

Review of *Pleasure and the Good Life*, Fred Feldman, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp. 221.

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Fred Feldman's *Pleasure and the Good Life* does much to show how hedonism about the value of a life is not as vulnerable to stock objections as is often supposed. Much of the work in this defense is done by distinctions Feldman draws between different forms of hedonism. Feldman distinguishes sensory hedonism from attitudinal hedonism and argues that the latter is more plausible than the former. Attitudinal hedonism is built around the idea of 'taking pleasure in' something, whereas sensory hedonism is built around the pre-theoretical idea that pleasures (and pains) are just certain sensations. Feldman then argues that certain forms of attitudinal hedonism (unlike sensory hedonism) are actually very plausible. Feldman does not so much argue directly for attitudinal hedonism as try to show that it is immune from a seemingly impressive set of influential objections. One unusual feature of Feldman's book is that the chapters are interspersed with numerous appendices. Feldman suggests that readers not interested in some of the more tangential issues can skip these and follow the chapters without any difficulty. While this is true, I would advise readers not to skip Appendix B which clarifies one of Feldman's key distinction between attitudinal and sensory pleasure.

Feldman almost named his book 'Forms and Limits of Hedonism' thereby alluding to David Lyons's book on utilitarianism and this would indeed have been an apt title (see p. 20). Another apt title might have been 'The Hedonistic Vacuum Cleaner'. Here the allusion would be not to another book like Lyons's but to a common characterization of a dialectical move available to modern consequentialists. Modern consequentialists hold only that the right action is the one with the best consequences but can reject hedonism in the theory of value and indeed can be very ecumenical in their value theory. This seems to provide consequentialists with a recipe for responding to a wide range of objections which charge that consequentialism is blind to certain morally relevant considerations. The recipe is simply to take those putatively relevant considerations and incorporate them into the consequentialist value theory. By 'sucking' the putatively morally relevant features into their value theory, the consequentialist avoids the objection those features have been left out. Hence the metaphor of the 'consequentialist vacuum cleaner' (originally coined by David McNaughton and Piers Rawling).

One of the many virtues of Fred Feldman's book is that it demonstrates that a similar 'vacuum cleaner' move is available to hedonists. This is surprising since hedonism is precisely what one might have thought would keep more traditional hedonist forms of consequentialism from deploying the consequentialist vacuum cleaner. For the ecumenical strategy of simply incorporating the critics' cherished features into the consequentialist's value theory seems to be ruled out by hedonism's more restrictive axiology. Feldman's book illustrates that this is an unduly impoverished conception of hedonism for at least two reasons.

First, this assessment of hedonism's dialectical resources ignores the possibility that hedonism might be best understood as a thesis about what makes a life valuable and not a theory about value more generally. Indeed, this is the understanding of hedonism to which most of Feldman's book is devoted (he briefly explores a broader form of hedonism in chapter nine). Even if pleasure and pain are the ultimate determinants of the value of a life it does not follow that they provide an axiological bedrock for everything. Feldman nicely illustrates this point in his reply to G.E. Moore's argument that a world filled with beauty but no sentient creatures to appreciate it is better than an ugly world with no sentient creatures. Feldman points out that if hedonism is understood as a theory about the value of a life then it remains open to the hedonist to insist that beauty contributes directly to the value of a world.

This first point may not impress those skeptical about the idea of a 'hedonistic vacuum cleaner' simply because it seems that only the non-hedonistic portion of the value theory can function like a vacuum cleaner. Moreover, many hedonists have defended hedonism about the value of whole worlds and not just about the value of a life. This is fair enough, but Feldman's reply to Moore still makes an important point. After all, hedonism about the value of a life is hardly a trivial or uncontroversial doctrine.

In any event, the second way in which hedonism can deploy a 'vacuum-cleaner' sort of move is much more interesting. Here the idea is that something very much akin to the 'consequentialist vacuum cleaner' can be deployed even within the hedonistic portion of a value theory. Whereas the consequentialist vacuum cleaner takes the critic's cherished value and simply adds it to the value theory as another basic form of intrinsic value, the hedonist vacuum cleaner takes the critic's cherished value and construes it as what we might call an 'intensifier' or 'diminisher' of the value (or disvalue) of a suitably associated pleasure or pain. The idea is that an intensifier increases the value of a given quantum of pleasure while a diminisher reduces its value (and *mutatis mutandis* for pain). The idea appears a number of times in Feldman's book. For example, in responding to the objection that hedonism is blind to the relevance of moral desert, Feldman argues that the hedonist can simply hold that the value of a given quantum of pleasure is a function not only of the intensity and duration of the pleasure but also of the subject's desert (p. 195). The idea appears in an even more sophisticated form when Feldman argues that G.E. Moore's supposedly non-hedonistic theory is extensionally equivalent to a form of hedonism. There the idea is that the value of a given quantum of pleasure or pain can be intensified or diminished (or even reversed) by the nature of the object in which the subject is taking pleasure (or pain). So while taking pleasure in a beautiful painting may have great value, taking pleasure in someone else's pain is actually of disvalue.

I shall not here try to assess the extent to which what I am calling Feldman's hedonist vacuum cleaner can accommodate the reservations of critics. Instead, I close by briefly discussing one critical question about another aspect of his project. Feldman's project is located squarely in first-order axiology and he aims to provide an account which 'can be understood (and perhaps interpreted) in accord with any plausible metaethical view' (p. 14). However, it is not entirely clear that he really avoids controversial meta-ethical assumptions. Here I specifically have in mind the *prima facie* plausible meta-ethical

doctrine T.M. Scanlon calls the 'buck-passing account' of value (see T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, Harvard, Cambridge MA, 1998, p. 11 and pp. 95-100). On Scanlon's view, 'to call something valuable is to say that it has properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it' (Scanlon, p. 96). At a couple of points in the course of his argument Feldman seems implicitly to reject Scanlon's buck-passing view. Moreover, Feldman also implicitly rejects views which do not incorporate the 'buck-passing' element of Scanlon's view but do maintain that there is a conceptual entailment from value to reasons, and other philosophers have held plausible versions of such views. First, in Feldman's critique of O'Keefe's discussion of hedonism and the Cyrenaics he claims that O'Keefe is wrong to think that hedonism is a view about how we should behave on the grounds that 'Hedonism (as I understand it) says nothing about what we should do, or what we should seek'. (p. 31) However, if Scanlon's buck-passing view is correct then O'Keefe need not be guilty of any sort of confusing axiology with normative ethics. For if claims about value really are claims about reasons for action then value claims will at least sometimes entail what sorts of actions we should perform. What sorts of action we should perform will be a function of the strength of the reasons for action present. At least in the limiting case in which only hedonistic reasons for action are present, a hedonistic value theory will (given a buck-passing view) entail what should be done. Hence (given the buck-passing view) hedonism does say something about what we should do after all.

The buck-passing issue also implicitly arises in Feldman's discussion of what he calls 'Brentano's cigar argument'. In that context, Feldman puts one reconstruction of Brentano's argument to one side simply because one of its premises assumes that hedonism 'does not imply that we have any obligation to determine the value of anything' (p. 47). However, if obligations are a function of moral reasons then given a buck passing view of value hedonism might well entail that we sometimes have such obligations (again, at least when countervailing reasons are absent). Of course, it is open to Feldman to reject the buck-passing view of value but then he will not have succeeded in providing an account which 'can be understood (and perhaps interpreted) in accord with any plausible metaethical view' (p. 14)

Feldman's book practices what it preaches; it is a pleasure to read. It is also thought-provoking and should make it clear that hedonism has far more resources than its critics have often supposed. Feldman's discussion is also sensitive to the historical roots of hedonism. Anyone interested in these issues should read Feldman's book.