over an interval of time. I can be pleased at this very moment that I am watching my favourite film, and simultaneously


\(^{6^3}\) Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 110.

\(^{6^4}\) Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 12.
dispositionally pleased to be attending Queen’s University even though I am not in class, on
campus, or even thinking about Queen’s right now. Moreover, attitudinal pleasure can come in
degrees. I can be more pleased about watching my favourite film than about the tea I am drinking
while watching it. Thus, my momentary happiness can be described as the sum of the extent to
which I am pleased (understood in positive units) or displeased (understood in negative units)
about states of affairs at the moment. This equation can be applied over a length of time by
adding up the sums of all moments within the temporal interval. Feldman here thinks himself to
be making sense of Solon’s maxim “Count no man happy till he is dead”.65 A happy life is one
that takes the most attitudinal pleasure in states of affairs over as much time as possible.

An important feature of Feldman’s description of pleasure is that it is an entirely
subjective attitude. Although attitudinal pleasure is a propositional attitude rather than a feeling
for Feldman, that is to say that we must take pleasure in some state of affairs, the authenticity of
pleasure is in no way bounded to the object we are taking pleasure in.66 Thus, like Aristotle,
pleasure arises amidst a relationship between the subject and an object or some state of affairs.
However, unlike in Aristotle’s account where pleasure is necessarily linked to good activity,
Feldman thinks we can take attitudinal pleasure from a variety of different sources.67 These
sources need not be good, or morally appropriate, in order to count as pleasure for Feldman.
Pleasure does not derive its character from the state of affairs it is linked to, but stands
unbounded in this way as a subjective attitude.

Moreover, in contrast to Aristotle, different people can take pleasure in a variety of
different sources, morally appropriate or not, and the appropriateness or goodness of these
sources and the people experiencing these sources does not affect the authenticity of the

65 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 122.
67 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 135.
pleasure. For Aristotle, the measure of true pleasure is to look at what the good person takes pleasure in. Feldman denies the validity of the claim that there is an essential conceptual connection between happiness and other good things like rationality, meaningfulness, wisdom, humanity and virtue.\(^6\) Attitudinal pleasure counts as pleasure regardless of its source or who is experiencing it. There are no qualifiers on its authenticity for Feldman. Therefore, no matter who you are, happiness just is taking pleasure in states of affairs, whatever these may be, throughout your life.

**Attitudinal Hedonist Eudaimonia**

I have said that Feldman equates Haybron’s two meanings of happiness. I will now turn to Haybron’s second horn: Feldman’s argument for why happiness as the subjective mental state of attitudinal pleasure should be understood as constituting what makes a life go well for a person. Feldman supports the evaluative thesis that “Happiness is The Good” or that the “good life” is the life of happiness, or what ultimately makes for welfare or well-being is happiness.\(^6\) He calls his welfare thesis “Attitudinal Hedonistic Eudaimonism” or AHE. AHE is the thesis that welfare tracks AHH, or in other words, someone who is experiencing high amounts of AHH will correspondingly have high welfare levels. What ultimately makes for well-being, or the good life, is a life in which we take more attitudinal pleasure than displeasure in states of affairs. By asserting that well-being consists in the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, Feldman is forwarding a form of evaluative or prudential hedonism.\(^7\) In this section, I will outline some of

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\(^6\) Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 149.
\(^6\) Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 161.
the formal features of AHE, and then compare the relationship between pleasure and other goods and the role pleasure plays in making up the good life according to Feldman.

First, in forwarding AHE, Feldman adopts some formal features of welfare that are part of accepting a eudaimonic view. He says that ‘eudaimonism’ is the term for the view that happiness determines welfare.\textsuperscript{71} Welfare is a kind of value often described as what is non-instrumentally or ultimately good for a person. It is sometimes called “prudential value” and should be distinguished from aesthetic or moral value.\textsuperscript{72} Welfare is applicable when we wish to express the concept of the “goodness of a life for the one who lives it”.\textsuperscript{73} It is important to note here that welfare is a value for a certain person. A certain state of affairs could have welfare for me and not for you. Thus, welfare involves relativization to a person.\textsuperscript{74} Moreover, a person’s welfare can vary through time and thus, welfare should be understood as a relation between a person and time.\textsuperscript{75} Interpersonal comparisons are possible concerning levels of welfare and in order to do so, welfare can be represented by a numerical system if so desired. Feldman sees no reason to believe there is any kind of upper limit on a person’s welfare levels.\textsuperscript{76} These are the formal features of welfare as Feldman adopts it.

In addition to these formal features, Feldman’s own eudaimonic thesis has elements particular to his hedonistic sympathies. He argues that the good life is the happy life, or in other words, what makes for well-being is happiness. More specifically, what makes for the good life is attitudinal pleasure. He does not offer a formal argument for why we should adopt his attitudinal hedonistic eudaimonic thesis. Instead, he offers a series of tests to try to capture the

\textsuperscript{71} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 161.
\textsuperscript{72} Crisp, “Well-Being”, \textit{The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy}.
\textsuperscript{73} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 161.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 162.
\textsuperscript{76} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 163.
fact that the right kind of value we are concerned with when we are concerned with a person’s welfare is best represented as attitudinal hedonism. The first test he offers he calls the “Sympathy Test”. He thinks that welfare is what we think a person is lacking when we feel sympathy for her. However, he thinks this test is inconclusive because he remarks that a person keen on the Aristotelian virtues might feel sympathy for a person who lacks courage, even though courage would in no way contribute to the person’s well-being. Thus, although the Sympathy Test can in some cases be illuminating, we must be careful to note that it does not provide conclusive evidence for why attitudinal hedonism best describes well-being.

The second test he offers he calls the “Crib Test”. In the “Crib Test,” welfare is what a mother wishes for in the life of her new born son as she looks over his cradle. However again, this test can be inconclusive if the mother happens to be sternly moralistic. She might wish her son to have a morally good life over a welfare good life. Again, we must proceed with caution when trying to define what we mean by welfare. There may not be one sure way to capture exactly what we mean when we say a life is going well for the person leading it. Thus, Feldman thinks the best way to define welfare is through a process of triangulation.

We should try to locate welfare within a web of concepts including: virtue concepts like prudence, self-sacrifice, and benevolence, emotional states or patterns of motivation such as love, selfishness and altruism, and prima-facie duties like benevolence, maleficence and gratitude. However, welfare is most tightly connected to the concepts of benefit and harm. A person’s welfare is what is adversely affected when a person is harmed, or favourably affected when a person is benefited. Welfare is what the prudent person seeks to maximize in himself;

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
what the selfish person is dominated by; and what the altruistic person cares for in others.\textsuperscript{79} Feldman does not mean this to be a formal definition, but makes the more modest claim that we already know what welfare is and he is only trying to locate welfare among these concepts.\textsuperscript{80} Admittedly, he accepts that we may follow his remarks and still confuse welfare with moral excellence.\textsuperscript{81} However, what Feldman hopes to illuminate with these tests and examples is his eudaimonic thesis that welfare tracks attitudinal pleasure.

There are a few specific features of Feldman’s description of the role of pleasure in the good life that are of particular interest to me. The first important point to take away from Feldman’s eudaimonic thesis is that he is a hedonist. He thinks that attitudinal pleasure is what makes the good life good. Pleasure is the metric by which to measure the value of a person’s life. A second important point to take from Feldman’s thesis is that attitudinal pleasure is what makes the good life. More specifically, we should be sure to understand that this is a mental state theory of welfare. Taking pleasure and displeasure in things are facts about the subject. Happiness is a mental state for Feldman. Thus, AHE is a mental state theory of welfare and implies that a person’s welfare depends entirely on her mental states.\textsuperscript{82} Unlike Aristotle, Feldman does not tie pleasure’s value to other goods or objective features of the good life like good activity. Instead, pleasure is itself a good and is understood from the perspective of the person experiencing it as the most important good for measuring the goodness of the life. The only good important for evaluating a good life is what is good from that person’s perspective.

Unlike Aristotle, there is no principle of naturalism in Feldman’s thesis. Pleasure does not necessarily correspond to what is good in a person and all that matters when evaluating what

\textsuperscript{79} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 167.  
\textsuperscript{80} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 168.  
\textsuperscript{81} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 169.  
\textsuperscript{82} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 170.
is good for a person is that it be experienced as good to that person. Thus, the differences
between Feldman and Aristotle’s characterization of pleasure in the good life are roughly
twofold. They differ in the value that they assign pleasure in the good life since Aristotle thinks
pleasure to be one good among many and Feldman thinks it the only good that factors into
evaluation. Secondly, Aristotle’s conception of pleasure is objective, with pleasure deriving its
nature from both the subject and the object, while Feldman thinks pleasure to be an entirely
subjective mental state.

As a hedonistic eudaimonist, Feldman commits himself to two conceptual evaluative
claims about pleasure that do not square well with the other goods philosophers like Aristotle
may want to include or evaluate within the good life. Firstly, as a eudaimonist, Feldman argues
that happiness is what makes for the good life.83 Feldman’s eudaimonism coupled with his
hedonism about happiness commits Feldman to the claim that pleasure is what is ultimately
valuable in life.84 Thus, other goods in the good life will derive their welfare value to the extent
that they promote pleasure.

What makes this point more complicated is that lurking in the background of Feldman’s
tests and triangulation concepts is the intuition that there are other ways to evaluate a life than
just welfare. Feldman thinks that there are different scales of value on which a life can be
weighed. He says that sometimes when we speak of the good life, we have in mind the life of
moral excellence.85 Similarly, we might speak of a person having a beautiful life, or one with
high aesthetic value. Eudaimonism, he claims, is not a theory about what makes a person’s life
morally or aesthetically good. It is a theory about what makes a person’s life welfare good, or

83 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 169.
85 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 207.
good in itself for that person. However, by dividing welfare, morality, and aesthetics onto different scales of calculation, Feldman is limiting what gains entry into his theory of the good life. For Feldman, morality and aesthetics are not values that factor into his calculation of the best life. Because of his hedonism, pleasure is the only metric available in his evaluation. Thus, the only way in which we can evaluate other goods within Feldman’s scheme is to calculate their value in relation to the amount of pleasure that they promote. Therefore, unlike for Aristotle, other goods are not choiceworthy for themselves, but only to the extent that they promote well-being, at least to the extent that we are evaluating them by what is good for the person living the life. Furthermore, there is no intrinsic connection between pleasure and moral appropriateness. Morality is only valuable to well-being to the extent that it promotes one’s attitudinal pleasure. Later in this thesis, I will discuss some problems with relating pleasure and morality in this way and evaluate a possible solution that Feldman forwards but ultimately rejects.

**Pursuing the Good Life**

Feldman does not explicitly state that pleasure is the ultimate end of all rational action. However, because he is a hedonist and therefore provides pleasure with a position of ultimate value, I will assume that if happiness or attitudinal pleasure is something we can pursue, we have reason to pursue it according to Feldman’s position. Moreover, because happiness is what ultimately makes for the good life, and we have reason to pursue the best life possible, we have reason to pursue our own happiness if it is within our power. Feldman, in turn, offers a strategy for how to claim authority over our own happiness.

He calls this strategy controlling authority over happiness. He remarks that we can’t control what happiness is. However, different things can be primary causes of happiness for

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86 Ibid.
different people. We can’t merely will ourselves to derive attitudinal pleasure from certain things. I can’t will myself into taking pleasure in heavy metal music just because I think it would provide me with more sources of happiness. However, it may be possible in some cases. to have the power to do things that will in the long term alter the primary sources of happiness. For example, I may hate to exercise and find myself totally miserable every time I drag myself to the gym. However, it may be possible to do certain things to make me come to enjoy my workout routine, like listening to my favourite music while doing it, or going with a friend. Moreover, Feldman thinks that we do have control over the amount of happiness we can get in life. He suggests that in order to increase our happiness, we should focus our attention on the things that give us pleasure, or our “voluntary happifying projects.” He acknowledges that sometimes some things will just demand our attention, like a toothache. However, overall, we should try to surround ourselves with the things that give us pleasure. We should stop thinking about the things that give us displeasure, and instead identify our sources of attitudinal pleasure and surround ourselves with these voluntary happifying projects. Thus, Feldman advocates for a self-conscious repression of the sources of unhappiness. It is as simple as “count your blessings and repress thoughts about your burdens.” Therefore, pursuing the good life is simple for Feldman. In order to live the best life that we can lead, we should try, to the best of our abilities, to affect our mental state into one of attitudinal pleasure. We can do this by surrounding ourselves with the things that make us happy, thereby repressing unhappy thoughts. In this way, pursuing the good life is a matter of controlling our subjective environment.

87 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 223.
88 Ibid.
89 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 225.
90 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 226.
91 Ibid.
Case Studies: Conclusions to Draw from AHE

a): Defense Mechanisms

A conclusion to be drawn from AHE is that a person’s life can be made better by only changing one’s attitude. Because in Feldman’s view, pleasure and displeasure in things are facts about the subject and happiness is a mental state, this implies that a person’s welfare depends entirely on her mental states. This means that there are psychological maneuvers we can use to defend ourselves from suffering in bad situations. If these maneuvers succeed, AHE would say that a person is faring well.

Feldman recognizes that views like this are often criticized. Amartya Sen thinks it is ethically mistaken to think that a person’s happiness can depend upon a defense mechanism. Simply because a person has managed to adapt their preferences, or what they can hope to expect in life, does not mean that they are any better off than they were before they adapted their preferences. Wayne Sumner takes this as the main reason to reject subjective theories of welfare. Following Sen’s example, Feldman asks us to imagine a poor, landless labourer. The labourer walks to work in the morning only to find that the foreman has decided to lay him off. This means that he will be in an even worse financial position than before and will have trouble providing for his family. However, to make the best of a bad situation, the labourer pushes thoughts of his poverty from his mind. He instead plans to spend the day taking time to enjoy the pleasure of his family’s company. Sen thinks it would be deeply ethically mistaken to think that because the labourer succeeds in pushing the displeasure of his poverty from his mind that his overall well-being is any better. Feldman sees no reason to accept Sen’s conclusion. He thinks that the survival strategy is in fact working. The labourer’s life would be even worse if he didn’t

92 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 170.
93 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 171.
94 Ibid.
look on the bright side of the situation and decide to count his blessings and enjoy his family’s company. Moreover, Feldman acknowledges that the labourer has more things to be displeased about than just today’s worsened poverty and thus his welfare levels will be correspondingly low.

It is important to take from this example that the way that we respond mentally to the aspects of our lives is what makes for a good life. This means that if we can succeed in controlling our mental states by pushing displeasure from our minds, regardless of what our external circumstances may be, we will be faring well. Again, this marks the stark difference between Aristotle’s objective view of pleasure and Feldman’s subjective view. Aristotle ties pleasure’s authenticity to the object it comes with. For Feldman, pleasure is pleasure no matter its source.

b): Inauthentic Happiness

This leads me to a second important conclusion to be drawn from Feldman’s subjective hedonistic eudaimonic view: a life made up of happiness derived from inauthentic sources is no worse than a life made up of authentic happiness. In order to demonstrate this point, Feldman draws on a criticism of his view made by Wayne Sumner. Sumner criticizes subjective views of happiness because of the possibility of non-autonomous values. He asks us to imagine Bertha, a dominated housewife. Bertha works hard all day cooking and cleaning for her family for little gratitude. However, Bertha has been socialized in such a way that this kind of life is all that she believes that she can expect and hope for. She therefore takes pleasure in the small tasks of her life; when she cooks a good meal, or does a particularly nice job with her washing, she is happy. Therefore, because Bertha has high AHH, according to AHE, Bertha would also have high well-

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95 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 189.
being. Sumner thinks this example demonstrates how we cannot equate happiness with welfare. Bertha obviously does not have a good life, but instead has been programmed into accepting a fate she would not have chosen for herself had she the option. He instead offers the solution that welfare should track autonomous happiness. When the values that I derive happiness from are “genuinely mine” and I am capable of critical assessment, then they can properly contribute to my happiness. The important point I would like to draw from Sumner’s criticism is his impulse to “tie pleasure down” to something authentic. Like Aristotle, Sumner thinks it important that our pleasure be based on an authentic source and, therefore, have an objective grounding.

Feldman rejects Sumner’s insistence that happiness must be based on authentic values. Feldman thinks that Bertha’s AHE score is acceptable. Firstly, Feldman thinks that it is psychologically implausible to think that Bertha could have been entirely indoctrinated into taking pleasure in her bad situation. She still has many things to be displeased about sufficiently to lower her AHE levels. However, even if this is not the case and Bertha really does take pleasure in all of the difficult aspects of her life, Feldman does not think it is clear that her well-being is really negative. Again, this is a situation where Feldman thinks we must be careful to know what scale we are evaluating a life with. He thinks that it remains true that Bertha is doing poorly in terms of freedom, knowledge and creativity. He says, “If we are looking for an example of a human being who develops and manifests all of her distinctively human excellences, Bertha is not the ideal candidate.” There are many scales on which a life can be weighed and Bertha makes a poor showing of them. However, even if this is all true, Feldman thinks it still correct to say that because Bertha takes pleasure in the activities of her life, her life

96 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 190.
97 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 196.
98 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 198.
99 Feldman, What Is This Thing Called Happiness? 199.
is good for her. It is still consistent to say that she would have been better without brainwashing and were free to live a different life. We must be careful to note that even though we would not want to trade places with her, this does not mean that her life is bad for her. Moreover, it is better for her in the community that she is stuck in to be socialized as she is. Our subjective mental states are what determine whether or not our life is going well for us. Again, we should conclude from this example that attitudinal pleasure need not be tied to anything good in order to contribute to the good life.

c): Disgusting Happiness

A further conclusion to draw from Feldman’s subjective understanding of attitudinal pleasure as the good life is that there are no requirements or limits on what a person can take pleasure in when pursuing the good life. In order to illustrate this point, Feldman introduces the character Judah from Woody Allen’s film *Crimes and Misdemeanors* as a case study of a man who has ample amounts of both happiness and welfare, but is morally repugnant. Judah is a successful ophthalmologist who is healthy, wealthy, loved and admired by his wife, girlfriend and colleagues. However, he also is a money launderer and arranges to have his girlfriend murdered, and could therefore be said to be lacking in certain virtues.

Feldman thinks that if we find ourselves thinking that Judah is not living a good life, it is because we are confusing scales of well-being, or prudential value, with scales of moral excellence. He says that sometimes when we speak of a good life, we have in mind the life of moral excellence, and other times we have in mind the life of high prudential value or welfare. Eudaimonism is not a theory about what makes a person’s life morally good, it is a theory about

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100 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 199.
101 Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* 203.
what makes a person’s life welfare-good, or good in itself for that person.\textsuperscript{102} Feldman acknowledges the criticism that some would feel that if Judah’s life were good, we would have an obligation to devote “all human endeavours” to its realization. However, he thinks this reasoning is flawed. There is no valid inference from the assumption that Judah’s life is high in welfare to any conclusion about what we ought to do.\textsuperscript{103} Instead, Feldman says that perhaps welfare is not the only thing that bears on our obligations.\textsuperscript{104} The correct conclusion to draw according to Feldman is that Judah’s life is morally despicable, but it may still be good for Judah.\textsuperscript{105}

Feldman acknowledges that some may still not be satisfied with this conclusion and so, in response, offers “Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism.”\textsuperscript{106} According to this theory, there are certain things that are appropriate, or deserve to be taken pleasure in, such as something good or beautiful, as long as there is nothing odd about the circumstances.\textsuperscript{107} A gardener can be said to take appropriate pleasure in the sight of her pretty garden, whereas a sadist cannot appropriately take pleasure in the pain he inflicts on his victim.\textsuperscript{108} We can adjust our hedonic measurement levels by only counting the units of pleasure which are produced from things that are appropriate, or deserve to be taken pleasure in. Thus, if the gardener and the sadist both feel +10 units of pleasure as they partake in their current activities, only the gardener’s units will be counted towards her AHE scores because only she deserves to be taking pleasure in that activity. Similarly, if we adjust Judah’s scores to track only the pleasures he deserves, his overall happiness and welfare levels will be quite a bit lower. It is no longer obvious that he is living a

\textsuperscript{102} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness?} 207.
\textsuperscript{103} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness?} 210.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness?} 214.
\textsuperscript{107} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness?} 212.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
good life. Although Feldman offers Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism to calm these worries, he himself is not convinced that it is necessary. He says:

“I think that our sense that Judah’s life is worthless may be the result of confusion. Perhaps it comes about as a result of confusing life evaluations in terms of welfare with life evaluations in terms of moral excellence. I think the term ‘the Good Life’ often serves to blur or blend these two forms of evaluation. Perhaps it would be acceptable just to say that Judah’s life rates high in terms of welfare (just as Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism says) and low in terms of moral excellence”.

Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism is therefore a tool that the advocates of a moral eudaimonic conception can make use of, but is not necessary for determining AHE levels for Feldman.

What this example illuminates is that morality and happiness are totally separate goods in a good life for Feldman. Feldman’s conception of well-being is in no way morally restricted. It also brings to light an ambiguity in the term “the good life” and what philosophers mean when they invoke it. It is clear that Feldman has in mind a very particular way of evaluating a life – by measuring the amount of attitudinal pleasure a person takes in things throughout her life. In my next chapter, I investigate the concept of eudaimonism more closely, and how different philosophers, ancient and modern, have invoked it and intend its use, in order to evaluate the role of pleasure in the good life from both an objective and subjective perspective.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have illuminated a few points of comparison and contrast between Feldman’s use of pleasure in the good life and Aristotle’s. Both philosophers think the best life is the most pleasant. However, as I have demonstrated, they understand this statement to be true in

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very different ways. For Feldman, pleasure is an entirely subjective good that in no way derives its authenticity from its subject or its object. Moreover, Feldman is a hedonist, and so pleasure is the good by which all other goods are valued when we are interested in evaluating a person’s well-being. However well-being has a very particular definition for Feldman. It is what is good for a person from that person’s perspective. Thus, Feldman’s view is a subjective mental state view of the good life.

The combination of his subjective hedonism and eudaimonism has interesting implications for how we evaluate a person’s life. Adaptive preferences or mental survival strategies are good strategies to invoke if we are interested in pursuing the good life and increasing our happiness. Moreover, the sources of our pleasure need not be authentic values. What is important about the states of affairs of our lives is whether or not we take attitudinal pleasure in them, not their authenticity, or value from an objective perspective. Finally, this point reinforces the separation between welfare value and moral value for Feldman. It is consistent to live a good life high in welfare while being morally repugnant. Moral value and well-being are different scales on which to measure a life, and the scale that is of interest in eudaimonism is well-being. Thus, morality and other goods are only welfare good insofar as they promote attitudinal pleasure for Feldman. In my next chapter, I assess the consequences of Feldman’s subjective hedonistic eudaimonic view by investigating the concept of eudaimonism more closely and bring to light some differences between how ancient and contemporary philosophers understand it. My hope is to evaluate the role of pleasure in the good life from both an objective and subjective perspective in order to illuminate why Feldman’s view of the good life as it stands is incomplete and therefore unattractive.
Chapter Four: The Value of Completeness in a Eudaimonic Theory

Introduction:

In the previous chapters, I have explained two rival views about the role of pleasure in the good life as articulated by Aristotle and Fred Feldman. In this chapter, I will assess the ability of subjective hedonism to articulate the role of pleasure in the good life. In doing so, I hope to draw out a few tensions between ancient and modern conceptions of what is involved in a good eudaimonic theory. I will conclude that the success of subjective hedonism to make sense of a good life rests on whether or not we are looking for completeness in a eudaimonic theory. If, as the ancients thought, the good life is complete and wanting for no goods, AHE fails to capture everything we want in a good life. If, instead, we are merely looking for an explanation of what the good life feels like to me, then AHE succeeds in capturing this mental state.

In order to assess AHE as a eudaimonic theory, I will test it against a few important features that I find pertinent from eudaimonic literature. Firstly, I will return to a problem from my first chapter concerning Aristotle’s placement of pleasure in the good life and of how much importance we should place on it. I will then entertain competing arguments about the correctness of equating happiness with attitudinal pleasure like Feldman, or if we should allow pleasure a more limited role like Aristotle. I will determine that even if we find this debate inconclusive, it is still fruitful to assess the consequences of a eudaimonic theory that equates happiness with pleasure. I will then turn to the problem of pleasure based upon purely subjective, or inauthentic sources and whether or not this pleasure should still be considered to contribute to a life going well. Keeping in mind Feldman’s examples from the previous chapter of the landless labourer and the desperate housewife, and the shortcomings of Aristotle’s objective theory, I will
use Feldman’s “Sympathy Test” and “Crib Test” for well-being to determine if subjective pleasure is what we wish for in the life of the people we love. I will determine that subjective pleasure does not completely or fully account for what we hope for in the life of our loved one. Implementing Feldman’s tests leaves me in a position to question what goods must necessarily be included in the good life according to a eudaimonic theory. I will assess if well-being is really the only metric we are concerned with when talking about the good life by comparing ancient and contemporary perspectives on eudaimonic theories and their respective takes on the importance of completeness. I will then examine Epicurus’ conception of the good life as an example of an ancient complete but hedonistic theory in order to highlight the importance of completeness and structure in ancient thinking about eudaimonic theories.

I see two main points of divergence between ancient and contemporary eudaimonic theories that I would like to make clear by the end of this chapter. The first point of contention between ancient and contemporary eudaimonic theories I will address is in the relationship between well-being and subjective pleasure, or relatedly, subjective and objective happiness, and how to understand the value of each in the good life. In ancient eudaimonic theories, goods are integrated and part of an over-arching structure. In contemporary examples like Feldman’s, happiness is one thing – pleasure. In order to see if subjective contemporary examples can make sense of more goods than just pleasure as well-being, I will try to put Feldman’s Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonia into practice. I will conclude that Feldman’s attempt to “avoid controversy” fails because he does not necessarily connect pleasure and morality in any kind of overarching structure. Unlike ancients like Aristotle and Epicurus, Feldman does not offer us an integrated account of all of the goods that make up the best life. Rather, he offers us the nature of one kind of good that is important in the good life. Taking Feldman’s argument to its conclusion,
we can be happy moral monsters living the good life. This leads me to my second related point of divergence between ancient and modern theories; whether or not our eudaimonic theory must be complete. Drawing on Julia Annas’ work on the transformation of virtue, I will conclude that whether or not we find modern eudaimonic theories like Feldman’s satisfying will largely hinge on whether or not we are looking for completeness in a eudaimonic theory.

**Assessing Happiness as Pleasure**

In order to assess Feldman’s eudaimonic argument, I think it is worthwhile to first determine whether or not his definition of happiness is acceptable. Feldman defines happiness as attitudinal pleasure. To be happy at a moment is to be taking more attitudinal pleasure than displeasure in things at that moment. As I argued in the previous chapter, two important features to take from his definition of happiness are that happiness is a mental state, and the particular mental state he has in mind is a kind of attitudinal pleasure. Here Feldman stands in contrast to Aristotle. For Aristotle, pleasure is always supervenient upon another good. It never stands alone. However, as we saw in my first chapter, this leaves Aristotle open to Van Riel’s criticism that he makes pleasure into something that is essentially a by-product. Feldman is in no way subject to this same criticism because, for Feldman, attitudinal pleasure is a specific kind of mental state and stands alone entirely as what makes a life happy.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that although Feldman and Aristotle both think that the happy life is the most pleasant, what they have in mind when they talk about happiness might be slightly different. Some scholars contest the translation of the Greek word “eudaimonia” into the English word “happiness,” objecting that there is more to the Greek “eudaimonia” than what we normally think of when we use the word “happiness” in English.

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However, Gregory Vlastos points out that how ancients like Aristotle and Epicurus use the word “eudaimonia” differs as greatly as when contemporary English speakers use the word “happiness” and so we should not be so very alarmed about the traditional translation of “eudaimonia” as “happiness” so long as we bear in mind that the Greeks put a heavier loading on the objective factor in “happiness” than does the English word.\textsuperscript{111} This is one of the main reasons why I have focused on Aristotle’s view of pleasure and the good life instead of happiness and the good life. Aristotle’s view of pleasure is much closer to what Feldman means by happiness than Aristotle’s view of happiness. Just how much Feldman differs from the Greeks with his emphasis on subjective pleasure will become clearer throughout the course of this chapter. What I would like to draw from Vlastos’ point is that when we talk about happiness, we should be careful to consider whether or not we are using the subjective meaning or the objective meaning. Feldman thinks that happiness is purely a subjective state of pleasure, and that this subjective state is what makes up the objective state of well-being – or how we decide if a life is going well for a person. It is the subjective side of this thesis that I am interested in investigating in this section of the chapter. I want to question if Feldman is correct in his definition of happiness as the purely subjective mental state of pleasure.

Feldman is not alone in equating happiness with attitudinal pleasure. Wayne Davis also argues that non-relational happiness, or “being happy” can be identified with psychological pleasure.\textsuperscript{112} However, Davis is careful to stipulate that he is identifying pleasure with happiness, not “true happiness” and that this identification does not entail that long term happiness can be


achieved by indulging every momentary pleasure.\textsuperscript{113} Moreover, he is not asserting that pleasure and happiness are synonymous. He only maintains that in one sense, the terms refer to the same mental state.\textsuperscript{114} Davis therefore seems to be in support of Feldman since he agrees that when we say that someone is happy, we are talking about a kind of pleasant mental state of that person. Likewise, he seems aware that sometimes when we use the term “happy” we are referring to something more than just attitudinal pleasure, suggesting to me that there are remnants from ancient understandings of eudaimonia in Davis’ thinking.

Daniel Haybron takes the opposite side and argues that “hedonism” or the doctrine that happiness, so construed, reduces completely to a subject’s balance of pleasure over displeasure is false.\textsuperscript{115} Haybron thinks that hedonism fundamentally misconstrues the nature of the mental state that could constitute anything plausibly called happiness.\textsuperscript{116} He also remarks that happiness can mean a number of things, but in the above hedonistic cases, what is often intended is psychological happiness, or a state of mind. However, he acknowledges that philosophers also use happiness to mean a type of well-being or eudaimonia and this is often called prudential happiness. A correct theory of prudential happiness is determined by asking what sorts of lives make us better off.\textsuperscript{117} Haybron thinks the most obvious problem with hedonistic theories is that they are too inclusive since they include fleeting and shallow pleasures that do not count toward happiness at all.\textsuperscript{118} He thinks that at the root of the problem, hedonistic happiness consists of nothing but a series of conscious events, making it essentially episodic and backward looking. He says, “Happiness is not just having a certain kind of experience or lots of them. It is a deeper

\textsuperscript{113} Davis, “Pleasure and Happiness,” 165.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Haybron, “Why Hedonism is False,” 173.
\textsuperscript{117} Haybron, “Why Hedonism is False,” 174.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
psychological condition incorporating the more or less stable underlying mental states that determine, in part and among other things, the kinds of experiences that will occur”. ¹¹⁹

Happiness is thereby a substantially dispositional phenomenon that tells us about the subject’s history, current condition, and propensities for the near future. Happiness is having a certain attitude about one’s life, and experiencing pleasure is not. Thus, Haybron thinks that hedonists are making a category mistake about the kind of mental state happiness is. ¹²⁰ According to Haybron, “Hedonism does little more than skim the phenomenological surface of our emotional states and call it happiness. But happiness runs much deeper than that”. ¹²¹

What I would like to draw attention to from Haybron’s criticism is that even if we agree that happiness is a kind of mental state, determining what that mental state consists of is a separate question. Haybron takes issue with the hedonistic element of Feldman’s theory. Happiness is not equivalent to attitudinal hedonism, but is a different kind of mental state entirely. Davis, on the other hand, agrees that a certain kind of happiness can be equated with attitudinal pleasure, but leaves open what might be involved in other kinds of happiness. I am not going to evaluate the merits and weaknesses of both sides of this debate. However, what I would like to pull from this tension is that Feldman’s theory is a two-step argument with at least two points of contention at each step. His first step is to argue that happiness is attitudinal pleasure. I have raised Haybron’s objection here and Davis’s support to try to demonstrate two examples from the contemporary philosophical literature that make this a point of contention in his theory. I do not think it is within my means in this thesis to try to come to a conclusive position on whether or not hedonism is the best description of happiness. My intuitions tell me that there might be more to it and that perhaps the best understanding of the subjective state may extend

¹¹⁹ Haybron, “Why Hedonism is False,” 176.
¹²⁰ Ibid.
¹²¹ Haybron, “Why Hedonism is False,” 176.
beyond the limits of philosophy and into the realm of cognitive psychology. However, what I do wish to take issue with is the second horn of Feldman’s argument: the life of attitudinal pleasure as the good life. I think the tension in this claim can even be seen in Davis’ support when he says that there may be more to “true happiness”.\textsuperscript{122} Thus, I will argue that even if we have reason to accept that some happiness can correctly be equated with attitudinal pleasure, we may still have reason to ask for more from a eudaimonic theory, or a theory of the good life.

Assessing Pleasure as Well-Being and the Good Life

Now that I have put concerns about equating happiness with pleasure aside, it is time to question the viability of a purely subjective hedonistic eudaimonic theory. In this section, I will first look at the foundations of eudaimonism. I will then re-examine some of the examples and case studies for well-being from my previous chapter and apply some of Feldman’s tests for well-being to assess if a purely subjective conception of the good life can fully account for what we mean by living well. I will also return to another criticism of Aristotle, that his account of pleasure is inherently perfectionist and elitist, and look to see if any room can be made in his objective account for agent-relativity. What I hope to illuminate in this section are the limitations of a fully subjective eudaimonic account.

In order to assess the success of Feldman’s eudaimonic thesis, I think it is worthwhile to look at the foundations of eudaimonism as a line of thought. The “Eudaemonist Axiom” as formulated by Gregory Vlastos is that happiness is desired by all human beings as the ultimate end, or \textit{telos}, of all rational acts.\textsuperscript{123} This principle, once staked out by Socrates, becomes

\textsuperscript{122} Davis, “Pleasure and Happiness,” 165.
\textsuperscript{123} Vlastos, \textit{Socrates}, 203.
foundational for virtually all subsequent moralists of classical antiquity.\textsuperscript{124} The axiom does not imply that what we are thinking about when making all of our everyday decisions is happiness. What it means is only that the last of the reasons we could give, if pressed to give our reason to do anything at all, is happiness. Happiness is the only reason, “if given, would make it senseless to ask for any further reason.”\textsuperscript{125} A description of happiness that adequately fulfills this role occupies much of Greek thought in eudaimonic literature. As I will attempt to demonstrate, because of these formal features of the Eudaemonist Axiom, Greek eudaimonic systems become complex structures of interrelated concepts like pleasure and virtue. I think it will be helpful to keep the Eudaemonist Axiom in mind when assessing the strength of Feldman’s thesis to see if his conception of well-being can adequately fulfill this role.

In the previous chapter, I looked at two case studies of pleasure based on non-objective sources that Feldman endorses as examples of AHE at work. In the first example, a landless labourer pushes thoughts of his poverty from his mind in order to make the best of a bad day when he has been laid off from work. Although some theorists like Amartya Sen think this is a problematic case of adaptive preferences, Feldman thinks this psychological maneuver makes the landless labourer’s life better than if he had not employed such a survival strategy. The second example involves the problem of the possibility of inauthentic sources of happiness. A dominated, hard-working housewife has been socialized into taking pleasure in the small mercies of her existence. However, if she had been better informed and not socialized in such a way, she would not take pleasures in the mundane tasks that make up her life. Again, Feldman thinks that because she does take pleasure in her day to day activities, this housewife's life is good for her. These examples serve to emphasize the strength of Feldman's commitment to subjectivity in his

\textsuperscript{124} Vlastos, *Socrates*, 203.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
theory of the good life. A life is good as long as it appears so to the subject. A person's objective circumstances do not matter unless they affect her subjective circumstances.

A primary reason for wishing to reject Feldman's position and other hedonistic and mental state accounts of well-being is the intuition that non-mental conditions of our lives matter. Robert Nozick constructs a striking thought experiment to demonstrate this point. A person is hooked up to an experience machine that continuously stimulates her consciousness with pleasant thoughts and sensations. Her body, however, remains inactive, she has absolutely no other interaction with the outside world, and moreover, she does not know that she is hooked up to an experience machine. She thinks that these experiences are real. Nozick thinks that there are three points to draw from this thought experiment that lead to the conclusion that something matters to us more than our subjective experience. Firstly, we want to do certain things and not just have the experience of doing them. Nozick’s point reminds me of Aristotle’s position that things are choiceworthy, or have value, and are worthwhile beyond the pleasure that we get from them. There is an additional good to certain endeavors than just our pleasant experience of them. Nozick’s second point is that we should find the life of the experience machine undesirable because we want to be a certain way, and to be a certain sort of person. Again, I am reminded of Aristotle’s point that what we take pleasure in reflects what kind of person we are. Thus, the things that we take pleasure in not only give us pleasure, but also build our characters. Character building is worthwhile in its own right beyond the pleasures that come with it. Thirdly, Nozick thinks that such an experience machine would limit the

127 Nozick, *Anarchy, State, And Utopia*, 44.
129 Ibid.
subject to a human-made reality, no deeper than what people can create. This limitation theoretically puts a cap or upper limit on the possibility of human experience that we are not limited by in real life. Moreover, constantly being stimulated with pleasant sensations puts a limit on the scope of human experience since we are limited to only the pleasant emotions and reactions. This thought experiment brings to light that there is more to living well than subjective pleasure. The conclusion that the person in the experience machine is leading a good life has been enough to lead many philosophers to reject subjective hedonism as a theory of the good life altogether.

Yet the alternative theories that require specific objective features to be present in order for a life to be good face problems of elitism and perfectionism, as we saw in Aristotle’s account of pleasure. Many contemporary theorists have balked at Aristotle’s perfectionism and universalism. Julia Annas notes that the modern idea of subjective happiness runs up against the ancient objective conception. However, she does not think that there is agreement on whether or not the modern conception is essentially subjective. She thinks that although the modern conception of happiness undoubtedly does have a subjective aspect to it, she thinks that contemporary readers can still feel the force of objective theories. There is a prevalent intuition that if happiness is based on mistakes, it turns out not to be happiness at all. We may feel as though we are trapped in the middle of a great divide, feeling uncomfortable when we commit completely to either the ancient objective position or the modern subjective camp.

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130 Nozick, *Anarchy, State, And Utopia*, 43.
134 Ibid.
Lawrence Jost, however, thinks there may be room in ancient accounts for some amount of agent relativity in living well. He says that what is at stake in ancient theories is the individual’s own virtue or arête; living well is a goal individuals can be expected to set for themselves.135 Moreover, Jost raises a point of Aristotle’s conception of “mean relative to us” rather than the “mean in the thing” as a way to make room for, if not subjectivity, then agent relativity.136 Jost sees the promise of agent relativity in Aristotle’s example of Milo the wrestler. What’s appropriate for Milo to eat differs greatly from the appropriate diet of the beginner because Milo is the bigger and stronger athlete. The appropriateness of one’s diet will be relative to features of the individual. Similarly, Jost thinks that appropriate emotion will be relativized to the individual’s psychology, and will take into account the agent’s own state of preparedness.137 In this way, Jost thinks Aristotle captures an aspect of agent relativity. Jost objects to the criticism that Aristotle’s theory is unable to capture our ordinary concept of well-being since it fails to preserve a proper “subject-relative or perspectival” character.138 Jost thinks that there is agent-relativity of an interesting sort available in Aristotle’s works even if it is not full perspectivalism. He thinks that there is room for attention to details of the individual’s character and disposition and Aristotle’s objective theory does not exclude all reference to the subject’s attitudes and concerns.139 The point I take from Jost’s argument is that Aristotle need not be considered ruthlessly objective. Rather, there is a case to be made for a kind of agent-relativity in Aristotle, if not full subjectivity.

Although I do not here have the space to pursue Jost’s interpretation of Aristotle’s agent relativism, I mention Jost’s interpretation as a plausible way out of the great objective-subjective

139 Jost, “Introduction” in Eudaimonia and Well-Being, xix.
divide. A solution may be to try to relativize the ancient objective conception of living well rather than to abandon objective considerations altogether and endorse an entirely subjective theory of the good life. Moreover, I do not think Feldman offers any conclusive arguments for why the landless labourer’s or the desperate housewife’s lives are really going well for them because of their subjective pleasures. To demonstrate this point, I will employ Feldman’s own tests for well-being to these examples to see if our intuitions match Feldman’s conclusion. If the landless labourer or desperate housewife were not lacking in well-being, we would have no reason to feel sympathy for them according to Feldman’s “Sympathy Test”. I think that we have plenty of reason to feel sympathy for the landless labourer who needs to employ survival strategies and blind himself to certain truths about his circumstances just to get through his day. The desperate housewife fares little better since we may sympathize and pity her distorted vision of reality and sense of own self-worth.

Even more damning than the landless labourer and the desperate housewife examples is the case of the experience machine. If the person in the experience machine were not lacking in well-being, we would have no reason to feel sympathy for her. However, I think there are plenty of reasons to feel sympathy for such a person. We may feel sympathy for her because she will never get to experience the real world as it is, full of all of its pleasures and sorrows. A person in the experience machine will never get her heart broken, get caught out in the rain, or feel the rush of making an important career or personal choice. There are other mental experiences than just pleasure that are important to living well and can even be considered a virtue of being a reflective agent. For example, philosopher Valerie Tiberius thinks that there are certain virtues of the mind that must be cultivated in order to live well as the reflective creatures human beings are. The virtue of perspective, or understanding how our own values fit into a wider picture of human
value and the virtue of self-awareness, or understanding the groundings for our own values, may be two mental states that are terribly important to living the kinds of mental lives that we do as human beings but also may be terribly unpleasant at times.¹⁴⁰ My point is that there are many non-pleasurable experiences that we may think are important to live through in order to live well, so we pity the machined dreamer who will never get to have these experiences because we think that she is lacking something important to living well.

I am even less convinced that any of these examples could pass Feldman’s “Crib Test”. A loving mother would not wish for her new born child to spend his life hooked up to a machine even if this machine caused him to only experience pleasant sensations. A loving mother wants her son to go through life well. This does not mean that she only wants him to experience pleasure throughout. Pleasure may not be the appropriate emotional response to the obstacles of real life. I think that a loving mother will wish for her son a “real life” even if that means he will not always be taking pleasure in things. What is more important is that he is living life well. Moreover, a loving mother would not wish for her child the life of the desperate housewife or landless labourer because a loving mother would not wish a life of survival strategies or indoctrination for her child even if the outcome is happiness. It seems more plausible to suggest that when faced with the options, a loving mother would wish for her child a life of mental clarity over the life of pure pleasure. When we think about wishing well-being unto the lives of our loved ones, we are concerned with more than just its subjective features. In an important sense, we want them to live a real life. Thus, although subjective pleasure can certainly seem to make a life better, it does not seem to fulfill our conception of what it means to be living well.

This leads me to the second point of divergence between ancient and contemporary theories; the importance of completeness.

**Pleasure and the Completeness of the Good Life:**

One of the most important, and I think precarious, positions of Feldman’s and other contemporary eudaimonists’ theses is that well-being is what makes for the good life, but with the caveat that well-being is defined in a particular and sometimes limited way. Case in point: Feldman argues that AHH is solely what makes for well-being, leaving other goods like morality out of the picture. However, in the broader context of eudaimonic literature, well-being itself is considered to be perhaps only one component of the good life and not the most important one at that.\(^{141}\) Thus in this section, I will evaluate how well Feldman’s theory of the good life makes sense of the way various goods interact within a single life.

Virtue is often thought to have priority over happiness when making ethical decisions. For example, a Kantian would never sacrifice morality for the sake of happiness.\(^ {142}\) All three major ethical approaches – deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics – all agree on some form of the priority of virtue. Where they differ is not on the importance of being good but on whether being good necessarily benefits us.\(^ {143}\) Virtue ethicists insist it does, while deontologists and consequentialists think not necessarily. Thus, depending on one’s theory of well-being and one’s moral theory, well-being and morality can have an uneasy relationship in the pursuit of the good life.

\(^{141}\) Haybron, "Happiness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*  
\(^{142}\) Ibid.  
\(^{143}\) Haybron, "Happiness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
“Why be moral?” is a pressing question for ancient theorists. Where the ancients differ from contemporary eudaimonic theorists is in assuming they have a responsibility to provide an answer. In response to the question of “why be moral,” Vlastos sees three main ways in which the ancients understand a relation to hold between happiness and virtue. Firstly, a purely instrumental relation could hold between virtue and happiness. As in Epicurus’ writings, virtue is desirable only as an instrumental means to happiness. Virtue and happiness could also stand in a partly constitutive relation, as in the works of Aristotle. (Virtue is in principle, but not the only thing desirable for its own sake.) We choose things for their own sake and for the sake of happiness. Happiness consists of and is nothing but such goods. Moreover, we saw earlier that Aristotle’s principle of naturalism assured us that if something is good for us and good in us, it will be good to us. We will take pleasure in doing what is good, and thus there is no tension between doing good and being happy. We are happy when we are doing well. Finally, virtue and happiness could stand in a completely constitutive relationship where virtue is the only thing that makes a life good. Vlastos’ remarks gesture to the idea that in ancient theories such as Aristotle’s, virtue is part of a theory, the overarching concept in which is happiness, but virtue is accounted for as part of the whole.

An interesting point to note about how the ancients integrate happiness and virtue in their eudaimonic theories is that they are reaching for a complete description of the good life. The components of the good life are integrated; pleasure and virtue must fit together as parts of a complete whole. Annas remarks that in the Philebus, Plato appeals to an assumption about

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144 Vlastos, Socrates, 204.
145 Ibid.
146 Vlastos, Socrates, 204.
147 Vlastos, Socrates, 206.
148 Vlastos, Socrates, 204.
completeness in order to make his argument that the good life cannot be the life of pleasure. He says that because the life of pleasure can obviously be found to be lacking something like intellectual activity, it is incomplete and therefore cannot fully account for the good life.\textsuperscript{150} It does not occur to Socrates’ interlocutor Protarchus to question the assumption that the final end must be complete. Yet Plato’s argument rests on the assumption that if pleasure leaves out something important as the object of rational aim, it cannot be complete, and therefore cannot be the good life.\textsuperscript{151}

There are two important features of ancient eudaimonic arguments to take from Annas’ example. Firstly, ancient eudaimonic theories are large structures integrating many goods to form a unified conception of living well so that happiness and morality are not in tension but each mutually reinforces the other. Secondly, ancient eudaimonic theories assume that any description of the good life must be complete and not lacking any important good in order to be a passable theory. Annas questions if our modern intuitions about completeness are as robust. She says “It is much more likely that, if we had a plausible candidate for happiness, but it was pointed out that this candidate lacked something important to human life, the response would be that there is more to life than happiness.”\textsuperscript{152} Annas’ intuition is important for understanding how to engage with contemporary eudaimonic theories. Contemporary eudaimonic theorists view themselves as describing a particular kind of good life - the life of well-being or the happy life. They are not attempting to undertake the same kind of eudaimonic project of living and doing well like the ancient’s. Thus, if Feldman’s AHE seems to be lacking in certain goods, like morality, he will not find this troublesome. Completeness is not a necessary feature of his contemporary eudaimonic thesis.

\textsuperscript{150} Annas, “Virtue and Eudaimonia,” 251.  
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{152} Annas, “Virtue and Eudaimonia,” 251.
The Priority of Happiness or Virtue: How Pleasure and Morality Interact in a Subjective Hedonistic Approach

If completeness is not a desired feature of contemporary eudaimonic theories, I think that contemporary eudaimonic theorists are left with a question about the priority of happiness and how it should interact with other goods in life like morality. If happiness is the good life, then we have reason to pursue it. Because happiness and morality are separate goods for contemporary theorists like Feldman, it is an open and I think viable question to ask how happiness and morality should interact and relate, especially in cases where they seem to conflict. In this section, I will attempt to answer this question by first assessing how well Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonia can be implemented. I will conclude that Desert Adjusted AHE fails to make sense of how pleasure and morality should interact because it is not well-integrated like ancient theories. I will then look at other norms that govern the pursuit of pleasure and how they should interact with moral norms. I will conclude with another argument from Annas that modern conceptions of eudaimonia resist being combined with virtue because of two fundamental assumptions. This means that if we are looking for completeness in a eudaimonic theory, Feldman can’t satisfy.

When pursuing our happiness conflicts with moral obligations, contemporary eudaimonic theories like AHE do not provide us with sufficient resources to decide which has priority in determining how to act. Determining how one should act could be as simple as a set of hypothetical imperatives. If you want to be happy, do x. If you want to be good, do y. On this view, it is entirely possible then to be living a good life by pursuing our happiness with total disregard to morality. It is likewise perfectly possible not to be living a good life in one’s attempt
to do and be good. In the previous chapter, I described Feldman’s notion of “Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonistic Eudaimonia” that he offers to “avoid controversy” about the possibility of “disgusting happiness” or to appease those of us who find the first option distasteful. I also stated that Feldman rejects the need for Desert Adjusted AHE because he thinks that the intuitions that feel a need for it come from confusing ideas about what is welfare good and what is morally good. For him, the good life is welfare good. Nonetheless, Desert Adjusted AHE at least offers us a notion of how morality and well-being could interact in a contemporary eudaimonic theory. I therefore think it is interesting to see how viable it could be to put Desert Adjusted AHE into practice with Feldman’s eudaimonic theory.

The first problem I see with attempting to put Desert Adjusted AHE into practice is determining a notion of desert. A Kantian and a utilitarian might have very different notions about what it is we deserve to take pleasure in. Since for a Kantian it is right to tell the truth, according to Desert Adjusted AHE, the Kantian can reasonably take pleasure in telling her best friend that her hair cut is awful. Since the utilitarian is concerned with promoting happiness, such a confession is very much undeserving of pleasure. Thus, I think we could go one of two ways in determining a notion of desert. Either, Desert Adjusted AHE can be commandeered by whatever ethical theory one adheres to, or, Desert Adjusted AHE should commandeer an ethical theory to round itself out and offer a unified account of happiness measurement. In the first case, Desert Adjusted AHE would be open for use by any Kantian, Utilitarian, etc, in order to determine happiness levels that appropriately arise from a person practicing that ethical theory. The problem with this method comes when people who subscribe to different ethical theories take different measurements when determining happiness levels. This will mean that Desert Adjusted AHE will not offer a unified measurement when determining happiness levels, but instead will
be relative to an ethical theory. I am skeptical that Feldman would like AHE to be held hostage by ethical theories in such a way since his interest is in describing what makes the good life good for everyone, and not specifically for the Kantian, or the Utilitarian, etc.

In the second case, proponents of Desert Adjusted AHE would have to make a decision about what kind of ethical theory they want to determine what deserves to be taken pleasure in. If this route is pursued, then more work would have to be done in order to develop an ethical theory that best fits with Desert Adjusted AHE. The resulting theory would offer a strong connection between well-being and morality. However it is possible that this method would put a priority on morality over welfare in order to determine what counts as well-being in a way that Feldman would be uncomfortable with. As I stated earlier, Feldman does not endorse the use of Desert-Adjusted AHE and thinks it comes from confusing what is welfare good with what is morally good. Using this method of Desert-Adjusted AHE, the subjective state of taking pleasure in things, which is central to Feldman’s notion of attitudinal hedonism, is no longer good across the board. Instead, it is fragmented into the pleasures that the ethical theory endorses as deserving to be taken pleasure in. Feldman would therefore have to explain why morality has the effect of determining how one pleasant subjective state is of the happiness kind, and how another identical pleasant subjective state is not. Feldman does not explain how this could be so with Desert-Adjusted AHE and so I am again left dissatisfied about the connection between happiness and morality in his subjective hedonistic theory. The relationship between happiness and morality is still not sufficiently clear in Desert-Adjusted AHE, making me think there is not much hope of “avoiding controversy” with Feldman’s half-hearted attempt.

We are left with the question of how, if at all, we should pursue happiness as part of the good life. Feldman offers us the strategy of controlling authority over our own happiness. In
order to be happy, we should surround ourselves with the things that make us happy and repress thoughts about our burdens. As I have pointed out, pursuing our happiness for Feldman is completely compatible with living the life of a killer and a thief, as long as one’s guilt doesn’t get in the way of pleasure. Haybron points out, however, that the pursuit of happiness may be subject to more norms than just moral.\footnote{Haybron, "Happiness", \textit{The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy}.} We may, for example, be governed by a norm of prudence, where we must make choices in accordance with what will promote well-being to the fullest. Moreover, he notes that some morally permissible methods of pursuing happiness may nonetheless be inappropriate because they conflict with ethical virtues. Although saving my money to buy a fast sports car may be morally permissible and will bring me great pleasure, it may conflict with my inclination to be generous and thus deter the cultivation of my virtue. Moreover, wrongly motivated virtues can conflict with genuine virtue.\footnote{Ibid.} If I buy a round of drinks at the bar so that everyone will like me and I take pleasure in my own popularity, my generosity is not motivated for the right reasons and thus conflicts with true virtue. Virtue for the sake of pleasure may not count as virtue at all.

What I hope to communicate with these comments is the difficulty of knowing how to act in order to pursue the good life once questions of morality are added. The pursuit of both morality and happiness can overlap and conflict in a variety of ways that subjective hedonism does not even begin to account for in a eudaimonic theory. The result is that we can be living what Feldman would call a good life and still be perplexed about questions of morality or how to do and be good. These are not concerns in ancient eudaimonic theories because of their completeness and their integration of virtue and happiness. However, this again makes me question our contemporary disregard for completeness in a eudaimonic theory. It seems clear that...
Feldman’s contemporary subjective hedonistic eudaimonic thesis is no help in answering these questions about the priority of pursuing happiness over morality in the good life. Moreover, the difficulties we saw in the Crib and Sympathy Test cases in separating a good moral life from a good happy life suggest to me that it is an unfruitful separation. Happiness may not be the only reasonable aim in life. Moreover, a good life is not best described as one where I must choose one or the other – choose to be happy or to be moral. A good life to me is one where I can pursue both simultaneously, and a good theory of a good life will help me decide what to do when these two ends conflict.

The idea that modern conceptions of happiness resist being integrated with conceptions of morality and virtue is one that Julia Annas thinks divides contemporary and ancient theories. In ancient eudaimonic theories, virtue plays a transformative role. Virtue transforms a life by transforming one’s view of what happiness is. She says that for example, only the virtuous person knows how to put money to the right use and therefore, only in a virtuous person’s life does money make a contribution to happiness. There is a clear progression of ideas in ancient theories with the starting point being that the final end is happiness, and the means of achieving our final end is virtuous living. However, she acknowledges that even if we grant the starting point, “we find it difficult by the time that we allow that virtue can transform a life, that we are still talking about happiness.” This might lead us to find ancient theories too demanding and unacceptable.

However, finding ancient theories unacceptable may show that some important modern assumptions about happiness are playing a role in our thinking. The first assumption is that our

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156 Ibid.  
modern conception must be essentially subjective.\textsuperscript{158} Because contemporary philosophers like Feldman think that happiness is essentially a subjective state, virtue need not necessarily transform what we think happiness is. As long as the subjective state is present, happiness is present, thus no virtue is required. Secondly, Annas finds modern conceptions of happiness to be too rigid to be transformable with virtue. She thinks that our modern conceptions of happiness have a rigidity of form rather than of content. We may have competing accounts of the content, but once we have settled on it, we are reluctant to allow that there could be radical change in that content while thinking that we are still talking about happiness.\textsuperscript{159} Contemporary theorists have problems with the idea that happiness might alter in content while retaining its role as our goal.\textsuperscript{160} This is indeed Feldman’s point when he says that “happiness is what it is, and cannot be another thing.”\textsuperscript{161} When the content of happiness is rigid, it resists being transformed by virtue insofar as our view of what happiness is cannot change. Happiness is just attitudinal hedonism for Feldman. What makes us happy might change. However, even if what makes me happy changes from chocolate to vanilla ice cream, this provides me with no grounds to say that happiness is vanilla and not chocolate ice cream, or to say that you should take pleasure from vanilla ice cream. Happiness just is the subjective state and the subjective state maintains a rigi.

Moreover, Annas thinks that morality embodies a value different in kind from the values that nonmoral things have, and it cannot be weighed up against them, but should instead override them.\textsuperscript{162} This is why virtue must play a transformative role in a good life instead of simply fitting into it with other goods. We therefore should not try to fit morality into our theory of the good life as one good among many. Instead, we must let virtue transform our view of what happiness

\textsuperscript{158} Annas, “Virtue and Eudaimonia,” 256.
\textsuperscript{159} Annas, “Virtue and Eudaimonia,” 257.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} Feldman, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Happiness}? 222.
\textsuperscript{162} Annas, “Virtue and Eudaimonia,” 258.
is. She thinks that this problem leaves us with the important decision of whether or not to abandon ancient theories and their unrecognizable view of happiness in favour of modern notions of well-being. She asks us to keep in mind that modern happiness rather than being firmly subjective is formed upon a variety of incompatible sources.\(^ {163}\) It therefore may not be fruitful to try to develop a eudaimonic theory from a conception of happiness formed from conflicting sources. Thus, contemporary subjective accounts of happiness may resist being combined with virtue altogether because of the difference in kinds of value, and the rigidity in thinking what form happiness takes. Therefore if we are looking for a eudaimonic theory that can fully account for both pleasure and virtue, contemporary theorists may excuse themselves from the game. Completeness is a value found in ancient theories, not contemporary.

**Epicurus and Objective Hedonism About Happiness**

Throughout this chapter, I have been evaluating Feldman’s eudaimonic thesis by comparing it with Aristotle’s and other ancient conceptions of the good life. The main points of my evaluation have centered on Feldman’s subjectivism and Feldman’s hedonism. In the previous section, I offered an argument from Julia Annas for why contemporary subjective views resist transformation by virtue and therefore do not integrate pleasure and virtue well, meaning that Feldman’s contemporary hedonistic account leaves little room for the integration of virtue into the good life. I think it is important to make the distinction between hedonism and subjectivism and take into account that the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. In this section, I will take a look at Epicurus’ account of the good life as an example of an ancient objective hedonism in order to entertain a new perspective on the relationship between pleasure and virtue in the good life.

\(^ {163}\) Ibid.
There are a number of important differences between Epicurean hedonism and contemporary ideas of hedonism. It is first important to understand that Epicurus analyzes pleasure not primarily as a subjective state of consciousness or mental event but “rather as the overall healthy condition or functioning of a natural organism.”\textsuperscript{164} He says “For the stable condition (\textit{katastema}) of the flesh and the reliable expectation concerning this contains the highest and most secure joy, for those who are able to reason it out.”\textsuperscript{165} Thus, pleasure for Epicurus is not a subjective notion but can be understood as an objective ideal. Moreover, when Epicurus identifies pleasure with happiness, his goal is to try to show how pleasure can fulfill the same function as happiness in Greek ethical thought.\textsuperscript{166} In order to do so, he must demonstrate how pleasure can serve as “the objective, natural goal that structures our actions and consequently gives unity and organization to our lives.”\textsuperscript{167} Epicurean scholar Philip Mitsis argues that when Epicurus identifies pleasure with our final goal, happiness, he places it in the center of his ethics and squarely within the tradition of Greek ethical eudaimonism.\textsuperscript{168}

It is obvious from Epicurus’ placement of pleasure within a Greek ethical eudaimonic framework that pleasure does not embody a separate good from ethics, but is integrated with virtue into one unified theory. Epicurus justifies pleasure as our final end and tries to show how the content of morality, including friendship and altruism, can be derived from his analysis of pleasure. Moreover, says Mitsis, Epicurus “believes he can justify a life of virtue by showing how it is inextricably linked to a life of pleasure.”\textsuperscript{169} However, it is also important to understand that Epicurus sees the relation between pleasure and virtue to be purely instrumental. He says

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Mitsis, \textit{Epicurus’ Ethical Theory}, 8.
\textsuperscript{168} Mitsis, \textit{Epicurus’ Ethical Theory}, 11.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
“One must honour the noble, and the virtues and things like that, if they produce pleasure. But if they do not, one must bid them goodbye.”\footnote{Epicurus, “Deipnosophists,” 546ef.} Unlike Aristotle, who thinks virtue is choiceworthy in its own right, Epicurus thinks virtue is only choiceworthy insofar as it leads to pleasure. However, in making pleasure the greatest good, Epicurus offers an integrated way of ranking goods. Virtue is an integrated part of his objective hedonistic theory of happiness.

What is interesting for my purposes about Epicurean hedonism is that Epicurus approaches his argument by trying to argue that pleasure can meet the formal requirements for a theory of happiness. He claims that in “pursuing pleasure as our final good, we will be happy, and consequently, invulnerable to chance, self-sufficient, and in complete possession of all the goods necessary for fully satisfying our natures.”\footnote{Mitsis, Epicurus’ Ethical Theory, 16.} In this way, Epicurus stands in contrast to other hedonists who “would argue individuals attempting to maximize and intensify a particular feeling of pleasure may have good hedonic reasons for rejecting all such formal constraints.”\footnote{Mitsis, Epicurus’ Ethical Theory, 17.} Unlike Feldman, who argues that we should accept that the pleasant life is the good life because it is pleasant, Epicurus does not think that pure pleasure is sufficient for the good life, but the pursuit of pleasure as the good will bring with it a life complete with all of the necessary goods.

I am not here prepared to offer an analysis of how well Epicurus succeeds in his task. What I would like to draw attention to rather, is that pleasure need not conflict with other goods in a hedonistic account of the good life. Epicurus derives virtue from his account of pleasure so that it creates an integrated whole. Epicurus lacks subjectivity in his account of pleasure, therefore leaving him free of the barriers that Annas finds in contemporary theories that resist the transformation of virtue. Although Epicurus’ theory may not quite be “transformed by virtue” in Annas’ sense, he offers a systematic way to organize goods within the good life. Moreover, I
would like to emphasize how important completeness is in ancient theories of the good life and Epicurean hedonism is a good example of this assumption. Epicurus does not think it sufficient to draw out the benefits of pleasure when he argues that it is the good. He feels the pressure to demonstrate how pleasure can meet formal requirements of the good life. A life of only pleasure without other goods could not be entertained as the best life a human being could lead. Thus, what the Epicurean example demonstrates is that virtue can be compatible with pleasure in a hedonic theory and therefore hedonistic theories need not be left incomplete, even if that means biting the bullet and prioritizing pleasure over virtue.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, in this chapter, I have attempted to illuminate some of the weaknesses in Feldman’s subjective hedonistic eudaimonic thesis. Firstly, I questioned the accuracy of equating happiness with pleasure as Feldman does. Although in doing so, Feldman gives pleasure a priority of place in the good life not found in Aristotle, it is still contentious that what we think of as happiness is fully captured by subjective attitudinal pleasure. I continued by granting Feldman this contentious point for the time being, in order to further investigate the ramifications of a subjective hedonistic eudaimonic theory. After implementing Feldman’s own tests for the good life on three cases involving the problems of adaptive preferences, extreme socialization and artificial reality, I concluded that what we are looking for in a good life is more than subjective well-being. Moreover, there may be some room for agent-relativity if not subjectivity within ancient theories that may be a foot hold in overcoming extreme perfectionism in ancient eudaimonic theories like Aristotle’s. Whether or not a theory of the good life should strive to be a complete account of what makes a life go well is a point of contention between ancient and
contemporary eudaimonic theories. In ancient theories, completeness is an assumed goal where as in contemporary eudaimonic theories, completeness is not necessary. Even if we grant that well-being is only one kind of good in the good life, I thought it important to see if Feldman’s AHE has the theoretical equipment to make sense of the interaction between goods in the good life and how to pursue various goods when they conflict. I therefore attempted to put his concept of Desert Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism into play to see if it could make sense of the interaction between pleasure and morality. I concluded that Desert-Adjusted AHE does not succeed because pleasure and morality are not well integrated in an overarching structure within AHE, bringing to even further clarity the disparity on the point of completeness between ancient and contemporary theories. Finally, I looked at Epicurus as an example of an ancient hedonistic theory that incorporates objectivism and virtue to show that virtue and pleasure need not be incompatible in a hedonistic theory. Moreover, Epicurus emphasizes the need in ancient thought to provide a complete theory of the good life.

What I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter are a few crucial differences between how ancients like Aristotle and contemporary theorists like Feldman view eudaimonic theories. Contemporary theories emphasize subjectivity where ancient theories stress objectivity. Disagreement on subjectivity and objectivity relates to disagreement about completeness. Feldman is content to offer an explanation of one kind of good that is the good life. Ancient theories like Aristotle’s feel the need to be able to conclude that their description of the good life is complete and lacking nothing of importance. Thus, ancient theories become large, integrated wholes, with systems of understanding the relationships between different concepts. What becomes clear to me after considering these important differences is that Feldman’s project is much more limited than the Greek tradition of eudaimonic thought. He describes one kind of
good that can be said to contribute to a good life. Whether or not we think he succeeds in offering a theory of the good life will largely depend on whether or not we are looking for completeness in a eudaimonic theory.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

By comparing Aristotle and Feldman’s views about pleasure and the good life I hope to have drawn out a few major points of tension between ancient and contemporary eudaimonic views. These points of tension bring to light that in our contemporary haste to discard elitism, perfectionism and objectivity, we have also lost completeness and a system of structuring or organizing various goods within our conception of well-being. Although I think these losses are serious, I would also hesitate to abandon our emphasis on subjectivity. I do not mean to suggest that the politicians, economists, psychologists and philosophers who investigate subjective measures of well-being are not doing good work. Rather, I urge a more nuanced understanding of how subjectivity relates to our objective circumstances, not just causally, but also morally and theoretically within a good life. I have argued in this thesis that contemporary subjective views of the good life suffer from certain kinds of losses. I see at least three possible directions in which one could go to remedy these omissions in order to come to a more complete and nuanced understanding of living well. My concluding remarks will therefore briefly touch on how one might rehabilitate the ancients to make room for subjectivity, the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of our mental states, and finally, how we might use empirically informed ethics to create an account of the good life that integrates objective goods with subjective mental states.

I mentioned in my previous chapter an argument made by Lawrence Jost about making room for agent relativity in Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean. Jost argues that Aristotle’s writings on Milo the wrestler’s diet is an example of how Aristotle is concerned with not only levels of appropriateness concerning the object, but also levels of appropriateness concerning the
Jost sees agent relativity in Aristotle’s writing as a way out of understanding Aristotle’s ethics as strictly objective. We must make room for the appropriateness of the situation. Included in our considerations must be features of the agent because what is appropriate for me to do will depend on features of me, and what is appropriate for you will depend on features of you. I think that evidence for Jost’s argument can be seen in Aristotle’s understanding of pleasure. Recalling from my first chapter, pleasure for Aristotle, derives its goodness from both the state of the object and the state of the subject. The state of the subject experiencing pleasure matters to how we understand it. To me, this indicates that there is room in Aristotle’s ethics for making room for considerations about the agent like Jost urges, and thus we need not understand Aristotle’s eudaimonic thesis as being harshly objective. These considerations lead me to believe that there may be hope for rehabilitating important aspects of Aristotle’s eudaimonic thesis – like structure and completeness – by making room for considerations about particular features of an individual within his theory of the good life.

An area which I think, if investigated further, could improve our understanding of the subjective aspects of living well is a more integrated understanding of our different mental states and how they interact. Throughout my thesis, I have criticized Feldman’s purely hedonistic subjective view of well-being for failing to account for how pleasure should interact with other goods like virtue. However, even within the limits of subjectivity, I think that an interesting avenue for further investigation is to understand how various mental states relate to and interact with attitudinal pleasure, and how these mental states relate to well-being. My interest in this avenue of research is rooted in Peter Goldie’s idea of the interconnectedness of emotions. Goldie says that emotions, moods and traits interweave, overlap and mutually affect each other. We

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therefore cannot investigate any one aspect of our mental lives in isolation. We should always be looking to understand our emotions and moods as integrated aspects of a whole. I think that it will be helpful to keep Goldie’s insight in mind when we investigate the mental states involved in well-being. Attitudinal pleasure may not be a mental state best understood in isolation. Rather, locating attitudinal pleasure among a complex network of mental states and character traits may allow us to better understand how it relates to well-being, perhaps include other aspects of our character like virtue. Therefore, I suggest that understanding the complexity of our emotions, moods, and traits is an interesting area for further study in happiness literature.

Although I have been investigating happiness, pleasure and the good life as largely a philosophical problem, I am anxious to avoid the conclusion that the happiness research done by psychologists, economists and other empirical researchers is of little philosophical importance. In fact, I think that empirically informed ethics is an interesting new avenue in which to take happiness research. Valerie Tiberius is a philosopher who tackles the problem of how an “is” can inform an “ought” in a non-fallacious way. In her book, *The Reflective Life: Living Wisely With Our Limits*, she forwards an empirically informed approach to philosophizing about how to live. She offers a first-personal, process-based account of how to live well as reflective beings. She bases her “reflective virtues” on empirically grounded limits of reflection. Although Tiberius’ focus is on reflecting well, rather than happiness, I think that her approach is of great interest to the study of happiness and the good life. Like Tiberius, I am excited about the prospect of integrating different disciplines of study in order to come to a richer understanding of the human condition. My hope is that by understanding how different disciplines of happiness research can relate to one another, we can understand how different aspects of living well, such as subjective

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mental states and objective goods, can also relate and interact and thereby come to a more complete understanding of the good life.

In this conclusion I have touched on only a few areas of further investigation in which I think happiness research can be taken. I am certain that there are many more and advocate for dialogue across disciplines in the search for the good life. What I hope to have demonstrated in this conclusion is that we have not only lost something from ancient eudaimonic literature, but have also gained a wide range of avenues for further investigation into the nature of subjective pleasure and its relation to the many aspects of living well. However, I think that we must keep in mind a clear understanding of what it is we mean by happiness and the good life, and what features we think are necessary to living well, as we develop a eudaimonic theory. I hope to have demonstrated that our criteria has changed since the ancients from a complete and integrated structure to Feldman’s contemporary focus on subjective good. Rather than suggesting that we must choose one over the other, I would like to conclude by urging an integrated approach that looks for a solution to the problem of making sense of how our objective and subjective circumstances relate in our overall conception of a good life.
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