

A SIMPLE DEFENCE OF MONISM

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ABSTRACT

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Monists about well-being often appeal to the simplicity of their theories as justification for preferring their theories over rival pluralist theories. Pluralists acknowledge the simplicity of monist theories, but argue that monist theories fail to capture many of the well-being facts, and that pluralist theories are to be preferred on the ground of their greater explanatory power. I present a new argument in this paper defending the simplicity argument given by monists. I first present a sophisticated monism, Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism, and argue for its initial plausibility. I then present considerations from statistical inference, and show that the pluralist's appeal to explanatory power is weaker than initially thought. I then present arguments traditionally thought problematic for monist theories, and show that Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism (and other equally plausible monist theories), keeps pace with rival pluralist theories. I conclude that while the pluralist does have greater explanatory power, given the considerations from statistical inference and the test cases I discuss, such explanatory power is not great enough to grant preference to pluralist theories, and that the simpler monist theories are still preferable.

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0. Introduction

Proponents of monist theories of well-being often appeal to simplicity as an advantage over competing pluralist theories. Proponents of pluralist theories concede that although monist theories are simpler, pluralist theories hold more plausibility due to greater explanatory power. I wish to contest this claim to greater explanatory power. The explanatory distance between monist and pluralist theories is much narrower than traditionally thought, and as a result the pluralist cannot claim to be closer to the well-being facts than competing monist theories. Monists can continue to appeal to simplicity. My case proceeds in three steps.

I first introduce a sophisticated monist theory, intrinsic attitudinal hedonism (IAH) and initially motivate it by contrasting it with a cruder hedonist theory, sensory hedonism. I show that IAH holds greater plausibility than sensory hedonism, and we should take the theory seriously, at least at first glance. Then I turn to a discussion of simplicity. I introduce one conception of weighing the trade-off between simplicity and explanatory power, Ockham's Razor, as formulated in Jonathan Schaffer's *Laser*. I conclude that the *Laser* is unsatisfactory, and I then present conclusions reached by statistical inference concerning the application of Ockham's Razor. With this superior conception of simplicity in hand, the contest will end in favour of monism. Given these results, I argue that IAH is sufficiently complex to emerge superior to competing pluralist theories. I show that IAH's more complex definition of pleasure can handle cases that are widely thought to show that hedonism is problematic, and as a result falls within a sufficient explanatory range of a plausible pluralist theory to be considered the superior option.

1. Motivating Hedonism

Hedonism is a monist theory of well-being. It holds that pleasure is the only criterion for determining whether a life is going well for the one who lives it. All other values are derivative, meaning that if something is valuable, it is because of the pleasure it produces, and not due to any other features of that value. For example, hedonism would hold that knowledge only contributes to well-being insofar as it produces pleasure. Knowledge that is deeply unsettling, or causes great pain, does not make a life better, says the hedonist.

In order to motivate the sophisticated hedonism that I will use later in the paper, I first wish to contrast it with a cruder version of hedonism called sensory hedonism¹. I present two stories where sensory hedonism gives bad explanations of an individual's well-being, and then discuss how IAH is better able to accommodate intuitions about the well-being of agents in these two stories. Doing so will demonstrate that IAH is a plausible monist theory.

Sensory hedonism treats pleasures as sensory experiences. The sensation one gets from eating gourmet food at a high class restaurant, runner's high from running five miles, or the experience of listening to music that one enjoys are all sensory experiences that produce pleasures. Another way of understanding this claim is that there is not a reflective component to pleasurable sensory experiences. I do not have to ponder whether or not I am pleased to be eating delicious food, or getting a runner's high. These pleasurable sensible experiences have a duration and intensity that is caused by my partaking in them. In what follows, I shall show that sensory hedonism runs into at least two counterintuitive judgements given its understanding of pleasure.

¹ Prominent philosophers who may be called sensory hedonists are Bentham, Mill, and Roger Crisp (in Crisp 2006, *Reasons & The Good*).

The first is the case of the masochist, who enjoys the feeling of pain. Imagine a case where the masochist is tied up, and has his skin cut into with a serrated blade. He screams in agony and writhes whenever a new laceration is created. However, the masochists begs his torturer to continue whenever they pause. If the masochist is asked why he wishes to continue the lacerations, he shall reply that he enjoys the feeling of pain. If pleasure is a sensory state, then the hedonist cannot make sense of this scenario. The masochist claims he enjoys the pain that is inflicted upon him, but the only sensory state he is experiencing is that of pain. There is no sensory experience of pleasure, yet the masochist states that he is pleased by the abuse.

The sensory hedonist can give two replies to make sense of the scenario. The first scenario is that what the masochist calls pain is actually a sensation of pleasure. That is, when a form of abuse is inflicted upon him, he feels not pain but rather pleasure. This does not work because we are no longer discussing masochism as commonly understood. What it is to be a masochist is to seek out *painful* experiences. If being cut gives the masochist pleasure, he would not seek out being cut but something else that produces the sensation of pain in him. The individual who feels pleasure when being cut into is akin to someone with an inverted spectrum.

The other option is to state that the masochist feels a sensation of pleasure along with the sensations of pain he receives from his abuse. The masochist undergoes torment because of the pleasure that results from it. This explanation gets the masochist wrong as well. What the masochist seeks out is the pain for its own sake, not the pleasurable sensations that result from torture. But, if we insist that the masochist seeks out the pleasurable sensations that result from his feeling pain, it is hard to differentiate the masochist from any individual who undergoes instrumental pain in order to

experience pleasure.² For illustration, imagine an individual who takes great joy in running but has lost the use of her legs. She is told that if she undergoes a long, painful surgery she will recover the use of her legs. The runner decides to undergo the surgery, and consequently she is able to use her legs again and enjoys running once again. The masochist is different from the runner in an interesting psychological way, however. For the runner, the pain is instrumental, but for the masochist the pain is experienced for its own sake. The sensory hedonist cannot appeal to this explanation. In short, although sensory hedonism may make a judgement about the well-being of the masochist that makes sense, the psychological explanations the sensory hedonist needs to appeal to are incorrect.

Here is another case that causes trouble for the hedonist. A woman loves eating burgers. In fact, she loves eating burgers so much, that she decides that she wants to know how they are made. She is aware of how burgers are produced, but she is not familiar with the specifics of burger production. In order to fulfill her curiosity, she signs up for a tour of a nearby slaughterhouse. Once there, she is horrified at what she witnesses. The animals wait in cramped conditions, and are shoved through tight corridors into a dead end, where a device comes and executes the animals. The device does not always work as intended, and the results are gruesome even when it does function as intended. The woman is nauseated and dizzy. After leaving the slaughterhouse, the woman cannot look at meat without recalling the events at the slaughterhouse, and she feels deep guilt and nausea. However, she does not wish she had remained ignorant, nor does she desire to forget what she saw. In fact, she thinks that the knowledge she gained is far too valuable to give up, despite the discomfort it continually causes her when dining. The woman believes she is better off with the

² For a greater in-depth discussion of how sensory hedonism cannot make sense of the masochist, see Fred Feldman's *Pleasure And The Good Life*, pages 85 - 95.

knowledge she received from visiting the slaughterhouse, and she believes that she would be in a worse state had she remained ignorant. The sensory hedonist cannot account for this case. The woman is clearly not given any sensory pleasure by the knowledge she has gained. In fact, it disturbs her, and she experiences deep discomfort whenever she sees meat. What she experiences is far closer to pain than pleasure. But the woman does not desire to lose that knowledge. She believes she is better off with the knowledge she gained. The sensory hedonist must say that either she in fact does receive sensory pleasure from the knowledge, or that she is mistaken about the contribution of such knowledge to her well-being, and that the prudent option is to choose ignorance. The former option does not work. Illness, nausea, and being disturbed are not pleasurable experiences. The latter option fails to do justice to her judgement about her knowledge. It is intuitively plausible that her knowledge does make her better off. The sensory hedonist may insist that ignorance is the valuable option because of the pleasure, or lack of pain, it provides, but this comes at the cost of losing plausibility. It fails to capture the why the woman thinks that the knowledge she possesses makes her better off.

To sum up, sensory hedonism gets explanations wrong. In the case of the masochist, sensory hedonism either states that the masochist undergoes pain instrumentally, or has to suggest that the masochist is not feeling pain at all, but is feeling pleasure where most people feel pain. But this is an incorrect account of masochism. In the case of the woman visiting the slaughterhouse, the woman believes she is better for knowing the process for making meat. The sensory hedonist has to say that the woman is not better off with her knowledge, and her ignorant state prior to her visit has higher well-being. But it seems that some knowledge does make us better off, even if it makes us

uncomfortable as well. I conclude that, given these two examples, sensory hedonism is unsatisfactory.

However, this is not to say that hedonism is untenable. Where the sensory hedonist goes wrong is their definition of pleasure, so we need to understand pleasure differently. The most promising formulation of hedonism is Fred Feldman's intrinsic attitudinal hedonism (IAH). Pleasures, under the sensory hedonism we were considering above, are not attitudes about anything. They are experiences that happen to us when engaging in an activity. Similar to how we experience pain when skinning a knee, or when we experience pleasure when drinking beer. For Feldman, however, his version of hedonism does not focus on sensory pleasures. His theory focuses on attitudinal pleasure. As he explains it:

*"Attitudinal pleasures are different. A person takes attitudinal pleasure in some state of affairs if he enjoys it, is pleased about it, is glad that it is happening, is delighted by it. So, for example, suppose that you are a peace-loving person. Suppose you take note of the fact that there are no wars going on. The world is at peace. Suppose you are pleased about this. You are glad that the world is at peace. Then you have taken attitudinal pleasure in a certain fact- the fact that the world is at peace. Attitudinal pleasures are always directed onto objects, just as beliefs and hopes and fears are directed onto objects. This is one respect in which they are different from sensory pleasures. Another difference is that attitudinal pleasures need not have any "feel". We know we have them not by sensation, but in the same way (whatever it may be) that we know when we believe something, or hope for it, or fear that it might happen."*³

I can take pleasure in many things. I can be pleased that I am writing a paper right now, pleased that my cup of earl grey is just the right temperature, or pleased that my book collection is continually growing. As Feldman points out, I do not have to have an accompanying sensation with this type of pleasure. For example, if I have an infected tooth pulled without anesthesia, the experience will be quite painful, but I shall appreciate the fact I had it pulled. That is, I shall take pleasure in the fact that I had the infected tooth pulled, not merely because it stopped the pain but because of the fact

³ Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure And The Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism*. Oxford University Press. 2004. 56.

that it is no longer in my mouth. Furthermore, like sensory hedonism, IAH is a monist theory of value. The most fundamental value is pleasure, but in the case of IAH, it is attitudinal pleasure.⁴

This theory provides more than enough flexibility to solve the cases above that proved problematic for sensory hedonism. In the case of the masochist, the hedonist can agree that the masochist does feel pain, and that he does enjoy the pain he experiences. The hedonist will say that the masochist takes pleasure in the fact that pain is inflicted upon him. In regards to the masochist, Feldman writes that “the person who suffers these sensory pains has an odd attitude toward the fact that he is suffering them: he enjoys it. More exactly, he takes intrinsic attitudinal pleasure in the fact that he is pained by those feelings.”⁵ To put it explicitly, when the knife cuts into the skin, the masochist writhes and howls at the pain, but he is glad to be experiencing the pain. IAH also provides a solution to the case of the woman who visited the slaughterhouse. Recall that she values the knowledge despite the discomfort it causes her. Despite knowing that ignorance would relieve her discomfort, she does not wish for it. IAH explains this by stating that the woman takes pleasure in the insight she has gained from attending the slaughterhouse, because she now knows the conditions the animals are subjected to and is glad to be more informed about such matters.^{6 7 8}

⁴ One might wonder how attitudinal pleasure counts as a pleasure when it lacks a sensory component. This is an important question, but one that must be put off to the side.

⁵ Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure And The Good Life*. 90.

⁶ This is not to say that the woman’s overall well-being will be high. Rather, what I only aim to show is that IAH is able to accommodate the idea that knowledge contributes to our overall well-being.

⁷ One worry a reader might have is that IAH really isn’t a monist theory at all, but rather a cleverly disguised pluralist theory. Roughly, the complaint would proceed that when describing all the instances of attitudinal pleasure, different attitudinal verbs are used. These are verbs such as ‘appreciates’, ‘enjoys’, ‘takes pleasure in’, and if those are being used to describe instances of well-being, we might wonder if they are different attitudes that all happen to contribute to well-being. I think worry is coherent, but the hedonist has an explanation ready. Enjoyment, appreciation, and taking pleasure in something all carve out a unified phenomenon in a joint-cutting kind of way. They are all unified under being guises of attitudinal pleasure. Perhaps they do differ, but it is not in ways that should make us think that they are not of the same kind.

⁸ Another worry that one might have is that there are really two values in IAH; one of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure, and another of sensory pleasure. If so, then IAH is a pluralist theory. This rests on a misunderstanding of IAH. The intrinsic attitudinal hedonist does not consider sensory pleasure to contribute to well-being (it is possible to extend IAH to include sensory pleasure as a way of weighing measurements of well-being, but I do not consider this a viable option).

2. Simplicity

Now that I have given a plausible monist theory, I wish to discuss Ockham's Razor. The Razor states, *ceteris paribus*, always choose the simplest theory. That is, when two theories are equal in all respects such as explanatory power, predictive accuracy, and fruitfulness, the theory that has less entities posited ought to be the theory of choice. The problem is that the debate between the monist and pluralist, all things are not equal. The pluralist theory possesses greater explanatory power, while the monist theory has greater simplicity. Because of this unevenness, the question as to how to adjudicate between simplicity and explanatory power arises. This section, then, will focus on a theory of simplicity that helps answer when it is permissible to weigh in favor of simplicity.

One way to measure simplicity is to count the number of fundamental entities in a theory. In the case of well-being we are talking about the most basic good(s) that make a life go well.

Jonathan Schaffer develops a version of Ockham's Razor, *The Laser*, which focuses on fundamental entities. *The Laser* states: "Do not multiply fundamental entities without necessity!"⁹ As he describes it,

"By the lights of *The Laser*, derivative entities are an 'ontological free lunch', in the sense that they are genuinely new and distinct entities but they cost nothing by the measure of economy. *The Laser* thus incorporates an implicit distinction between *the commitments* of a theory, and *the cost* of such commitments. By the lights of *The Laser*, derivative entities are additional commitments, but they cost nothing. More precisely: derivative entities cost nothing *further*, beyond the cost incurred for positing their fundamental grounds."¹⁰

One thought experiment can be used to motivate the separation between IA pleasures and sensory pleasures: Imagine someone who is in a dingy basement, and has electrodes inserted into their brain, and stimulate to force the individual's brain to produce serotonin, dopamine, and other neuro-physiological effects associated with sensory pleasure. In other words, let's stipulate that this individual experiences a large amount of sensory pleasure as a result of the stimulation of the electrodes. It is still possible for this individual to be dismayed at the situation they find themselves in. That is, they can *be displeased* at the fact that they have befallen this state of affairs. The sensory hedonist must say this life is good, because of the amount of sensory pleasure present, but this seems to be an odd conclusion. The intrinsic attitudinal hedonist, however, has the resources to explain why this individual's well-being is low by appealing to their taking displeasure in their science-experiment participation. In this way the IA hedonist motivates not counting sensory pleasure as contributing to well-being.

⁹ Schaffer, Jonathan. "What Not To Multiply Without Necessity" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol 93. Issue 4. 644-664. 2015. 647.

¹⁰ Schaffer, Jonathan. "What Not To Multiply Without Necessity" 647, 648.

Shaffer also provides a rule for when the *The Laser* should be applied. He calls this the *Ontological Bang for the Buck*. This rule states “Optimally balance minimization of fundamental entities with maximization of derivative entities (especially useful ones).”¹¹ How to balance a theory this way will involve a complex weighing of various virtues a theory possesses. Schaffer provides an ideal for *Ontological Bang for the Buck*: pure set theory. In pure set theory, the only fundamental entity is the null set. As Schaffer explains, in regards to the null set, “From this single primitive, an entire transfinite hierarchy of pure sets can be derived through the operation of set formation.”¹²

Schaffer also provides another case where *The Laser* and *Ontological Bang for the Buck* are ideally met.

“Georg has developed a decent regimentation of set theory. He invokes 10 primitive concepts, and from those 10 primitives he can define 40 other useful set-theoretic concepts. Hamsa though- in a moment of genius -builds on Georg’s work to discover a beautiful axiomatization with just a single primitive notion. With her single primitive, Hamsa can define ninety-nine other useful set-theoretic concepts, including all forty of Georg’s set-theoretic concepts.”¹³

In this case, we should prefer Hamsa’s theory to Georg’s, as Hamsa only uses a single primitive notion (perhaps the null set), whereas Georg uses ten primitive notions to achieve less than Hamsa.

Both the pluralist and the monist would accept that *The Laser* should be clearly applied. Unfortunately, cases such as these do not give us an answer as to when we ought to rule in favor of simplicity over explanatory power, or vice versa. The well-being debate is more similar to the following case. Georg has ten primitive axioms in his set theory. From those ten axioms he can derive one hundred theorems. Hamsa, on the other hand, has one axiom. From Hamsa’s single axiom ninety five theorems can be derived. George’s theory is more explanatorily powerful, but

¹¹ Ibid. 652.

¹² Schaffer, Jonathan. “What Not To Multiply Without Necessity” 652.

¹³ Ibid. 649.

Hamsa's theory is simpler and much more efficient, but at the cost of being explanatorily weaker. The question then arises as to which of these theories to treat as the theory closer to the truth.¹⁴ Hamsa can argue that her theory is better because it is simpler and gets close enough to Georg's theory, but Georg will respond that the five extra theorems his theory provides are too important to justify giving up his theory. On top of that, it is unclear how many of those five theorems Hamsa's theory must provide in order to justify giving up Georg's theory. If Hamsa's theory can prove ninety-nine of those one hundred theorems, we might think that justifies giving up Georg's theory, but if we count down we will eventually reach a point where ruling in favor of simplicity is not permissible. But saying that there are points when ruling in favor of simplicity is permissible and there are points when ruling in its favor are not does not provide a rule for how to recognise when we are in these situations.

In other words, when to rule in favor of simplicity and when to rule in favor of explanatory power is not a straightforward matter. To quote lessons learned from studies of simplicity in statistical inference: "Too little complexity and the model will be so unrealistic as to make prediction unreliable; too much complexity and the model will be so specific to the particular data as to make prediction - yes - unreliable."¹⁵ The implication for well-being is that a theory that has one-thousand different basic units of well-being will explain a set of one thousand instances of intuitive cases of well-being, but will fail to explain extra data outside of that given set. That is, the theory will be explanatorily more powerful than a less complex theory, but given new data, such as new cases of well-being, it will be unable to accommodate them. One example will be, given a set of four instances of well-being that are explained by a theory that holds knowledge, friendship, achievement,

¹⁴ Presupposing there are truths about sets beyond which ones are useful for particular purposes.

¹⁵ A. W. F. Edwards. "Occam's Bonus" in *Simplicity, Inference, And Modelling: Keeping It Sophisticatedly Simple*. Zellner, Keuzenkamp, and McAleer, eds. Cambridge University Press. (2001). 128.

and moral goodness to explain each individual case, the theory will include instances that are intuitively not cases of well-being. The theory will include, for example, a case where something undesirable is achieved, such as being the most hated person in the world, or a case of a parasitic friendship that will not end. A non-well-being example is that of someone who has a theory of what counts as a chair. They have one thousand different possible configurations for what counts as a chair, from three legs, to five legs, a seat made of wicker, and so on. However, when presented with an object that is clearly not a chair they will include it because one of their many posits allow it in. An art piece with thirteen legs and a wicker cushion may end up being included, or a dog will be included because it has four legs. For contrast, a theory with less posits, not necessarily a monist theory, will be more flexible in accommodating new data, provided its not too simple.

The issue is that too simple of a theory will only be able to explain a limited set of data, similar to the pitfalls facing a too complex theory. As the problems presented against sensory hedonism above show, it gets too many things wrong. To be exact, a single posit, such as sensory pleasure, cannot explain much data. It will consider only instances where sensory pleasure is experience to be instances of positive well-being, but other plausible cases of positive well-being will be ignored because they will not fit the theory. To put it another way, a theory that is too simple will not recognise cases of well-being it cannot explain. It is akin to someone who refuses to acknowledge that there are things that are green that do not contain chlorophyll, because their theory holds that only things with chlorophyll are green.

Here is the upshot of this section. It is reasonable to initially assume that a pluralist theory is closer to the truth of well-being. Given its complexity, the amount of posits the theory commits to, the pluralist theory appears to get closer to the truth than its rival monist theories. The idea being

that monist theories are too simple. The monist theories have only one posit, and hence are more likely to be farther away from the truth and unable to accommodate instances of well-being that their theory cannot straight-forwardly explain. The catch is that, from the standpoint of statistical inference, there is no independent reason to think that either is privileged in that one closer to the truth. Both theories have advantages: Complex theories tend to be closer to the facts, and simple theories tend to be more amenable to new data.¹⁶¹⁷ Ideally, we want the theory that is the best trade-off between simplicity and complexity, as this will give us reason to believe we are approximating the truth. The problem is that we do not know what the optimal trade-off between the two is.

The point of discussion is that this deflates the pluralist's claim to explanatory power. While they do have a complex theory, compared to monism, from the standpoint of statistical inference there is no independent reason to think they are closer to the truth, closer to the well-being facts, than a simpler theory. In fact, the pluralist may be accommodating what appear to be instances of well-being, but are in fact not instances of well-being. I am asserting that the pluralist allows too much to count as well-being, at the cost of failing to count *correct* instances of well-being.

What I aim for in the next section is to further deflate the pluralist's claim to explanatory power, and to show that a sophisticated monism, IAH, is able to come close to a plausible pluralist theory. As Elliott Sobel puts it, "parsimony can be *relevant* to rational belief even when parsimony

¹⁶ Malcom Forster, who works on statistical inference, describes the dilemma surrounding the tradeoff: "[C]omplexity is good for reduction of bias, whereas simplicity reduces the tendency to overfit. The optimum model is the one that makes the best trade-off between these two factors. The bias/variance dilemma refers to the fact that as we go up in a hierarchy of nested models, the bias decreases, but the expected variance increases. A model selection criterion *aims* at the best trade-off between bias and variance, but neither bias nor variance is known, so this theoretical insight does not lead directly to any insight. It tells us what we *aim* to do, not how to do it." Quote is from: Forster, Malcom R. "The New Science Of Simplicity" in *Simplicity, Inference, And Modelling*. 106.

¹⁷ Model bias is, roughly, how close the model is to the truth. Overfitting is when, roughly, the model fits the current data too well and is unable to accommodate newer data. Variance is the distance of the best-fitting model to the best-predictive model.

does not *suffice* to tell you what to believe.”¹⁸ Although parsimony alone cannot suffice to tell one to believe a monist theory, I aim to give sufficient reason to adopt monism: IAH comes close in explanatory power to a rival pluralist theory, *and* is a simpler theory.

3. Modelling The Debate

Given the considerations of complexity and simplicity from the standpoint of statistical inference above, I must now show that IAH is a sophisticated enough theory, not only compared to other monist theories, but that it also comes within the explanatory range of plausible pluralist theories. I have shown that it is an improvement over sensory hedonism, which was too simple of a theory. Now I aim to show that it rivals pluralism. To motivate this, I shall now move on to three cases that are representative of the kinds of cases thought to show that hedonism is untenable. These three cases represent three different types of cases.¹⁹ In order to handle these cases, I employ a mixed-strategy available to the hedonist, rather than using one uniform response for all cases. What this shows is that the intrinsic attitudinal hedonist has an array of responses available to them in response to these cases. Because the hedonist has a responses available to them, the monopoly on explanatory power that pluralism purportedly has is weaker than it initially appears. Because pluralism holds a weaker grip on explanatory power, we have reason to prefer IAH on the grounds of simplicity.

To be clear, I do not claim that these are the only types of cases out there, nor do I claim that show that hedonism can handle every tokening of these types of cases. What I do intend to show is that hedonism is able to handle the most well known versions of these cases. If I succeed,

¹⁸ Sober, Elliott. *Ockham's Razors: A User's Manual*. Cambridge University Press. 2015. 151.

¹⁹ By types, I mean the kind of thing instances of which are tokens.

then the strategy for handling for the three token cases generalises for the majority of cases that fall under these three types.

In order to model the debate between a monist theory and a pluralist theory, I shall introduce David Ross' pluralist theory, as given in *The Right And The Good*, as the opponent to IAH. Ross' theory is elegant, simpler (compared to rival pluralist theories; it only has four values), and considered emblematic of pluralist theories, so his theory is most appropriate. Nothing hangs on Ross' theory in particular, and other pluralist theories may be substituted in place of Ross'.²⁰

David Ross' theory of value has four fundamental intrinsic values. They are virtue, pleasure, "allocation of pleasure to the virtuous,"²¹ and knowledge. Ross describes virtue as the "action, or disposition to act, from any one of certain motives, of which at all events the most notable are the desire to do one's duty, the desire to bring into being something that is good, and the desire to give pleasure or save pain to others."²² Ross does not define pleasure beyond noting that it seems to be intrinsically good, but I shall assume it to be sensory pleasure. By "allocation of pleasure to the virtuous", Ross means pleasure that is given to those who deserve it. Knowledge is the last intrinsic value in his theory, and by knowledge Ross means the ordinary understanding of knowledge. Ross uses these four values to explain why we value other things as well. The last paragraph in the chapter "What Things Are Good?", Ross writes:

Aesthetic enjoyment, for example, seems to be a blend of pleasure with insight into the nature of the object that inspires it. Mutual love seems to be a blend of virtuous disposition of two minds towards each other, with the knowledge which each has of the character and disposition of the other, and with the pleasure which arises from such disposition and knowledge. And a similar analysis may probably be applied to all other complex goods.²³

²⁰ Strictly speaking, Ross' theory is about value more generally, and not just well-being. Most pluralist theories of well-being contain elements of Ross' theory, or subsume it. Consequently, I do not think misrepresenting his theory in this way is unfair or objectionable.

²¹ Ross, David. Philip Stratton-Lake. Ed. "What Things Are Good?" in *The Right And The Good*. Oxford University Press. 2002. 140.

²² Ross, David. *The Right And The Good*. 134.

²³ Ross, David. Philip Stratton-Lake. Ed. "What Things Are Good?" in *The Right And The Good*. Oxford University Press. 1930. 141.

Ross' pluralism is a strong theory. It has four fundamental entities, which are able to explain why other things we value are valuable. The things that we value that are *not* the four basic values are complex goods, which are analysed in terms of the four basic values.

I now turn to model the debate between the monist and pluralist. I present three cases representative of the kinds of cases thought to show that hedonism is problematic. I first give the case, and then demonstrate how the pluralist explains the case. I then give the hedonist explanation of the case. What I aim to show is that hedonism has the resources to explain such cases by applying a mixed-strategies response. That is, for each case, the hedonist will use a different strategy available to them.

The first one is the “false pleasures” type of case.²⁴ In this type of case, the agent in the scenario is mistaken about the state of affairs in which they are taking pleasure. The most famous version of this type of case is Robert Nozick’s “experience machine”, in which the individual is plugged into a computer simulation and tricked into thinking that they are experiencing the events they are taking pleasure in, but are not actually experiencing such events. The reason these cause trouble for the hedonist is that our judgements about the well-being of individuals found in these kinds of cases hold that the individual is not living a good life. It seems intuitive that living a life hooked up to a computer that simulates pleasurable events is not a good life. But hedonism claims that it is a good life. That costs some plausibility.²⁵

The case I will consider, however, is not the experience machine, but one akin to it. This case involves a businessman whose life is a lie. As Feldman describes it:

²⁴ I borrow the names for the types of cases from chapter three of Feldman (2004).

²⁵ For the experience machine, see Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974) pages 42 - 45. For the deceived businessman case, see Shelly Kagan’s *Normative Ethics* (1998) pages 34 - 36.

He enjoys many pleasures, but each is somehow predicated on some mistaken belief. For example, he enjoys the pleasure of family life, but his wife and children secretly despise him; he enjoys the companionship of his business colleagues, but they also misrepresent their attitudes. It is stipulated that the business man would be miserable if he knows the truth about these matters.²⁶

It is intuitive to think that the businessman's life is in fact not going well for him. Ross' pluralism is able to capture this intuition. He can say that the man's life is low in well-being due to the man's ignorance. That is, he lacks the knowledge of his situation. A passage from Ross perfectly demonstrates how he would handle such a case:

Wrong opinion, so long as its wrongness is not discovered, may be as great a source of satisfaction as right. Yet we should agree that it is an inferior state of mind, because it is to a less extent founded on knowledge and is itself a less close approximation to knowledge; which again seems to point to our recognising knowledge as something good in itself.²⁷

In other words, what makes the man's life low in well-being is his ignorance. His pleasure itself may be valuable, but his failure to understand that everyone he appreciates scorns him is what makes it a less valuable life.

The intrinsic attitudinal hedonist, however, states that the man's life is in fact going well for the man. As long as he is taking pleasure in his relationships, even if they are founded on lies, his life is going well for him. The fact that these relationships are not as the businessman perceives them does not affect the amount of value present in his life. Some might take this to be a counterintuitive conclusion for hedonism to reach, and hence should count as a strike against the view's plausibility. This is the wrong conclusion to reach. Although we are not systematically deceived like the businessman, we only differ from him in degree, not in kind. Human beings have a wide variety of cognitive biases which distort reality. These biases include overestimating our own attractiveness, thinking that we are morally better than others, and pollyannaism, which is the tendency to overrate

²⁶ Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure And The Good Life*. 109.

²⁷ Ross, David. *The Right And The Good*. 140.

how well one's life is going in general. These biases likely evolved to make life more bearable, by distorting our perception of reality.

We do not think that our lives are lacking value like the businessman's. But, if the businessman's evaluation of his life is based on a misperception, much like the way ours are, then it is plausible to think that the businessman's life is in fact going well for him. To put the point another way, if we judge that the businessman's life is very low in well-being, then such a judgement will overgeneralise to cases that we intuitively judge to be high in well-being, and they will in fact be not as good as we initially believed. Or, we can instead accept that the businessman's life is going well for him, and maintain our intuitive judgements about everyday cases that have misperceptions present in them.

The pluralist and the hedonist both have answers to this case. The answer I gave for the hedonist may be contentious, but that does not make it a *bad* answer. If anything, the hedonist can give a more in depth explanation of why the businessman's life is valuable by pointing to the fact that we find our lives to be worthwhile despite biases distorting our perception of reality, rather than committing to the claim that our lives are in fact worse than we find them to be. The pluralist faces a dilemma. Either they risk overgeneralising and judging many cases of intuitive well-being to instances of lower well-being that initially thought, or, they must appeal to a different explanation to show why the businessman's life is bad.

The dilemma, to put it another way, is this. Either the pluralist can bite the bullet and accept that our lives are in fact worse than we judge them to be, and systematically so, or they can attempt to revise their theory in order to avoid the conclusion that our lives are worse than we judge them to be. The pluralist can shrug and dig their feet in, claiming that the list they have given *is* the correct

account of what makes a life go well for the one who lives it. It just happens to be an unfortunate consequence that every life goes very poorly. To put it another way, the things that make a life go well are x, y, and z, but those items are unfortunately out of reach for the kinds of beings that we happen to be. Still, the pluralist can insist, even though all lives are of poor quality (despite what we judge of them ourselves), that does not give the pluralist any reason to think that their theory is incorrect. I think this response to the first horn is problematic for what I take to be a methodological reason, and because it implies what many consider to be a repugnant theory.

The methodological reason is as follows. When we enter into a discussion of well-being, we should at least assume that there are some lives that are good for the one who lives it. That is, we should assume that our theory grants that *there are* lives that are high in well-being. I do not mean this in the sense of possibility, where it is possible for someone to lead a life high in well-being, despite the fact that there are no actual beings whose lives are high in well-being. I mean it in the sense that there is at least one actual being whose life is good for them (I will explain why I don't want to count the possibility constraint in a bit). I think there are strong reasons for adopting this methodological constraint. The first is that when we discuss well-being, a theory that predicts that the good life is unattainable because the components of a good life are out of reach seems far removed from reality. It is similar to a moral theory that informs us of the proper ways to act morally, but we happen to be moral monsters because the dictates of such a theory are unable to be fulfilled by us. Such a theory of morality does not have much use for us, because when we ask the question "what ought we do", the response is effectively that we are unable to do anything that we ought to do. In a similar vein, such a theory is comparable to a sort of epistemological theory which claims that there are things that can be known, except beings like us fall under the unfortunate

affliction of just being unable to know such things. To be clearer: The point of many of these theories is that they can serve as practical guides to various concerns and questions we may have. A theory that answers our questions in a way that makes us unable to practically act on it loses the force motivating it.

Naturally, pluralists can protest that their theories avoid the pitfalls I list. They can argue that their theories both list items that are attainable by us and are conducive to a good life. So, for example, such a theory might list achievement, relationships, and play as what counts for a good life. I think these theories, although they do meet the criteria, are wrong for the reasons I list for thinking Ross' theory is wrong (both above and in what follows). For example, we might ask what it is about relationships that make a life higher in well-being, but the answer an objective list theory gives, "it just does", is arbitrary and perplexing. That is, although a theory like the one meets the methodological constraint above, the theory itself is in many ways unsatisfying. The items on the list seem arbitrarily chosen, and do not provide a deeper explanation as to why they count towards well-being.

To be more pointed, the more sophisticated a pluralist theory becomes, the more likely it is to become less practically applicable. As in the case of the deceived businessman, once a requirement like true belief is added in addition to the list of items that contribute to well-being, the attainability of well-being becomes more difficult. We might think ourselves doing well, but if more sophisticated pluralist theories are correct, we might in fact be much worse off than we think ourselves. Constraints such as true belief make it more difficult for us to have a life higher in well-being, and increase the chances of us being much lower in well-being.

The other problem with the pluralist embracing this horn of the dilemma is that it implies anti-natalism, which many find to be an objectionable theory of the quality of human life. To review, anti-natalism is the view that human life is constantly miserable, to the extent that no life is worth beginning.²⁸ Combined with a moral stance against the inflicting of harm, and the conclusion that it is morally wrong to bring people into existence follows. If the pluralist bites the bullet, and accepts that our judgements of our well-being are systematically flawed, and accepts that our well-being is lower than we judge our well-being to be higher than it actually is as a result, then anti-natalism begins to loom in the background.

One may object that just because our judgements are flawed in such a way, and that well-being is lower than we think, it does not follow that the pluralist is (perhaps accidentally) committing to anti-natalism. To put it another way, just because our judgements are flawed and our well-being is lower, it does not follow that our well-being is low enough to the point where anti-natalism begins to look like a plausible theory. This leads to the difficult question of what level of well-being is low enough to the point where anti-natalism appears plausible, and whether or not a pluralism that admits of our judgements being significantly flawed is able to somehow calculate our well-being as still being high enough that human lives are worth beginning.

I cannot admit to know what the threshold of well-being for a life not worth beginning is. However, I feel confident in positing the existence of one. Clearly there are cases of lives not worth beginning such as children who are born with terminal diseases, crippling disabilities, or chronic illnesses. And lives that would be high (enough) in well-being are worth bringing into existence.²⁹

²⁸ A book length defence can be found in David Benatar's *Better Never To Have Been: The Harm Of Coming Into Existence*.

²⁹ Shouldn't I say that children who are healthy are worth bringing into existence? No. The pluralist will include more than just health as counting for well-being, and it is not clear that health is enough to put one over the 'well-being threshold' where one becomes a life worth beginning. To put it another way, our pluralist will still say that a healthy person will be mistaken about their level of well-being, so health is not enough to give one high well-being.

Let's stipulate for illustration that well-being level 0 is a life clearly not worth beginning, the threshold is well-being level 50, and 51 and above is a life worth beginning. The task that falls to the pluralist must then be how the weighing of well-being is conducted. Given that our pluralist places emphasis on true belief as a criterion for having well-being, a lack of it will decrease well-being. Because we are systematically flawed in our judgements of well-being, clearly we are not at level 100 of well-being. I think it is also safe for me to say we are not even at a level 90 of well-being. If so, perhaps we are somewhere between levels 51 and 89 on the scale of well-being, where a life is still worth beginning.

Why think that, on the pluralists' view, that we are somewhere on the part of the scale? One possibility is that although we are systematically mistaken, the weighing of true beliefs is not given as much emphasis. So, we still lead relatively good lives despite the fact that we are subject to an array of cognitive biases and distortions. This conflicts with the pluralists' emphasis on the importance of true beliefs. The problem with the deceived businessman's life is that he is mistaken about his life. That is the big mistake that is going on in his life. Downplaying the impact of cognitive biases on our judgements of well-being does not square well with the pluralist's diagnosis of the businessman case. Given that we are systematically mistaken much like the businessman, then the pluralist's diagnosis of the case, that the businessman leads a life that is not very good, must match what they think of the typical human life, cognitive biases, distortions and all. Given this, human life is not between the 51 and 89 on our well-being scale. And that leaves us between 0 and 50 on the scale, the area where life is not so great. For this reason, I think the pluralist best resists embracing the first horn of the dilemma.

The other option for our pluralist is to revise their theory in order to accommodate the judgement that the businessman's life is in fact good. The pluralist can change their theory to include an experience component, or reject the true-belief component. For the latter option, the pluralist can give a list of items the businessman meets which make his life good whether he is aware of them or not. The list may be marriage, children, and friendship, and the businessman meets these in the version of the case given above. So, despite his being mistaken about his family and friends liking him, he is still high in well-being because he checks the boxes on the list given. The generally applied version is that despite people being systematically mistaken about the quality of their lives, they are in fact (relatively) high in well-being because most people have friends, significant others, children, or whatever else is included on the pluralist's list of things needed for a good life. Of course, this solution leads to problems in the opposite direction of the businessman's, where someone might judge themselves to be low in well-being yet the pluralist deems them to be high in well-being. For example, we can imagine someone who has a spouse and children, yet completely resents the situation they are in. They regret being married and having kids, and perhaps regret the opportunities and experiences that they have been deprived thereof. The pluralist will say that their well-being is high, despite what our individual would say about his/herself. Whereas the intrinsic attitudinal hedonist can capture both the businessman case and regretful individual case, the pluralist delivers what I argue are backwards conclusions. If the businessman enjoys his life, his life is good for him. If our regretful individual resents his/her life, then their life is not high in well-being.

The other option is for the pluralist to include an experience component, in order to capture the same judgement as the hedonist (or other monist theories). Such a view might include a list of items needed for a good life, but also require that an individual enjoys those items in his/her life in

order for them to count as contributing to well-being.³⁰ In the case of the businessman, then, this pluralism draws the same conclusion as IAH by stating that the businessman checks the list of items needed, and that he enjoys them as well. In the case of the regretful individual, this pluralism draws the same conclusion as IAH as well, by stating that although the individual has the items on the list in his/her life, they are not contributing to well-being because the individual does not enjoy them. In this way, the pluralist is able to avoid the first horn, and match the hedonist in their conclusions. However, the motivation for holding onto a pluralist theory of this kind begins to wane. Given the emphasis on the need for the relevant attitude to be present for the experience requirement to be satisfied, we can ask whether the items on the list are actually doing any work contributing to well-being, or if it's the attitude itself that is only really needed for well-being. If the attitude is doing all the leg work, then the list becomes explanatorily superfluous, and the simpler theory that only takes the attitude into considerations of well-being is the preferable theory. For this reason, the pluralist should avoid the second horn of the dilemma.

The second type of case is that of the “failure to capture values”. In this, the individual states that they are better off having some property in their life such as knowledge, friendship, play, or achievement. The idea is that cases of this type demonstrate that hedonism fails to capture much of what in fact does make our lives go well, or fails to do justice to our judgements about what makes our lives go well. An example of an objection is an example of a friendless life, such as Robinson Crusoe had he never met Friday. Because it is commonly thought that life with friendship is higher in well-being than one without, we think that Robinson Crusoe's (fictional) life is higher in well-being with Friday than it is without. However, Hedonism allows the possibility of a friendless

³⁰ I use the attitude ‘enjoys’ for the experience requirement, but other relevant attitudes can be considered as well.

life being higher in well-being than one full of friendship, and that seems counterintuitive. Because hedonism cannot capture these judgements of what makes our lives go better, hedonism is less plausible than pluralist theories.³¹

The case I will consider for this grouping is “The College Student.” In this case, the semester is nearing spring break, and the college student has two options. She can either spend the week on vacation with her friends partying, or she can spend the week reading papers and books on metaethics. The student knows that she would have a good time if she went partying with her friends, but instead decides to stay in her apartment and study. When her friends come back and describe to her everything she missed out on, she says that while she knows she would have had a lot of fun with them, she thinks the time she spent studying is more valuable.

Ross has a straightforward explanation of this case. Her choice to study metaethics improved her well-being because it produced knowledge, which is valuable in and of itself. IAH can offer an explanation as well. The student’s choice was a valuable choice because the student took pleasure in increasing her knowledge. That is, her well-being increased because she took pleasure in the knowledge she gained. The case can be complicated by stipulating that the student suffered migraines and neck aches from staring at books for the duration of the week. This does not cause a problem for IAH. While the student suffers sensory pain, and may have attitudinal pain due to suffering the migraines and neck aches, it is still available to the hedonist to state that the student is taking pleasure in the knowledge she gained.

³¹ For examples of these cases, see pages 13, 28, 29 of James Griffin’s *Well-Being* (1986), chapter six, starting on page 123 of Elizabeth Anderson’s *Value in Ethics and Economics* (1993), pages 95 - 97 of John Finnis’ *Natural Law & Natural Rights*, 2nd Edition (2011), and pages 92 - 98 of Wayne Sumner’s *Welfare, Happiness & Ethics* (1996).

The second case is difficult neither for Ross nor IAH. Whereas Ross explains the value of the student's choice in terms of the intrinsic value of knowledge, the hedonist argues that the student takes attitudinal pleasure that she gained such knowledge.

The third type of case is that of "worthless pleasure" cases. This type of case contains scenarios where an agent clearly takes pleasure in what they are engaged in, but the action or state of affairs in which they take pleasure is crude, repulsive, or pathological. A popular example of this kind of case is that of Caligula, a Roman emperor who tortured his subjects for fun. It is counterintuitive to think that a life full of pleasure is good if the pleasure comes from torturing and maiming sentient beings. However, hedonism is committed to the claim that this is a life full of well-being, and this costs hedonism plausibility.³²

The case that represents these types of is a scenario, which I borrow from Feldman, where we imagine a person named Porky, who engages in bestiality with the pigs in his pigsty.³³ As Feldman describes the situation, "he takes quite a lot of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure in various facts—that he is feeling precisely *this* sensation in his private parts, that he is having sex with this muddy sow, that he is wallowing in the mud, etc."³⁴ Feldman further stipulates that Porky is suffering no attitudinal pains.

The common intuition is that the pleasures Porky receives are supposed to be worthless, or that the pleasures he is taking are of no value. That is, his life is not a good life because the pleasures he experiences are repugnant.³⁵ Ross is able to back these intuitions up quite easily. He can point to

³² Examples of these cases can be found in pages 138, 139 of David Ross' *The Right And The Good* (1932), pages 10, 11 of Joel J. Kupperman's *Value... And What Follows* (1999), and pages 6, 7 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. (1095b-15 - 1096a-10)

³³ Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure And The Good Life*. 118.

³⁴ Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure And The Good Life*. 118.

³⁵ Some pluralists about well-being do include leading a morally good life as part of what makes a life good, such as Parfit (1984), Ross (1930), and Finnis (2011). However, many pluralists do not consider living morally well as part of

the intrinsic value of the allocation pleasures to the virtuous, and argue that Porky is not living a good life because the pleasures he gets are not deserved because his actions are not virtuous. Ross can explain that Porky's actions are not coming from any desire to do one's duty, give pleasure or spare pain, nor to bring anything good into existence, and hence Porky is not leading a good life.

I readily assert that Porky's life is in fact good for him. As Feldman describes it, "A hard-core hedonist might say that if Porky is happy with this life, and is taking pleasure in his activities, and is in no way harmed by his disgraceful behavior, then his life is good *for him*."³⁶ To be clear, the activity Porky engages in is *morally* reprehensible, and I find his life to be disgusting. Finding Porky's life to be morally repugnant is the correct response. We may not choose to live such a life as well, but there are lives that are not repugnant that we would not choose to live. As such, we have to remain vigilant in making sure that other types of judgements, such as those of morality or personal preference, do not sneak into our theorising about well being. We must focus on whether Porky's life has well being. This is the question as to whether or not Porky's life is valuable *for him*.

Even if the hedonist reading of Porky's situation can be made more plausible, an objector can tighten the screws by making the situation more reprehensible. We can imagine a man who takes pleasure in throwing boxes of puppies off a bridge into the path of an oncoming train. Much like Porky, this individual takes pleasure in each of the aspects of his situation, and we can stipulate that he is not harmed in any way by this activity, and no one else is (besides the puppies). The situation is only superficially different from Porky, but is likely to pull much harder on intuitions. Once again, such a life is morally repugnant. However, we must put moral intuitions and responses off to the

their criterion for well-being, and the separation between morality and well-being is widely accepted. Nonetheless, I do use Ross in my paper, who does accept morality as a condition for well-being. I state why it should be separate in what follows.

³⁶ Feldman, Fred. *Pleasure And The Good Life*. 118.

side and ask if the life this individual is living is good for his or herself, and conclude that this individual's life contains well-being.

There are three reasons we do not want to bring moral considerations into determining when someone has well-being. The first is that we should like to keep our theory of well-being compatible with a variety of moral theories. If a theory of well-being presupposes a moral theory then that theory of well-being lives and dies with that moral theory. If that theory of well-being is independently plausible, then we should not want its fortunes to hang on the plausibility of a theory in a separate domain. The second reason we should refrain from bringing moral considerations into theorising about well-being is that it may be the moral theory that is determining the contents of a theory of well-being. Someone who is overly Victorian or prudish may judge lifestyles that appear to be high in well-being as low in well-being. For example, a philosopher may judge someone in a happy same-sex relationship as low in well-being because their moral theory forbids the permissibility of that lifestyle. Finally, it is possible for virtuous people to live lives that arguably are low in well-being. Ascetics, who deny themselves pleasures, are not intuitively people who are high in well-being. Similarly, many people who lead moral lives, such as activists, are often persecuted, tortured, and harmed in other ways for acting morally. It is counterintuitive to claim that these individuals are living lives high in well-being because they are acting morally well. To summarise: IAH has the conceptual resources to handle a wide swathe of cases. In addition to that, pluralism (at least Ross' theory), while able to capture intuitive ideas about well-being, runs into trouble when trying to accommodate those intuitions at every turn. IAH is in good standing.

4. Objection

If my argument is successful, the pluralist's appeal to greater explanatory power is much less persuasive than it is, and because IAH is simpler theory, we should prefer the sophisticated monist theory (or other equally sophisticated monist theories), to pluralist theories. However, the question arises as to how to rule out bizarre monist theories that can provide explanations, but seem intuitively wrong.³⁷

The objection proceeds as follows. Assuming the argument is successful, I have shown that IAH, and other sophisticated monisms such as desire-satisfaction theory are viable as the correct account of well-being due to their simplicity, and their ability to almost match pluralism on explanatory power (although not quite as much). The problem is that the argument allows too many monist theories to be considered viable. Imagine a theory called *Thaumatism*, which states that the only thing that counts towards well-being is the attitude of being surprised.³⁸ Such a theory would state that an individual's well-being is higher the more surprise is present in their life, and the less the worse. The consequence being that individuals who frequent haunted houses, roller coasters, read and watch murder mysteries, and victims of amnesia are higher in well-being, whereas someone who is never surprised by anything is very low in well-being.

Furthermore, the theory is structurally similar to monist theories. It is easy to calculate someone's well-being; someone can be surprised to different degrees and at different times, and we can at least measure those instances in a similar fashion to how a hedonist measures pleasure.

Thaumatism is also able to provide explanations for the cases given above. For example, in the case of Porky, his life is not full of well-being because he is not surprised by anything (At least, I'm

³⁷ I owe this objection to Eden Lin, who brought this up in private conversation.

³⁸ I take this from a passing objection to utilitarianism made by Richard Joyce in page seven of *Essays In Moral Skepticism*.

assuming there's very little that is surprising to Porky in the pig pen). The woman at the slaughterhouse is higher in well-being, given her surprise at the condition and treatment of the animals there.

To be clear, *Thaumatism* is a ridiculous and false theory, but the question is whether I am able to rule it out using my own arguments and the constraints that follow from those arguments. A straightforward rejection of *Thaumatism* from other monists is that it seems that surprise just has nothing to do with well-being, whereas the monist's item of choice has everything to do with well-being. However, this move is closed off to me because of my rejection of the appeal to intuitions made by the pluralist. Just as the pluralist appeals to certain items as just seeming to be required for a good life, and I reject them by appeal to simplicity, debunking, and methodology that does not appeal intuitions, the *Thaumatist* can cling to my arguments, and if not prove to *Thaumatism* to be a superior theory, it appears to remain viable. The challenge then is to find a way to reject *Thaumatism* as a viable theory. I believe this is possible, and is instructive for how to conduct the debate between less silly monist theories when determining viability.

There are three ways for sophisticated monists to deny the viability of this theory. The first is the appeal to the phenomenology of the item relevant for well-being. The second is to argue that *Thaumatism* does not match the explanatory power of the sophisticated monisms. The third option is to make a nuanced appeal to intuitions. I shall start with the first strategy.

If the *Thaumatist* claims that surprise is what is used to determine well-being, then they owe us an explanation why that is the attitude that contributes to well-being. They owe us an explanation as to why surprise, and not some other attitude that beings like us experience. The problem is that phenomenologically, surprise is not by itself something that we want to pursue. Surprise is

sometimes incredibly unpleasant, and a life that experiences constant surprise, from the inside, must be one of constant discomfort. Unlike pleasure, there is not a component of surprise that makes us wish to pursue it, nor to continue the experience. Given this, the motivation for why someone would choose *Thaumatism* as their theory of choice seems to be out of an attempt to parody other monist theories, or akin to throwing a dart at a collection of attitudes on a dartboard. Whereas monist theories such as hedonism and desire-satisfaction have motivations behind their theories, *Thaumatism* lacks the kind of motivations one would find in a philosophy classroom. To put it another way, pleasure and the satisfaction of desires are things we pursue, but surprise is not actively something we seek out. Given this, it would be deeply odd if surprise turned out to be the special sauce needed for well-being in a way it would not be for hedonism or desire-satisfaction.

Thaumatism is also a terrible theory in regards to explanatory power. The first problem is that we can ask what it is about surprise that makes it relevant to well-being. If it does, at all, the *Thaumatis*t can say that we pursue it because we enjoy it or want it. But if that is the case, both hedonism and desire-satisfaction theories can capture the theory. If we enjoy a surprise, what makes surprise good for well-being is that it contributes to pleasure, whereas if we want to be surprised, what makes it good is that we have the desire to be surprised satisfied. The hedonist and the desire-satisfaction theorist can give a deeper explanation of what surprise contributes to well-being (assuming there is any), rather than having to say that the well-being buck stops at surprise. These theories also avoid problematic consequences of *Thaumatism* where someone receives a deeply unsettling, unwanted surprise. *Thaumatism* claims, controversially, that this someone is higher in well-being for experiencing the surprise, but both hedonists and desire-satisfaction theorists can avoid this by saying the surprise was unpleasant and unwanted, respectively. What's more,

Thaumatism is likely to get cases that both pluralists and sophisticated monists agree to be high in well-being wrong. Imagine the case of someone achieving a gold medal in some sport, and this someone taking pleasure in the achievement, and having the desire to win the medal satisfied.

Although all parties will agree this is a clear case of someone high in well-being, the *Thaumatist* will insist that this is not a case of someone high in well-being because this individual is not surprised (unless they are surprised they won, but the case can be stipulated to rule this out). So, whereas it is cases on the margins and controversial cases that monists and pluralists disagree on, the *Thaumatist* will invariably take a left turn where both monists and pluralists take a right turn. Because of this, the *Thaumatist* does not even appear to be playing the same game as the monist and pluralist, but rather running about sticking the judgement of 'high in well-being' on a particular property chosen for reasons separate from the concerns of those involved in the well-being debate.

Finally, the choosing of surprise just seems bizarre. Although this involves intuition talk, which I am supposed to avoid, I think it is appropriate to use within a debate among monists. What makes the appeal to intuitions in the debate between the pluralist and the monist odious is that there is no way to break the standoff between the two camps by simply appealing to intuitions. There is not enough common ground to reach a decisive victory for either camp, hence the need for considerations involving methodology. But within the monist camp itself the appeal to intuitions is permissible because of greater common ground. All monists agree that simplicity is important, all agree that there is only one thing that determines well-being, and accept principles such as the experience requirement and are willing to grant that cases that seem controversial to the pluralist are in fact clear cases of well-being. In other words, there are a set of shared assumptions and motivations among monists. Given this, there will be a set of shared intuitions, and appeal to

intuitions that are not shared can be supported by appeal to the shared ones. The *Thaumatis*, presumably, shares these assumptions and motivations, and will be subject to the same intuitions that the desire-satisfaction theorist and hedonist hold. Given this, it is appropriate to appeal to intuitions in a debate between monists, and to argue that *Thaumatism* just seems to get the well-being facts completely wrong.

I also want to note that bizarre versions of theories do not only afflict the monist. Pluralists too have the task of explaining why silly versions of pluralism are not viable pluralist theories of well-being. For example, an objective list theory that has ‘Is carrying two pairs of scissors’, ‘Near grass that is one and a half inches tall’, and ‘Is born under the Pisces sign’ is a pluralist theory of well-being, and is clearly false, but the task of explaining why it’s false, as a pluralist theory, falls to those in the pluralist camp.

What are the lessons for a debate between viable, competing monist theories? I think there are at least two we can glean. In the debate between monists considerations of shared intuitions and appeals to methodological considerations will determine which theory is the victor. I do not claim to be saying something new, but rather making a bit more clear how to conduct the debate between the hedonist and the desire-satisfaction theorist. Questions of explanatory depth, whether one theory can capture the other, and whether the motivations for a monist theory are all met are criteria on which to conduct the debate. For example, one argument in the hedonist’s favour is that it can give a deeper explanation of why we think the satisfaction of desires is relevant to well-being; usually, when we get what we want we take pleasure in it. In such a case, our well-being is increased. Otherwise, when we get what we want and are disappointed, the hedonist can explain that we are lower in well-being, while the desire-satisfaction theorist appears committed to the conclusion that

we are higher in well-being, even when we are disappointed at the satisfaction of our desires.³⁹ In many ways, the debate conducted will be similar to the one between monists and pluralists, but the criterion for success within the monist camp is better defined than for the debate between pluralists and monists.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion I have now shown is that IAH is able to handle cases typically thought problematic for hedonism. Consequently, IAH is a sophisticated monist theory that, while being simple, is also explanatorily powerful. Furthermore, I have given reason to think that IAH comes close to a rival plausible pluralist theory in terms of explanatory power. First I argued that the pluralist's appeal to explanatory power is not as potent as they think, via appeal to statistical inference. This is because the complexity of a theory is not a reason to think it closer to the truth. Second, I've shown, alongside IAH being able to handle problem cases, that the pluralist responses have issues as well. For example, the intuitions driving the pluralist's judgement about the businessman case are subject to debunking, and consequently the pluralist faces a dilemma when explaining the case. Other intuitions that are operative in pluralist thinking run into trouble as well; moral commitments may muddy judgements of well-being, and lead one to condemn a morally disapproved life that is full of well-being. Finally, I considered an objection that allows aberrant versions of monism to be counted as viable given my methodological argument. I responded by appealing to considerations of phenomenology and the motivation behind theories, the methodology governing the debate between monists, and arguing that I can appeal to intuitions in debates between monists. Taking the preceding arguments into account, given that IAH is

³⁹ Different desire-satisfaction theories have ways around these problems, but for want of space I omit the various strategies. But the different theories themselves run into issues despite solving problems such as the one detailed.

explanatory on par with pluralism, and is the simpler theory, we ought to choose in favour of monism.^{40 41}

⁴⁰ David Sobel, in private conversation, pointed out that my argument works for any monist theory that is at least as sophisticated as IAH. I agree with him. The framework for the argument is only different for other monist theories, such as desire satisfaction theories, in that the cases thought traditionally problematic for them will be different, and how they will answer those cases will be different from IAH. If the desire satisfaction theorist is able to taxonomise the problematic cases and give strategies for answering them, then my argument should work as well for desire satisfactionism.

⁴¹ One worry someone might have after reading this paper is that IAH is in fact more complicated than competing pluralist theories, not due to the commitments to primitives in the theories themselves, but due to the amount of auxiliary hypotheses needed to get my argument off the ground and running. I acknowledge that there are a substantial amount of auxiliary hypotheses at play in my paper, but I don't think I've committed to an amount that makes my argument fail, nor do I think I've committed to any more than that to which the pluralist commits. Here is why. The first is that many of my auxiliary hypotheses are supposed to be common ground between the pluralist and the monist, such as the appeal to psychological data and the findings of statistical inference. While they are up for different interpretations, they are unlikely to be up for dispute, and all parties can agree to them. In this way, both the pluralist and I are committing to the same amount of hypothesis. Yet, hypotheses such as my insistence on the separation between well-being and morality appear to be a non-common ground hypothesis to which I commit but the pluralist does not. Doesn't the amount of those kinds of hypotheses throw me into the complexity camp? I still think not. The reason I make the 'don't let morality inform our theory of well-being' claim is that many pluralists, but not all, do hold that morality in some way or another informs or should inform our theory of well-being. These pluralists are holding onto the hypothesis that morality should inform our theory of well-being to a substantial degree. The pluralists are then committing to the mirror-image of a hypothesis I hold, or I am denying that a hypothesis that the pluralist holds should be taken for granted. If the former, then the pluralist and I will be committing to a similar number of hypotheses, so the claim of my theory having greater complexity appears less concerning. If the latter, then my theory is still simpler, given that I'm not committing to any hypotheses, but rather denying that one of the pluralist's auxiliary hypotheses is something to which I must be committed. A denial of a hypothesis is arguably not itself an hypothesis. If we're inclined to think the opposite, then it would be possible to make any competing theory arbitrarily complex by listing all of the assumptions and denials to which it is committed, but this seems to be a move that makes any theory we don't like look too complex, without any principled reasons for counting the denials as such.

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