

## THE CASE FOR STANCE-DEPENDENT REASONS

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LILA LOVES LAGAVULIN. It is her favorite whisky. Aatif likes watching college basketball but has little time for baseball. Taniquill prefers the feel of flannel pajamas to cotton. Pei Lin enjoys being in rooms that are painted eggshell blue more than those painted canary yellow. Alejandro is more in the mood to listen to jazz than classical music. Tyus totally goes for spicy food. As a result, each has a reason to go in for what they favor over what they disprefer.<sup>1</sup> In such matters of mere taste one has a reason to choose what one favors or prefers.<sup>2</sup> In such matters, one's "stance" or favoring can play a role in grounding reasons, at least if we suppose that the attitude is based on an accurate descriptive understanding of what one's options are really like.<sup>3</sup> These reasons need not be decisive, obviously, but they carry some *pro tanto* weight, at least in many contexts. I will call this the "Modest Claim."<sup>4</sup> The astute reader will spot that my choosing that label for the view reveals that I did not expect this view to be highly contentious.

- 1 I have claimed before that one's favorings concerning matters of mere taste play a role in grounding value. See Sobel, "On the Subjectivity of Welfare" and "Pain for Objectivists."
- 2 I might instead have made this claim in terms of *pro tanto* well-being benefits. I intend the "Modest Claim" (introduced below) to include claims both about reasons and about well-being benefits in matters of mere taste. But I will mostly focus on the version of the claim concerning reasons. (Steve Wall and I are working on developing related thoughts in the context of theories of well-being. See our "A Robust Hybrid Theory of Well-Being.") To keep the Modest Claim from immodest entanglements I will avoid as many other commitments as I can while prosecuting my case for it. In particular I do not make any claims about the interrelation or explanatory priority between facts about an agent's reasons and her well-being.
- 3 This phrase is intended to distinguish cases in which such favorings are a part of the ground of one's reasons from the claim that such favorings merely have causal upshot that make them, when combined with stance-independent norms, relevant to what we have reason to do. I do not offer much further about the sort of grounding at play here. I think of it as an asymmetrical relationship that offers a metaphysical, and not merely epistemic, explanation. The debate in Plato's *Euthyphro* is about grounding in the sense that I intend.
- 4 We need to distinguish between objective and subjective reasons. The latter are relative to a limited set of information or evidence whereas the former are not. Our topic will be objective reasons only (and well-being).

But it is. A wide range of influential philosophers, including T. M. Scanlon, Michael Smith, Ralph Wedgwood, Richard Arneson, Roger Crisp, and Richard Kraut, maintain that an individual's favorings or stance never play a normative role in grounding reasons.<sup>5</sup> Too often it is a bit obscure why people deny the Modest Claim. Indeed, there has been real confusion about the best formulation of the claim. In this paper I will try to clarify the central claim and articulate the considerations that seem to motivate people to resist it. I will argue that these considerations are unpersuasive and that we should accept the Modest Claim.

If one were ever going to grant normative authority to contingent attitudes it would surely be in the context of matters of mere taste.<sup>6</sup> Thus the most plausible and coherent views that deny the Modest Claim embrace what I will call broad normative stance-independence. Shafer-Landau, in the context of characterizing a type of moral realism, explicated this notion of stance-independence. Proponents of normative stance-independence maintain that truths in the relevant normative domain, in our case reasons for action, obtain "independently of any preferred perspective" and are "not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective."<sup>7</sup>

As the above examples made clear, a great variety of attitudes are covered by the relevant notion of an agent's "stance," including, among others, loving, liking, wanting, desiring, craving, valuing, and preferring. Further, there are different levels of stance, such as when one wants to love Radiohead more than  $\kappa$ c and the Sunshine Band. It is an advantage for the friend of the Modest Claim to have so many options. I will not champion here the normative relevance of a particular stance. I do think the above examples offered of favoring attitudes are all tempting stances for the defender of the Modest Claim to point to. It may be

- 5 Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* and "Replies"; Smith, *The Moral Problem*; Wedgwood, "Intrinsic Values and Reasons for Action"; Arneson, "BOL: Defending the Bare Objective List Theory of Well-Being"; Crisp, "Hedonism Reconsidered"; Kraut, *What Is Good and Why*. See also Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, ch. 6; Dancy, *Practical Reality*, ch. 1. Raz comes across to me as very conflicted on this issue; see *Engaging Reasons*, especially ch. 3. I do not mean to suggest that all such attributions are trivial to demonstrate. This paper will not focus on making good on these attributions. Scanlon, Smith, and Parfit's relevant views, however, will be discussed, below. Overall, I have been quite surprised how commonly people, including leaders in the field, self-ascribe this view. Admittedly, however, there is some confusion about exactly what the view comes to and that fact may be playing a role in swelling the ranks of those who think of themselves as belonging in this category.
- 6 Understanding the precise boundaries of what counts as a matter of mere taste would surely be a difficult matter. All I need to show here is that a range of cases surely fit in this category. I do discuss below strategies available to the friend of the Modest Claim for how to find cases that are especially difficult to deny belong in the category of matters of mere taste.
- 7 Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 15.

that more than one such favoring attitude grounds or partially grounds reasons.<sup>8</sup> However, the friend of the Modest Claim need only assert that at least one such stance grounds reasons, and they need not claim that it does so in all contexts. I will use “favoring attitude” or “stance” as the generic and “preference” or “desire” as the favored example of a particular stance. I will use “stance-independence” to refer to full stance-independence and “stance-dependence” to refer to at least partial stance-dependence.

Three ambiguities in understanding the most useful and important usage of stance-independence are worth considering before we proceed. First, consider a view that says that there are completely objective, stance-independent criteria for what is beautiful and that, while it is valuable to interact with the beautiful, appreciating the beautiful is even more valuable. Such a view might say that the relevant sort of appreciation is conative—being moved by beauty or loving it, for example. Such a view claims that one’s normatively favored conative reactions are the key to this extra value. Should this be thought of as a fully stance-independent view or not?

In this case, the appreciation is thought to be warranted by stance-independent norms and only warranted reactions are thought to be of value.<sup>9</sup> Such a view will say that conative reactions ground reasons, but only if those conative reactions are themselves warranted by the object of the attitude. The most important divide is between views that maintain that conative attitudes can play a role in grounding value even if the object of the attitude does not, by itself, justify or merit the attitude, and views that deny this. The latter sort of view still seems to me to side with Socrates in the *Euthyphro* question of where value originates. The attitudes are, on such a view, still normatively slaves of stance-independent values. Only by properly responding to what is stance-independently valuable can they generate value.

The friend of the Modest Claim, as I will understand it, maintains that, even in contexts in which none of the options commands or warrants the relevant favoring attitude, nonetheless where the attitude happens to go still plays a role in grounding reasons. So we will understand the relevant sort of stance-dependent theorist as claiming that, at least in some cases, one’s stance plays a grounding role even when that stance is not itself normatively required or favored by the

8 Lin, “The Subjective List Theory of Well-Being.”

9 For a view that has some similarities with the position outlined here, see Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*. Hurka claims that loving the (stance-independently grounded) good is itself good. For a version of this thought made in the context of well-being, see Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, index I; Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*; Feldman, “The Good Life”; Kagan, “Well-Being as Enjoying the Good.”

stance-independent value of the object. Our question is whether the stances one has no stance-independent reason to have can ground normativity.<sup>10</sup>

The second ambiguity concerning stance-independence is what a stance is in the relevant sense. Dale Dorsey has shown how one can focus on contingent cognitive attitudes such as beliefs about what has the relevant sort of value within a recognizably subjectivist framework. Ruth Chang has suggested a voluntarist view according to which stipulating that one has a reason can, in some contexts, create a reason.<sup>11</sup> What is crucial to both views, I take it, is the thought that even if one's cognitive attitude or stipulation hits on something that is not stance-independently favored, it still has direct normative upshot. Both of these views still grant authority to an agent's contingent stance, even if not her conative stance.<sup>12</sup> As I understand the Modest Claim, it maintains that some such "favoring stance" can create reasons in such contexts and need not insist that the relevant favoring attitude is a conative state. However, I think there are strong reasons to incline toward a conative version of the view and I will assume such a version here for the sake of simplicity.

The third ambiguity concerns the level at which one's attitudes must endorse an option to count as authoritative. Some argue against the Modest Claim in this way. They maintain that, while one must favor a sensation for it to give one a reason in matters of mere taste, still, they maintain, one need not have a higher-order favoring attitude toward that pleasure in order for it to be reason-giving. Thus, they conclude, the reason here is stance-independent.

I think this argument mistaken. To see why, consider the full-on subjectivist who thinks that a particular favoring attitude grounds all of an agent's reasons. Now this alleged fact, that those attitudes ground reasons, is, according to the subjectivist, not itself hostage to anyone's further favoring attitudes. Subjectivists maintain that favoring attitudes at some level or other ground one's reasons. They need not maintain, and have not tended to maintain, that for the attitudes at level  $N$  to ground reasons, there must be a further favoring attitude at level  $N+1$  or higher toward the  $N$ -level attitude. If maintaining that one's favoring attitudes at a specific level ground reasons that are not themselves in need of

10 This claim is expanded and further defended in Wall and Sobel, "A Robust Hybrid Theory of Well-Being." On this understanding, the objectivist can help herself to warranted attitudes grounding reasons. How this would shake up the objectivist/subjectivist debate is explored in our paper.

11 Dorsey, "Subjectivism Without Desire"; Chang, "Voluntarist Reasons and the Sources of Normativity" and "Grounding Practical Normativity: Going Hybrid."

12 It is especially crucial in this context to recall that we are here interested in the claim that such cognitive attitudes generate objective reasons (or well-being), not subjective or evidence-relative reasons.

ratification from some further favoring attitude toward it was enough to make one a fully stance-independent theorist, then most full-on subjectivists do not accept any stance-dependence. If most subjectivists do not count as embracing stance-dependence on a construal of what makes a view stance-dependent, then so much the worse for the usefulness of that construal. Stance-dependence in that sense has rarely been endorsed, even by subjectivists.

Some influential stance-dependent views look to higher-order attitudes, such as what one's idealized self wants one's ordinary self to want. But a view that claimed normative authority for all (informed) attitudes at all levels, regardless of higher-order ratification, would clearly remain stance-dependent. Further, the higher-order stances that have been purported to have normative upshot were not claimed to be made reason-giving or well-being grounding only if there was some higher-order favoring attitude toward the lower-order stance.<sup>13</sup>

To see in action what I regard here as the mistake I am warning against, consider an argument from Guy Fletcher to the effect that even hedonistic views that take pleasure to be a sensation one intrinsically wants for its intrinsic phenomenological properties, and maintain that pleasure necessarily benefits one, do not count as relevantly attitude-dependent. He argues that "on the hedonistic theory, pleasure is good for you even if you have no pro-attitude toward it."<sup>14</sup> And that is true. If you bundle the pro-attitude into a state, as Fletcher does with pleasure, the hedonist does not claim you need an additional desire toward the bundled state for pleasure to benefit. But you might just as well bundle together the favoring attitude and the object of that attitude, call that a desire satisfaction, and say that views that claim that desire satisfaction benefits whether one has an additional desire for desire satisfaction or not are not subjectivist.<sup>15</sup> Such maneuvers will implausibly result in having to say that traditional fully subjectivist views are not stance-dependent in the relevant sense at all.

Subjectivists maintain that one's conative attitudes, perhaps after procedurally idealized deliberation, ground all of one's reasons. So the contrast between subjectivism and stance-independence is very stark. Fully stance-dependent views, such as subjectivism, are challenged by their apparent inability to vindi-

13 Frankfurt ("The Faintest Passion") holds a view that requires such a higher-order ratification of, or at least no higher-order dissatisfaction with, the lower-order attitude. However, my point is that if such a view were the only way of embracing stance-dependence, then implausibly few philosophers would fit in this category. Many who we rightly think of as embracing a stance-dependent component (or full-on subjectivism) have not claimed that the reason-giving or well-being grounding stance needs ratification from some yet higher-order level. For explicit resistance to this idea, see Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value."

14 Fletcher, "A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being."

15 See the discussion of Heathwood's view below at the end of section 4.

cate the thought that necessarily all have a significant reason to be decent. When we are confident that there is a right answer for all, independently of what an agent cares about, as many are in the moral case, we distrust the move toward full stance-dependence. Such a fully stance-dependent view will, many think, make too contingent whether or not an agent has a certain sort of reason we are confident she has. The friend of the Modest Claim, of course, can avoid such controversy by just accepting that our reasons to be moral are not contingent on our happening to care about something. They can allow that our reasons to be moral are not grounded in our contingent concerns but rather in some more secure way.

Conversely, fully stance-independent views are challenged by cases in which we are pre-theoretically confident that there is no single answer about what is best for all and we must thus find something that is different about the agents, other than their different stances, to ground the difference in what we think is best for each. Matters of mere taste, where we pre-theoretically think that what benefits an agent or gives her reasons depends on what resonates with her, are the most obvious and serious challenge for full stance-independence. In such contexts we think that what an agent likes or prefers plays a crucial role in determining what the agent has most reason to choose.

In such contexts we often think there is a value in letting people make their own choices even if they are going to make mistakes. And we also often think that it is morally problematic and paternalistic to interfere with such choices, even if such choices will be unwise. But these thoughts put no pressure on us to move to a stance-dependent view. We must distinguish them from thoughts that do put such pressure on us. Beyond these two thoughts we also think that, in such contexts, the best choice for a person depends on what that person likes or prefers, at least if they are informed about the options under consideration. If one was responding to a request for advice from a friend, such that worries of disrespecting someone's autonomy or acting paternalistically are not in play, we would think it crucial to know, in such contexts, what they like, favor, or prefer.

The rejection of the Modest Claim is not an immediately intuitive view. How then might one motivate it? The rest of the paper will consider reasons to accept full stance-independence stemming from (1) the arbitrariness of what we favor; (2) the potential pointlessness of what we favor; (3) the attractions of replacing stance-dependent attitudes with a stance-independent notion of pleasure; (4) explaining the covariation of favoring attitudes with reasons without granting a normatively grounding role to our attitudes; (5) insisting that symmetry with theoretical reasons favors stance-independence; and (6) maintaining that the normative pressure put on us by our stances, even in cases of matters of mere taste, is only rational coherence or consistency pressure, and so generates only

wide-scope normative upshot. In each case, I will argue that we should be unpersuaded. The Modest Claim is highly intuitive. If I succeed in showing that we have been offered no good reason to reject it, we should accept it.<sup>16</sup>

I aspire to show that at least some reasons are grounded by the agent's stance. I am trying to avoid being committal on many other questions when I can do so and still argue successfully for my main thesis. At some points in what follows I may appear to assume that morality and other domains are a domain of stance-independent reasons.<sup>17</sup> I do so because that seems what the point of view of the dissenter to my thesis must embrace. Clearly the full-on subjectivist will not resist my thesis. So my argument sometimes takes the form of conceding stance-independence in some domains for the sake of argument. I sometimes allow myself to, as it were, vent on behalf of the person who believes there are strong stance-independent values so as to highlight that the friend of the Modest Claim can accept the direction of all such reasonable venting.<sup>18</sup>

#### 1. ARBITRARINESS

One thought often suggested by those who reject the Modest Claim is that our contingent favorings, even procedurally idealized conative favorings, are arbitrary and therefore without intrinsic normative significance.<sup>19</sup> Here is how Michael Smith puts the point.

For on the relative [subjectivist] conception it turns out that, for example,

- 16 I do not here attempt to address concerns stemming from merely behavioral dispositional understandings of the nature of desire such as have been mentioned by Quinn ("Putting Rationality in Its Place") and Scanlon (*What We Owe to Each Other*). I make a start at addressing such concerns in Copp and Sobel, "Desires, Motives, and Reasons."
- 17 I am less concessive elsewhere. See my *From Valuing to Value*, especially "Subjectivism and Reasons to Be Moral."
- 18 Because I do not here take a stand on the broader view into which the Modest Claim ought to be embedded, as a helpful referee pointed out, some may worry that some potential costs of the Modest Claim are ignored. They might worry that either the Modest Claim will be embedded in a broader subjectivism or it will force one to a hybrid view. Thus, if we take the former route the status of reasons of morality would presumably be threatened, whereas if we take the latter route there will be some costs in terms of unity for the resulting hybrid view. This is a reasonable worry. However, if I can show that the purported costs of the Modest Claim that I focus on here are exaggerated, and that purported successes in accounting for reasons of mere taste without an appeal to stances are less successful than purported, then I think it quite unlikely that the costs mentioned above should sway us from a view that incorporates the Modest Claim.
- 19 Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 29; Heathwood, "Desire-Based Theories of Reasons, Pleasure, and Welfare"; Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

the desirability<sub>me</sub> of some consideration,  $p$ , is entirely dependent on the fact that *my* actual desires are such that, if I were to engage in a process of systematically justifying *my* desires, weeding out those that aren't justified and acquiring those that are, a desire that  $p$  would be one of the desires I would end up having. But what my actual desires are to begin with is, on the relative conception of reasons, an entirely arbitrary matter, one without any normative significance on its own. I might have had any old set of desires to begin with, even a set of desires that delivered up the desire that not  $p$  after a process of systematic justification. The desirability<sub>me</sub> of the fact that  $p$  thus turns out to be an entirely arbitrary fact about it. But arbitrariness is precisely a feature of a situation that tends to undermine any normative significance it might initially appear to have.<sup>20</sup>

It can help us better understand the thinking behind the idea that arbitrary favorings lack normative status to focus on lessons from the *Euthyphro*. The conclusion of the *Euthyphro* is that God's attitudes could not ground what is morally correct. Some who reject the Modest Claim might be moved by this argument to conclude that favoring attitudes generally could never ground reasons. I will argue that that is an unpersuasive generalization from the good points in the *Euthyphro*.

The *Euthyphro* argument is compelling because we are committed to conclusions about what is morally correct, such as that it is wrong to torture babies for fun or incarcerate blacks for longer periods of time than whites for the same crime, regardless of God's attitudes. We think there is something intrinsic to such actions that make them worthy of moral disapprobation. The suggestion that there is nothing about such actions that is worthy of such disapprobation and that such actions are wrong simply because God just happened to dislike such actions is unacceptable. In contexts in which there are specific conclusions that we cannot live without and where such conclusions seem clearly true regardless of anyone's stance, the suggestion that someone's stance grounds such truths seem obviously false.

God's stance toward options, unguided by antecedent moral facts, feels arbi-

20 Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 172. On Smith's more full picture, reasons of mere taste will be vindicated only if all fully rational agents converge on desires with the same *de se* content. Elsewhere, I have taken issue with this view ("Do the Desires of Rational Agents Converge?"). This view claims that my reasons not to poke myself in the eye with a stick are contingent on such broad convergence. More broadly, Smith thinks he can allow that our tastes give us reasons by saying that perhaps all rational agents would agree that if they had a desire for chocolate rather than vanilla then they have a reason to go for chocolate. But this is just for all rational agents to agree that our arbitrary favorings ground reasons in some contexts. The complaint that Smith offers here against arbitrariness cannot stand together with his purported solution to matters of mere taste.

trary from a moral point of view because we think there are right answers that God's attitudes, unguided by such facts, might hit or fail to hit. God's attitudes determining morality feel to us too much like just spinning a wheel and selecting whatever comes up, in a context in which we are persuaded that there are right answers regardless of what comes up on the wheel. The claim of arbitrariness in this context is a reflection of our antecedent convictions that there are right and wrong answers regardless of what God happens to favor. Lacking a reason to think that the attitude will track what we are sure is the right answer, we find the attitude problematically arbitrary.

In the *Euthyphro* case, (1) we are confident that there are right answers and that those answers are right regardless of what God's attitudes are; (2) we are confident that there is a correct moral attitude to have toward some cases that is warranted by intrinsic features of the situation; and (3) we do not see how God's attitudes could make slavery right or wrong. These features of the situation persuade us that the attitudes here could not ground the normative facts.

But these features are not replicated in our target cases of matters of mere taste. It is not at all intuitively obvious that there are stance-independent truths about what one has reason to do in matters of mere taste. It is not intuitively obvious that one's attitudes should track, or would be uniquely warranted by, attitude-independent facts in matters of mere taste. And it is not intuitively obvious that an agent's favoring attitudes could not make a normative difference in such cases. Thus the *Euthyphro* should not persuade us that an agent's stance could not ground reasons in our target cases.

The claim that conative favorings are arbitrary does not seem to be an argument for stance-independence but rather to presuppose it. This presupposition is in good shape, it seems to me, in the context of moral claims.<sup>21</sup> But the presupposition that there is a right answer in matters of mere taste regardless of what

21 There is another possible interpretation of what goes wrong when one thinks of God's attitudes as determining what is right. Even in cases in which it is not thought to be clear what is right and wrong in a particular case, one might say, still what is clear is that God loving something, say praying five times a day, could not be what grounds the duty to do so. Here the intuition is not that we know what the right answer is and so distrust any mechanism not ensured to get that answer. Rather the thought now is that the normative status of a type of action could not be changed just by God having a favoring or disfavoring attitude toward it. Favoring attitudes could not ground such normative changes in this way, or so this objection maintains. I think this complaint is less convincing in this context. But it is even less convincing still when we turn to our topic of an agent's reasons and her well-being. It is hardly obvious that my liking or preferring a color could not make it good for me to paint my walls with it or give me a reason to do so. So I will interpret the lesson of the *Euthyphro* that might be thought to help along the case for stance-independence in the first way mentioned above rather than the second.

we like or prefer is hardly similarly persuasive. Suppose my friend who wants what is best for me plans to bring dessert for the upcoming dinner party and asks me what to bring. My answer that I like salty caramel is unlikely to bring the response that that is entirely arbitrary and so there is no reason to think salty caramel benefits me more than dispreferred flavors. Without a background in which we are confident about the existence of a stance-independent right answer, the concern that an agent's preferences are arbitrary and so without normative status seems weird and difficult to understand.

Or, perhaps, one might say, yes, my favorings are arbitrary in the sense that there is no good reason to have them in preference to some other set of favorings. But in contexts like matters of mere taste that seems no good reason to doubt that their presence plays a normative role in grounding reasons to go one way rather than another. Again, it would be weird, and not in line with common sense, if my friend asked me whether I have any stance-independent reason to favor salty caramel ice cream and to insist that, unless I do, I have no reason to get that flavor.

Parfit advanced the claim that desires one has no reason to have cannot ground reasons. It is worth considering his claims to see why they cannot help defend the rejection of the Modest Claim or offer reasons to embrace full stance-independence. Parfit claims that, according to subjectivists, at the beginning of any chain that purportedly provides a reason

there must always be some desire or aim that we have no such reason to have. And . . . we cannot defensibly claim that such desires or aims give us reasons. . . . So subjective theories are built on sand. Since all subject-given reasons would have to get their normative force from some desire or aim that we have no such reason to have, and such desires or aims cannot be defensibly claimed to give us any reasons, we cannot be defensibly claimed to have any subject-given reasons.<sup>22</sup>

Desires, Parfit maintains, cannot ground reasons. And because of this he is often thought to belong to the stance-independent camp. But that is a mistake. Parfit rejects stance-independence. He argues that "liking" something can ground reasons even when one has no reason to like the object. In a fairly wide range of cases Parfit allows that one has no reason to like or dislike various sensations and experiences. Yet he maintains that such likings do ground reasons.

Parfit is clear that we do not have reasons to like the sensations we happen to like.

22 Parfit, *On What Matters*, 1:91.

It is sometimes claimed that these [hedonic] sensations are in themselves good or bad in the sense that their intrinsic qualitative features or what they *feel* like, gives us reasons to like or dislike them. But we do not, I believe, have such reasons. . . . Whether we like, dislike, or are indifferent to these various sensations, we are not responding or failing to respond to any reasons. . . . When we are in pain, what is bad is not our sensation but our conscious state of having a sensation that we dislike. If we didn't dislike this sensation, it would not be bad.<sup>23</sup>

Parfit agrees with the subjectivist, as against the Benthamite hedonist, that intrinsic features of sensations do not play a normative role in grounding reasons in matters of mere taste independently from our favoring or disfavoring responses to those sensations.

If Parfit's worry about desires was that they are arbitrary, likings will not look less arbitrary. If the worry was that value must be stance-independent, likings are no more stance-independent than desires. Obviously, the problems found in the *Euthyphro* cannot be solved by switching from a focus on what God wants or loves to what he likes. Parfit left it mysterious why likings one has no reason to have can be a ground of reasons but desires one has no reason to have cannot. Both are contingent states that we have no reason to have. Both are favoring attitudes or responses. But be that as it may, his conclusion is that reasons in matters of mere taste are grounded in stance-dependent attitudes. Parfit, his insistence that desires never ground reasons notwithstanding, did not purport to find a way to ground our reasons of mere taste in something other than favoring attitudes.

In the case of God, one being's attitudes were held to be normative for all—that is, to ground moral claims that applied to all. The friend of the Modest Claim might attempt to diagnose the greater persuasiveness of the arbitrariness concern in the moral case than in the well-being case by pointing to this feature. That is, they might say that perhaps contingent favorings are more plausible as grounds of normativity when we look to individualized normative notions such as what is good for Joey or what gives Jan a reason, and less plausible as a normative ground for universal normative claims. That is, they might try saying that while only stance-independent facts can ground universal normativity, stance-dependent facts can merely ground reasons for the person whose stance is involved.

Such a diagnosis might gain support from its ability to explain some of what went wrong in Mill's account of well-being. Mill claimed that "what makes one pleasure more valuable than another" is the "decided preference" of "all or al-

23 Parfit, *On What Matters*, 1:52–53.

most all” those who have “experience of both.”<sup>24</sup> But this part of Mill’s view does not seem compelling. It seems quite mistaken to think that dissenting minority, competent judges whose preferences over whisky are just as informed as the others, but who differ from the competent majority in what they prefer, ought to defer to or take their cue from what the majority prefer. Insisting, as Mill seems to, that there is a common answer about what is best for all in such contexts, regardless of differences in individual taste, seems unconvincing.<sup>25</sup> Stance-dependent views typically disavow this universality. Rather, the version of stance-dependence that will concern us here will maintain that, at least sometimes, Joe’s favoring attitudes are normative for Joe. Individualizing the authority such that my valuing attitudes are normative for me but not necessarily for you would therefore resolve some counterintuitive results from Mill’s competent-judges test.

But this move of individualizing the normative upshot of favoring attitudes, while perhaps necessary, is not sufficient on its own to avert the threat from arbitrariness. For so long as we remain confident that there are right answers about what I have reason to do that my attitudes could fail to hit on, we will continue to find that fully stance-dependent views have the fundamental problem we found in the *Euthyphro*. And there certainly are cases that plausibly fit this model, such as Parfit’s example of having a reason to avoid one’s own future agony regardless of whether one now cares about that or the claim that counting blades of grass is not good for one regardless of how much one likes it. These individualized normative claims still seem to have the sort of problem we saw in the *Euthyphro* case, and so individualizing the normativity, on its own, will not solve the worry. Individualizing and retreating to contexts of matters of mere taste seem to me sufficient.

## 2. VALUING THE VALUELESS, FAILING TO VALUE THE VALUABLE

Stance-independence might also be motivated by reflection on cases in which people value intuitively valueless things or fail to value intuitively valuable things. Recall Parfit’s example of a person who does not currently care, even after procedurally idealized deliberation, to avoid her own future agony or Rawls’s

<sup>24</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Those who think that, on Mill’s view, the preferences of the vast majority of competent judges do not ground, or even perhaps completely reliably covary with, what is good for dissenting competent judges might interpret Mill as offering a notion of objectivity of well-being claims across persons of the sort we use in saying that, since the vast majority of competent judges go for crisp apples, we will call crisp apples “good apples.” This would so far be compatible with the thought that a dissenting competent judge might prefer mealy apples and so “bad apples” would be better for them.

case of a person who values counting blades of grass.<sup>26</sup> Many think it clear that even if the person values in these ways after procedurally excellent deliberation, still she has no reason to count blades of grass and she does have a reason now to avoid future agony.<sup>27</sup>

The *Euthyphro* and the grass counter illustrate the same basic point. If our contingent conative reactions settle what has normative status, then they could grant normative status in intuitively very implausible directions. God could make torture intrinsically morally good and we could lack reason to avoid our own future agony just by failing to care about it now. The apparent implausibility of this leads many to embrace stance-independence.

Thus, one might conclude on the basis of such examples, desires on their own, without the backing of antecedent good reasons to value the option, cannot give us reason to do what there was no reason to do prior to our favoring it. Encouraged by such cases, one might be led to think quite generally that the cases in which wanting is correlated with reasons are cases where the want hits on antecedently valuable options.

In response, several strategies are possible. First, one might dispute the force of the cases even against full-on subjectivism. In different ways Sharon Street, Mark Schroeder, and I have made attempts in this direction.<sup>28</sup> Second, and much more relevantly for our purposes in this paper, one might allow for the sake of argument the force of such cases yet say that they fail to motivate full stance-independence. Let us consider how this latter reply might be developed.

To be moved by such examples to embrace full stance-independence seems a serious overreaction. We are perhaps too used to thinking about whether subjectivism is quite generally true and need to remind ourselves that the Modest Claim in no way entails that subjectivism is generally true. Even if we fully accept that there are plenty of stance-independent truths about what each agent has reason to do (comply with morality, avoid future agony, not waste their lives counting blades of grass, etc.), and even that such truths swamp, or perhaps even

26 I have argued that Parfit's agony argument can be fully accommodated by the subjectivist in Sobel, "Parfit's Case against Subjectivism."

27 The blades of grass example strikes me as odd given that we do not seem to similarly begrudge people other idiosyncratic and seemingly pointless activities such as stamp collecting or watching football. Perhaps the thought is that if one counts blades of grass too much one will waste one's life, but that is true for a wide range of activities. Perhaps the thought is that one might count blades of grass but not get Benthamite pleasure from doing it, but again that seems possible for a wide range of activities. There may be some temptation to marginalize favored wastes of time that no one really engages in.

28 Street, "In Defense of Future Tuesday Indifference"; Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; and Sobel, "Subjectivism and Reasons to Be Moral" and other essays in *From Valuing to Value*.

silence, the normative force of our attitudes when the attitudes differ from such stance-independent reasons, this only gives us reason to think that the scope of authority of contingent attitudes is limited by such truths. Even if there were contexts in which we were confident there were such attitude-trumping reasons, we would so far lack a rationale for thinking contingent attitudes cannot carry authority outside such contexts. The examples on the table so far put pressure on the idea that our stance provides reasons even in cases in which it is sensible to think that a person's stance conflicts with stance-independent normative truths. But we have seen no reason to think that our stance is normatively impotent in cases in which this does not seem to be the case, such as where one has a preference between listening to the Stones rather than the Beatles or drinking Lagavulin rather than Talisker.

Obviously, arguments such as Parfit's Agony Argument or Rawls's Grass Counter are examples in which we are plausibly invited to see the relevant favoring attitude as hitting on options that are valueless or failing to hit on options that are valuable. Such examples leverage our confidence in certain favoring-independent right answers. But it is hard to see how such examples could be thought to carry over to cases in which we are not confident that there is a favoring-independent right answer. I suppose if someone started out quite confident that there are favoring-independent right answers about what we have reason to do in matters of mere taste, such an argument might work for them. But, I submit, that is not the situation for most of us. Full normative stance-independence is not just common sense; it will need to be motivated in some way. This explains why none of the examples that have been offered have focused on cases in the realm of mere taste. But why should examples in which we are antecedently confident that there is a stance-independent right answer persuade us that our stance is normatively irrelevant in contexts in which we are not similarly confident?

This raises the issue of whether what I have been calling matters of mere taste are just contexts in which stance-independent reasons give out and leave us with a range of what is, so far as stance-independent reasons are concerned, a variety of permissible options.<sup>29</sup> As I see it, the defender of the Modest Claim should concede, as much as possible, for the sake of argument that this is the situation. This allows us to set aside disputes about whether our attitudes over matters of mere taste ground reasons even when they would point us in, for example, immoral directions. That would be controversial and the friend of the Modest Claim seeks to avoid such controversy. The crucial issue for our purposes re-

29 Ruth Chang and Joseph Raz have important work discussing cases in which reasons of one type give out and leave room for matters of mere taste. See Chang, "Grounding Practical Normativity"; and Raz, *Engaging Reasons*, ch. 3.

mains, even if we allow that such reasons are silenced in those contexts. There remain a range of contexts in which our stance grounds reasons. What the defender of the Modest Claim insists is that there is a broad range of cases in which the fact that one just happens to favor one option over others grounds the fact that one has more reason to choose that favored option.<sup>30</sup>

However, while the friend of the Modest Claim can afford to be significantly concessive to their opponent about what the genuine stance-independent values are, and the extent to which they override stance-dependent values, they cannot be infinitely accommodating on this score. For example, some might insist that normative reality is densely packed with stance-independently grounded normative distinctions such that there is little or no room left for stance-dependent attitudes to play a normative role. One possible view in this direction would be Benthamite hedonism, which will be considered in the next section, and which the friend of the Modest Claim cannot happily grant for the sake of argument but must dispute.

If it turns out to ultimately be problematic for some reason to adopt the significantly but not infinitely concessive strategy for understanding the domain of matters of mere taste outlined above, the friend of the Modest Claim may have to offer a more positive characterization of that domain. I think an intuitive understanding of that domain exists and the examples I opened the paper with clearly fit within that domain. We tend to think our favorings over simple color, sound, or taste sensations, for example, clearly fall into this category. The friend of the Modest Claim need not be able to offer a precise positive characterization of the border between such matters and options outside this realm so long as a decent range of cases clearly fall within the bounds of matters of mere taste. That would be sufficient to make meaningful and informative the claim that our favorings within this realm carry authority.<sup>31</sup>

The most we could reasonably think justified on the basis of the considerations so far put on the table would be that one's stance cannot ground normative authority when it runs contrary to the part of normative reality that is

30 To be clear, the friend of the Modest Claim is in no way committed to the thought that the force of the attitudes is silenced by or otherwise limited to contexts in which they speak against stance-independent values. The point here is to show how relatively uncontroversially one's position can be compatible with the Modest Claim.

31 If for some reason the only live possibilities were that either favoring attitudes always carried authority or that they never did, then, armed with the agony-style arguments, we would have an argument for stance-independence. Parfit offers an argument along these lines that he calls his "All or Nothing" argument. I address this argument extensively and offer grounds for thinking it rests on a confusion in Wall and Sobel, "A Robust Hybrid Theory of Well-Being."

stance-independent. Let it be granted that stance-independent normative facts trump or outweigh stance-dependent normative facts. This conclusion seems to gain support from the examples so far on the table. But the stronger claim, that stance-dependent facts can never ground normative claims even when they do not run counter to stance-independent facts, seems so far to lack any support from what has so far been presented. And thus I do not see yet a reason to doubt the commonsensical view that my liking chocolate ice cream more than vanilla grounds a reason I have to eat the former rather than the latter. There is no independently plausible stance-independent fact that such a conception runs counter to. So we still lack a motivation for full normative stance-independence.

### 3. THE NORMATIVE ROLE OF FAVORING ATTITUDES CAN BE REPLACED BY PLEASURE

If our contingent conative favorings do not ground reasons, perhaps we have no reason at all to choose one way rather than another in matters of mere taste. That would be wildly counterintuitive. Providing an alternative grounding for such reasons is a necessary condition for finding a minimally plausible rejection of the Modest Claim. How can the stance-independent theorist hope to replace the role of the attitudes so as to avoid this extremely counterintuitive result?

By far, the most popular attempt is to point to pleasure. The stance-independent theorist need not say that all should go for chocolate over vanilla ice cream or flannel over cotton jammies. They can instead say that some get pleasure from chocolate and some get it from vanilla and people have a reason to choose, in such contexts, what brings them pleasure.

But a notion of pleasure that is serviceable for the stance-independence theorist comes with a variety of problems that have historically driven people away from Benthamite hedonism.<sup>32</sup> Obviously our stance-independent theorist must not say that what makes something pleasurable is that one has some contingent favoring attitude toward intrinsic features of a current sensation. That would just reintroduce the favoring attitude they are hoping to find a way to do without. Thus it would seem it must be something like a flavor or set of flavors of sensations (presumably with some phenomenological commonality). Such views have several problems, well known from the history of ethics.

It is not tempting to grant intrinsic normative authority in matters of mere taste to a flavor of sensation regardless of whether one likes that flavor or not. It

32 As I intend the term "Benthamite hedonism," it covers people who may disagree with Bentham about many things but who agree with him that pleasure and pain are stance-independent states with direct normative upshot.

is no more tempting to do so than to grant authority to the flavor of chocolate over vanilla in determining what an agent has a reason to choose, regardless of whether one likes it or not.

When we are assessing sensations for whether they benefit me thanks to what they feel like it is indeed “intolerably alienating” to think that despite in no way favoring a sensation it nonetheless intrinsically benefits me at the moment I experience it thanks to the way it feels. On the rival picture, we are to picture a person who is fully and accurately acquainted with what two sensations are like. The person quite likes or in some other way positively resonates with sensation  $x$  but finds  $y$  in no way agreeable. Nonetheless, we have to imagine, we should think  $y$  is intrinsically better for the person to feel even in our contexts of matters of mere taste. That, it seems to me, misunderstands the way we can be benefitted in such contexts. The benefit comes from the agreeable nature of the experience. There is not a sensation that normatively calls us, in the way many think morality does, regardless of what answers to our own perspective. There is no categorical imperative to pursue one type of sensation in the context of matters of mere taste, regardless of whether you like it or not.

Thus it seems to me deeply misguided to think that, in such contexts, what one resonates with is unimportant to what one has reason to do. Now perhaps the Benthamite hedonist can somehow try to tie a favoring attitude to the sensation they claim grounds reasons without allowing a grounding role to such favorings.<sup>33</sup> It seems weird for the Benthamite to intrinsically recommend a flavor of sensation to a person, just on the grounds of what it feels like, who does not like such feelings. If the Benthamite can robustly tie a favoring attitude to that sensation closely enough, this might well relieve much of this awkwardness. It would then be rare, at least in practice, for the Benthamite to recommend a sensation the agent in no way likes. In this spirit, Ben Bramble writes, “Or perhaps it is no coincidence at all that all beings with whom we are acquainted like or want their own pleasure. Perhaps we all like or want our own pleasure because pleasure is the most obviously valuable thing.”<sup>34</sup>

Considering this proposal brings us to the second historically significant worry about Benthamite hedonism: namely that there is no underlying phenomenological commonality behind the various pleasures we experience. One of the reasons it is not at all clear that there is a broad tendency for people to like the flavor of sensation that is alleged by the Benthamite to be pleasure is that we are offered so little concerning what such a flavor of sensation is supposed to be like. This makes it difficult to understand how to gather evidence for the empirical hy-

33 We will consider and find wanting some such proposals below.

34 Bramble, Review of *From Valuing to Value*.

pothesis that most people like it and like it because it is so obviously valuable. A great many philosophers have introspected in vain for such a phenomenological commonality involved in the full range of pleasurable experiences such as taking a warm bubble bath, winning a tense tennis match, and sexual excitement. It is difficult to believe that just about everyone, even presumably children and animals, recognizes the obvious value in pleasure as the Benthamite conceives of it, and as a result wants more of it, given that most philosophers who have focused on this question have doubted that there is any such thing.

Many are attracted to such a Benthamite picture because they think it natural to say that what makes pleasure good is the way it feels and that the reason it is liked, typically, is due to the way it feels. The valuable feeling explains and rationalizes both why it is good and why people tend to go for it. Many think only a Benthamite picture can vindicate all this.<sup>35</sup>

What seems clear, and what is right in what these hedonists say, is that what is bad about pain is the way it feels. But that is what the stance-dependent theorist should say as well. The stance-dependent theorist should say  $x$  is good or bad for one depending on one's attitude toward it. The attitude explains why the object of the attitude is good or bad. Consider a sensation that is bad for me to feel. What is bad about it? A perfectly natural answer on the part of the stance-dependent theorist in many contexts would be: the way it feels, rather than some upshot of the feeling such as it signaling that one has diabetes. Consider that one would naturally say, in reply to the question of why you like Diet Coke more than Diet Pepsi, "the way it tastes, not the stupid ads or the clever packaging." Why is the way it feels intrinsically bad? Because one dislikes such feelings. It is perfectly natural on such a view to say that what is bad about a sensation is what it feels like. Thus that being a perfectly natural thing to say does not tell in favor of the Benthamite.

Some maintain that our preference for pleasure over pain is not an arbitrary one.<sup>36</sup> The suggestion seems to be that the stance-dependent theorist must maintain that it is arbitrary to like pleasure. There are a few ways in which this is not so. First, it is not arbitrary to generally favor getting sensations one likes over sensations one does not like. So someone who thinks that pleasure is a sensation that is intrinsically liked for what it feels like will maintain that a preference for

35 Smuts, "The Feels Good Theory of Pleasure." Several other papers from *Philosophical Studies* are well worth studying in this context, including Bain, "What Makes Pains Unpleasant?"; Bramble, "The Distinctive Feeling Theory of Pleasure"; and Rachels, "Is Unpleasantness Intrinsic to Unpleasant Experiences?" I am grateful to Nikki Fortier's "The Hybrid View of Pleasure and Pain," which drew my attention to the prevalence of this reply on behalf of the Benthamite.

36 See, for example, Goldstein, "Why People Prefer Pleasure to Pain," 396.

pleasure is not at all arbitrary. Likely, however, our Benthamite means to say that the preference for the flavor of sensation that is pleasure is not arbitrary. I think the anti-Benthamite can say that it is no accident that the vast majority of people find intrinsically motivating states that involve having sex and eating highly caloric fats and sugars. Creatures that failed to find such things intrinsically motivating fared less well in our evolutionary past (when the most salient danger was too few calories rather than too many) and so would have been selected against. This understanding, at a minimum, would seem a more plausible story concerning animal pleasure and their attraction to such things rather than a story involving the animal's detection of valuable properties and rationally appropriate responses to such states. But if that is the best story for other animals, it would seem unnecessary to posit more in the case of adult humans. Thus it is no accident, our stance-dependent theorist can maintain, that overwhelmingly we find intrinsically motivating sensations involved in having sex and eating chocolate.

The Benthamite hedonistic view under consideration here has been broadly found to be unattractive. Its champions bemoan how this once popular view has become quite unpopular. It has lost favor because most found complaints against the view, such as I just offered, to be telling. Yet the friend of stance-independence needs some view of this sort to ground reasons in matters of mere taste. If there were a powerful motivation for stance-independence or for rejecting the Modest Claim, it might make sense to turn to Benthamite hedonism despite its unattractive features. But we have not yet found this powerful motivation for full stance-independence. My sense is that people have been persuaded by independent considerations that stance-grounded reasons are problematic and then felt forced to make their peace with some variant of the Benthamite view. This paper argues that those independent considerations do not force full stance-independence upon us. And the problems with Benthamite hedonism that led to its abandonment remain. The newfound attractions of Benthamite hedonism to some do not seem to stem from it solving the problems that have historically bedeviled it but rather from it being needed to fill a role in fully stance-independent views.<sup>37</sup> And we have been seeking and, so far, not finding a motivation for such fully stance-independent views.<sup>38</sup>

37 This, of course, is a claim that contemporary champions of such forms of hedonism will dispute—including, notably, Roger Crisp, Ben Bramble, and Neil Sinhababu. But I cannot here address the recent attempts to address such problems. See Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*; Bramble, "A New Defense of Hedonism about Well-Being"; and Sinhababu, "Epistemic Argument for Hedonism."

38 It should go without saying that I cannot, within the few pages available to me here, deal with all of the sophisticated moves advocates of a centuries-old position have made nor

## 4. REASONS COVARY WITH FAVORINGS BUT ARE NOT GROUNDED BY THEM

Some maintain that the appearance that contingent favoring attitudes ground reasons in some cases can be partially explained by saying that such favorings covary with our reasons but do not normatively ground them. Several such views are on offer. The first that we will consider claims that such favorings are causally but not normatively relevant to our having such reasons.<sup>39</sup> So the fact that someone prefers playing tennis to playing racquetball would not itself be the normative ground of why one has more reason to play tennis. Rather, the fact that one prefers it will make it more likely that one will play more often, more regularly get valuable exercise, and will make it easier for one to focus on developing worthwhile skills. The fact that one has this preference is relevant to what one has reason to do but only because it makes it more likely that various stance-independent valuable outcomes will occur if one plays the sport one likes.

The stance-independent theorist's gambit is to see the importance of desire as merely a matter of allowing us to focus on good things and stick with projects long enough to be capable of realizing the sort of stance-independent value that only focused, long-term effort can achieve, that is, to treat such favorings as instrumentally valuable to the achievement of stance-independently valuable states. But surely there is intrinsic value in getting flavors of ice cream one quite likes rather than a flavor one finds unpleasant. It is quite implausible to instrumentalize away all the intrinsic values we seem to see in getting what one favors. This surely explains why just about every objective list of intrinsic prudential goods ever offered includes pleasure.

A second way that stance-independent theorists try to explain why reasons covary with favorings without giving normative authority to desire can be found in Scanlon, who maintains that desires almost never ground reasons. He then is forced to explain the source of our reasons in matters of mere taste. He there appeals to pleasure and pain. When confronted with the thought that a sensation counts as pleasure only if it is wanted, he responds by admitting that desire tracks reasons in this context without grounding reasons. He wants to maintain that it is a "complex experiential whole" that is causally affected by desire that grounds reasons.<sup>40</sup> Again, desire is seen as causally but not normatively relevant to our reasons. Yet he admits that a state is pleasant in the reason-conferring

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refute to the satisfaction of advocates of the view a position that has been maintained for so long. Here I try to point to general issues for the view that, I claim, cannot be overcome.

39 Parfit, *On What Matters*, 1:67–68. Parfit, due to what he says about "liking" does not in fact try to instrumentalize away all normativity that flows from favoring attitudes.

40 Scanlon, "Replies."

sense he has in mind only if it is desired while it is occurring. I think such a view untenable.

As I understand the view, a sensation has normative status only if it is intrinsically liked, but the normatively relevant role of the attitude is merely to causally affect the sensation, altering it, and it is the altered sensation that grounds normativity, not the attitude. In this way we might be thought to tie favoring attitudes necessarily to normative status without grounding normative status in liking. But we need to distinguish the initial sensation that the agent has a desire for while it is occurring from the sensation that has been causally affected and changed by the desire. Let us call them  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ .  $S_1$  is what the agent desires while it is occurring.  $S_2$ , since it has intrinsic phenomenological features that are different from  $S_1$ , may not be desired. If Scanlon wants to claim  $S_2$  has normative status, he will have to confront cases in which  $S_2$  is in no way liked. He has failed to find a way to ensure that favoring attitudes and the normatively relevant stance-independent sensation necessarily covary without granting the attitudes a grounding role.

Scanlon sought a story that could explain why the satisfaction of a future desire lacks the manifest authority of a desire for a phenomenological state one is currently experiencing. I think the subjectivist has a better story here. If we think favoring attitudes in the context of matters of mere taste that are accurately informed about their objects have authority quite generally, then such favoring attitudes for current phenomenology, since they are uniquely accurately informed about their objects, make it easy to explain the special normative relevance of such states.<sup>41</sup>

A third strategy to explain the covariation of preference satisfaction with normative status, without granting a grounding role to our stance, would claim that it is well-being or autonomy that ground the normative facts in the area.<sup>42</sup> As this view has been developed, one accepts at least a subjectivist component in one's account of well-being, but one claims that what grounds our reasons is well-being facts or autonomy facts, not facts about our stance.

Obviously the connection between the furtherance of our stance and well-being or autonomy will be a delicate matter on this view. If the view granted that our stance grounds facts about well-being or autonomy, and facts about well-being or autonomy ground facts about our reasons, then it will be tempting to think that if  $a$  grounds  $b$ , and  $b$  grounds  $c$ , then  $a$  grounds  $c$ . Additionally, if the

41 It has been doubted that subjectivists have a rationale for appealing to informed desires rather than uninformed desires. I respond to this concern in Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization."

42 Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1; Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*.

view allowed that facts about our stance were identical with facts about well-being or autonomy, and it is allowed on this view that facts about well-being or autonomy ground reasons, it would seem that what is identical to what grounds reasons must itself be allowed to ground reasons.

So seemingly this view must find a way to intertwine facts about our stance with facts about well-being or autonomy while avoiding claiming that the intertwining amounts to grounding or identity. The onus is on the person who would champion this view to specify the sort of intertwining imagined and explain how it would avoid the above concerns before it would be a serious challenge to the Modest Claim.

A fourth attempt to ensure that the relevant favoring attitudes necessary co-vary with reasons without granting a normatively grounding role to such favorings is a bit more nakedly an attempt to repackage the stance-dependent position in stance-independent garb. This view maintains that what is valuable is the combination of a sensation and a liking of that sensation. According to this view the combination need not itself be something the agent has any further favoring attitude toward in order to be normative. After all, the person who likes a sensation need not like that they like it. Thus, the champion of such a view maintains, the view is a fully stance-independent view. The gambit here is to put the favoring stance within the object deemed valuable rather than have the object of the attitude be valuable and the attitude explain why the object is valuable.<sup>43</sup>

Several plausible temptations toward such a view are not relevant in this context. First, one might think that only favorings that are accurately informed by their object carry authority and that favorings over current phenomenology are uniquely informed by their object. This might motivate one to focus on now-for-now desires rather than desires one has for outcomes that occur at some time other than when one has the desire. But this sensible view provides no grounds to deny that desires of the right sort ground our reasons rather than merely being conjoined with them. Second, one might sensibly think that having the desire without its object is not valuable. This seems highly intuitive but it is what the friend of the Modest Claim thinks as well. Third, one might well think that the combo of wanting *x* and having *x* is valuable even if one lacks a higher-order favoring attitude toward that combination. But again, as I argued earlier, that is what the friend of the Modest Claim should maintain as well.

The view under consideration here appears to largely repackage a stance-dependent view, not offer a genuine alternative. Given that, within such contexts, any sensation that is liked results in a valuable state, and no disliked sensation in

43 Heathwood, "Desire-Based Theories of Reasons, Pleasure, and Welfare"; and my reply in Sobel, "Parfit's Case against Subjectivism."

this context is valuable, and presumably the degree of benefit is tied to the degree of the favoring attitude, it is overwhelmingly plausible that such sensations are valuable because and to the extent that they are liked. A view that insisted on denying that would lack a convincing explanation for why, in such contexts, each combination of a sensation and a liking of that sensation was valuable. Surely that cannot be a coincidence. It seems the only role for the sensation is to be the object of the favoring attitude. If the object of the attitude is objectively valueless, and the attitude toward the object is objectively unwarranted, it is unconvincing and mysterious to claim that the combination of these two things is somehow objectively valuable. Further, a view that maintained that only such combinations of object and a liking of the object are valuable would intuitively not seem to be an objective view. The explanation of what makes such combinations valuable—presumably that it is valuable to get stuff you like—hardly looks like a distinctively objectivist view. The stance-dependent theorist already maintained, of course, that what is valuable is the getting of something one favors. That will necessitate that there be on hand something that one so favors. So it is already part of the stance-dependent theorist's view that in each valuable case there will be an object of the attitude and the attitude. It is hard to see what the purportedly stance-independent theorist thinks of themselves as adding to the stance-dependent theorist's claim here.

The attempt to find ways to mimic stance-dependent positions by purportedly stance-independent theorists should flatter the friend of the Modest Claim. But it would be more flattering still, and a bit more straightforward, to try to account for why this mimicry seems so necessary.

##### 5. SYMMETRY WITH THEORETICAL REASONS

Some might be tempted to point to the case of epistemic reasons to believe and maintain that as these are not determined by our stance, it is quite plausible that our practical reasons are likewise stance-independent.<sup>44</sup> Symmetry favors stance-independence, such a person might argue. But I think this is a weak consideration in favor of stance-independence. Surely it is more plausible to reject this symmetry than to reject the thought that we have reason to go one way rather than another in matters of mere taste. Further, symmetry considerations cannot explain why we should not start with the appearances on the practical side,

44 Increasingly there is pushback about the assumption expressed here about how things work on the epistemic side. See, for example, Cowie, "In Defence of Instrumentalism about Epistemic Normativity"; Sharadin, "Epistemic Instrumentalism and the Reason to Believe in Accord with the Evidence."

which suggest that our stance can determine our reasons, and use symmetry to reach the counterintuitive conclusion that our stance can determine what we have reason to believe.

#### 6. RATIONALITY NOT REASONS

Another thought might be that our desires are sort of like our intentions. The direction they go puts rational or coherence-based pressure on us, but has no important link with objective reasons. It can be rational in some context to do what one does not have a genuine reason to do. Think, for example of Williams's gin and petrol case where it seems rational, relative to one's information, to drink even though in some sense we would want to say that one lacks a normative reason to drink. One way of expressing this general thought would be to claim that our attitudes give rise only to wide-scope reasons but not to narrow-scope reasons.<sup>45</sup>

I do not think this is a plausible analysis of the sort of normativity involved with our cares and likings in contexts of matters of mere taste. Consider an advisor who wants us to get what is in our interests and who has information that we are in no way irrational to lack. Perhaps they know of a new flavor of ice cream and they have a way of determining whether we would like it or not. It would be "uncooperative" with the project of aiding me in getting what is good for me not to share such information with me in appropriate contexts or not to advise me to eat this flavor in preference to other, much less well-liked flavors. What this shows, I think, is that the normative authority of what we favor outstrips contexts in which rationality is at stake. Here the advisor could know that the advisee's rationality would be secure if the new information is not mentioned. Indeed, we can construct a situation in which it is clear the agent will, if left uninformed, act rationally with respect to her available information. Still, the flavor seems advisable to eat over some other flavors on grounds of the fact that I will find it yummy. And this sort of advice puts at risk the agent's rationality as they must deliberate anew, in light of the new information, and for all we know they might not deliberate as rationally as they did prior to gaining the additional information. Thus such very natural and sensible advice that aims to serve one's favoring attitudes is not motivated by considerations of rationality and indeed can put at risk the advisee's rationality, yet for all the world it seems a perfectly obvious sort of advice to offer. Further, I submit, it would be uncooperative for the informed advisor in such a situation to be indifferent between the agent getting the flavor she likes, in a context of a matter of mere taste, and losing that

45 Broome, "Normative Requirements."

favoring attitude. I think this shows that the normativity here is not merely rational, coherence-based, or wide scope.<sup>46</sup>

## 7. CONCLUSION

Peter Railton, in a famous passage, wrote:

Is it true that all normative judgments must find an internal resonance in those to whom they are applied? While I do not find this thesis convincing as a claim about all species of normative assessment, it does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him.<sup>47</sup>

While I find Railton's words ultimately compelling, as a premise in a philosophical argument I think one could reasonably complain that this was not common ground, that there were quite common intuitions that told against it, and that it was question-begging against a quite wide range of sensible views.

I want to champion the view that there is a scaled-down version of Railton's claim that it is much less plausible to resist and that can more reasonably be treated as a compelling premise. There is, I maintain, a component of normative reasons that must find this internal resonance with the person whose reason it is. In matters of mere taste, such as choosing between patterns of dress or music or gustatory sensations, where intuitively we are choosing something because it is pleasing to ourselves rather than for other reasons, such resonance is critical to which such options we have reason to choose. In such contexts, if it is to ground a reason, options must resonate with me. I must in some sense favor or like it, at least if rational and aware. Call this the Minimal Resonance Constraint.

And, while I do think the Minimal Resonance Constraint and the Modest Claim are crazy intuitive, there are those who deny it. But this denial is not justified by bringing forward cases in which intuitively our attitudes do not seem to ground reasons in the domain of matters of mere taste. It remains, I submit, highly intuitive that our attitudes ground our reasons in that domain. Instead, broadly speaking, the denial is motivated by finding cases outside of the realm of

46 Björnsson and Finlay, "Metaethical Contextualism Defended."

47 Railton, "Facts and Values," 47. See also, among others, Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person."

matters of mere taste in which the attitudes seem to lack authority and assuming that if attitudes lack authority in those contexts they must also lack authority in matters of mere taste. But this crucial assumption, while warranted if the opponent were a full-blown subjectivist, is not warranted against the defender of the Modest Claim. Further, I maintain that when you kick the tires of the stance-independent attempts to capture our reasons in matters of mere taste you notice the problem that they keep running into is a failure to heed our minimal resonance constraint (or to unconvincingly and without explanation try to mimic it). And I put it to you that you find that lack of resonance, at least in the context of matters of mere taste, unacceptable.<sup>48</sup>

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