



What does pleasure want?

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Abstract

Some philosophers and psychologists share an assumption that pleasure is by nature such that when an experience is pleasurable, an agent is motivated to continue having that experience. In this paper, I dispute this assumption. First, I point out how it does not make sense of the wanting-liking distinction in motivational neuroscience. Second, I present as a counterexample what I call 'dynamic pleasure' which does not motivate retaining one's focus on the object of original experience but motivates an exploration of other options instead. Third, as another counterexample, I bring out pleasures of relief which are bound to pass when one's discomfort is removed and in which case it is reasonable to assume that there is no motivation to maintain them. Fourth, I appeal to phenomenology of pleasure and argue that many experiences have a temporal shape which is in conflict with the self-maintenance assumption. As an example, I use the pleasure in listening to a song. The conclusion of the paper is that we should reject the self-maintenance assumption and consider seriously pluralism about the motivational structure of pleasure.

Keywords Pleasure · Motivation · Valence · Experience · Wanting-liking distinction · Songs

1 Introduction: self-maintenance assumption

It is a popular assumption in the philosophical literature on pleasure and positive affect¹ that pleasure is directly and intrinsically motivating, independently of deliberation. For example, if a person takes pleasure in eating ice cream on a hot summer day, then it makes sense to think that due that experience being pleasurable, they

¹ I will treat 'pleasure' and 'positive affect' and also 'positive valence' as synonyms. Admittedly, this is a contentious assumption. But I take it that the most plausible difference between them is only the extent to which they are intuitively associated with consciousness: while pleasure is a paradigmatic conscious state, positive affect and positive valence are less strongly associated with consciousness.

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are motivated to continue eating ice cream, unless they have reached satiety or have some countervailing motivation to stop eating.

What does pleasure exactly motivate? One suggestion is that a pleasurable mental state motivates the agent to maintain that very same state. In other words, the idea is that when some mental state is pleasurable, then the agent is motivated to continue being in that state. Call it ‘Self-Maintenance’ assumption (‘SM’ in short). Take the ice cream example again. On the proposal in question, what the pleasure of eating ice cream directly motivates is the continuation of that very same experience that the agent takes pleasure in. The motivation to continue the activity of eating is only instrumental to the motivation to maintain the pleasurable experience that eating causes.²

This assumption, or something close to it, has arguably been expressed by Kant, for instance, according to whom pleasure is “the consciousness of the causality of a representation in respect of the state of the subject as one tending to *preserve a continuance* of that state” (Kant, 2007 [1790]: 51).³ It can also be found in Sidgwick who has claimed that “pleasure is a kind of feeling which stimulates the will to actions tending to sustain or produce it” (Sidgwick, 1981 [1907]: 42f).⁴ SM has also been quite explicit in the work of many contemporary authors. Here are just a few examples:

The theory to which we come is, roughly, that for an experience to be pleasant is for it to make the person want its continuation.

(Brandt, 1979: 38)

[pleasure is] a positive experience state that we seek and that we try to *maintain or enhance* (my italics)

(Rozin, 1999: 12)

Intuitively, we would like to say something like: they [pleasant sensations] (defeasibly) motivate behavior intended to do whatever it is that would sustain undergoing the sensation as long as it remains pleasant

(Aydede, 2018: 243f)

² The claim of SM is distinct from psychological hedonism. According to psychological hedonism, it is only pleasure (and displeasure) that agents ultimately desire (Bentham, 1970 [1789]). One does not have to be a full-blown psychological hedonist to maintain that pleasure is something that organisms aspire to persist feeling when they are feeling it. The thesis that pleasure is by nature self-maintaining concerns the nature of pleasure, not human nature or motivation.

³ An alternative translation: “consciousness of a representation’s causality directed at the subject’s state so as to keep him in that state” (Zuckert, 2007: 233).

⁴ Sidgwick’s view is admittedly more intricate as he seems to allow that pleasure can be considered apart from its motivational force. According to Shaver’s interpretation, for instance, Sidgwick’s view is that pleasure is a feeling that appears desirable (Shaver, 2016: 903). It is an open question of x’s appearing desirable has a motivational effect such that one is motivated to pursue or maintain x. The most natural reading of ‘desirability’ is that x’s being desirable does not entail x being desired. There seems to be a modal aspect to desirability in that x is desirable just in case the S *would* desire x if certain conditions were met.

That being said, SM assumption still seems to have been tempting for Sidgwick, as the quote illustrates.

It is quite uncontroversial (throughout the history of philosophy and up to the present day) that pleasure has a particular motivational structure: it is self-maintaining.

(Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2022: 2529)

SM has been put to argumentative use by some theories. In the recent literature on positive affect, it has been appealed to as an explanandum by reflexive imperativists, for instance, who argue that to have a pleasurable experience is for that experience to have reflexive imperative content which commands one to have more of that same experience. One of the main motivations for their view is what they take to be an intuitive assumption that any theory of affect should explain: “pleasant experiences are such that, when we experience them, we want to have more of them” (Barlassina & Hayward, 2019b: 250). But the assumption seems to be also reflected in the desire theory of pleasure, according to which a sensory state is pleasurable just in case the agent intrinsically and *de re* desires to be in that state (Heathwood, 2007: 32).⁵ Finally, also the most well-developed adverbialist/psychofunctionalist account by Aydede (2018) states that for a sensation to be pleasant, it has to be processed in a way that is biased towards sustaining that sensation (or as he puts it, it is to have an experiential (phenomenal) desire for that sensation).

This idea needs to be disambiguated, however, because it can be read in at least two ways, one stronger than the other. The stronger understanding would be that the motivation to persist derives from the phenomenal character of pleasure itself. According to this view, it is the affective phenomenological character of pleasure that motivates one to act in ways that is conducive to the maintenance or promotion of that pleasure (see Barlassina & Hayward, 2019a).

A weaker understanding of the assumption is that although motivation in question is necessary for feeling pleasure, it does not derive from pleasure’s affective phenomenal character but from something else. The weaker reading accommodates Kant’s view: according to the latter, it is essential to a pleasurable mental state (i.e., whose introspection is pleasurable) that one is motivated to stay in that state, but the motivation derives from the representation that causes that state, not from the character of pleasure. One can thus accept the overall idea behind the SM and still see it as being about the nature of pleasure, while disagreeing on what the motivation in question exactly derives from. In this paper, I have in mind the weaker reading that sees self-maintenance motivation as a necessary condition of pleasure.⁶

In what follows, I will dispute SM assumption by presenting several counterexamples. The first counterexample concerns dissociation cases between

⁵ Heathwood might try to reject the SM assumption and argue that a desire *to be* in a state does not entail a desire *to continue being* in that state. I find it plausible that the latter follows from the former, but I grant that my interpretation can be contested. If it turns out to be inaccurate, then I can still maintain that there is at least a possible view that understands SM-motivation in terms of experience-directed desires.

⁶ There’s an even weaker understanding of the assumption, according to which motivation to maintain the pleasurable state is not an essential feature of feeling pleasure and the motivation is just something that often accompanies pleasure. The critique of the assumption in this paper does not target that reading because probably anyone can accept it.

pleasure and motivation, which is supported by research in the affective neuroscience. The second counterexample concerns what I call ‘dynamic pleasures’. These are pleasures which direct the agent’s attention away from the sensations in which they are taken in. The third counterexample concern pleasures of relief whose functional profile is such that they by their nature are disposed to go extinct. Fourth, I will argue that many, if not most pleasures have an intrinsic temporal shape, such that attributing self-maintenance motivation to such pleasures conflicts with that shape. As a result, SM assumption turns out to be an idea that only contingently applies to some pleasures and does not apply to others. If we take fully into account the motivational structure of pleasure and reject SM in its simple form, we make room for a more nuanced view of the motivational structure that pleasure has.

Before moving on to discuss the problem cases, it is important to note that there are ways to criticize SM that do not really have much bite. For instance, most, if not all, physical pleasures fade upon satiation. People generally cannot go on sustaining the same pleasure in eating a juicy steak, for example, when satiation sets in. Someone could try to argue that the case of pleasure fading upon satiation is a counterexample to SM assumption because it suggests that such a pleasure is not geared towards self-maintenance (at least not in the long run). However, in response it can be stressed that SM is about *defeasible* motivation and allows that there are countervailing factors that preclude self-maintenance motivation from being effective. Perhaps satiation generates the countervailing motivation to end the experience in question and that motivation wins the competition with self-maintenance motivation. Because in this case, self-maintenance motivation is defeated by the other motivation but still entailed by pleasure, SM assumption is not falsified. The case of satiation is thus not an immediate problem for SM. In general, motivations other than the self-maintenance motivation usually win out. Often it is simply the motivation to seek out something novel, for instance. Again, such cases do not disprove SM because they are just cases where SM motivation loses to other motivational factors.

To really challenge SM assumption, one needs to find cases in which the self-maintenance motivation is either an unnecessary hypothesis or in which it is inconsistent with the motivational structure that the pleasure has in the case in question. In what follows, my second and third counterexample to SM concern the first type of case, the rest concern the second type. Although they can be grouped in that way, they are mostly independent of one another. The aim of the paper is to present a number of counterexamples to build a cumulative case against SM. The reason for building a cumulative case and not pick out a single master argument is that any single argument can in principle be rejected by the proponent of SM because they can always appeal to the aforementioned idea that self-maintenance motivation is defeated by some countervailing motivation. By presenting a number of problem cases, it should be possible to show that the burden of proof is on the proponent of SM because there are a plenty of cases in which postulating self-maintenance motivation is not plausible.

2 Against the self-maintenance assumption

2.1 Liking without wanting

The first reason for thinking that the motivation to sustain the pleasurable state is not necessary for feeling pleasure comes from the data in affective neuroscience which supports the idea that mechanisms that underlie wanting (motivation) and mechanisms that underlie liking (positive hedonic state) can be doubly dissociated (Berridge, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2021). Wanting is realized by the mesolimbic dopamine system, while liking is enabled by hedonic hotspots in the orbitofrontal cortex, nucleus accumbens, ventral pallidum, pontine parabrachial nucleus, and some other areas. They also have different behavioral manifestations: pursuit of the stimulus in the case of the former, characteristic facial expressions in the case of the latter (Smith et al., 2010: 29). Wanting and liking are dissociable: the activation of the wanting system does not entail the activation of the liking system, and vice versa. The evidence for the wanting-liking distinction has most extensively come from the research on rodents. As a representative example of that research, consider the study by Smith and Berridge (2005) where they injected rats with GABA_A antagonist bicuculline which increased the rats' eating behavior, suggesting a boost in wanting, but which did not increase the liking reactions. Or, consider the study by Peciña et al. (2003) which showed that hyperdopaminergic mutant mice were more motivated to pursue sweet rewards than wild-type mice but did not show any indication of liking these rewards more. Increase in dopamine caused increase in wanting but it didn't seem to cause increase in liking.

I take it that wanting is identifiable with motivation in the sense relevant for this paper and that liking is identifiable with pleasure. It could perhaps be argued that liking should not be identified with pleasure that SM refers to. One is a theoretical postulate in neuroscience and the other is a folk concept studied by philosophers. However, it is unclear why this kind conceptual policing should be accepted, given that the manifestations of liking are what intuitively also count as manifestations of pleasure. Moreover, that wanting can be dissociated from pleasure is fairly intuitive and corresponds to the everyday experiences of not enjoying getting what one wanted.⁷

If wanting and liking are dissociable, then there are psychologically possible cases in which an agent likes a feeling but does not want to have it. The hedonic hotspots in the brain do not immediately motivate the agent to do anything about the feeling that these hotspots mark as liked when they are activated. However, if a motivation to maintain itself were essential to pleasure/liking, then it would be puzzling how an agent could like a feeling without wanting it. SM assumption suggests that there is a single mechanism underlying liking and wanting but wanting-liking dissociations give a good reason to doubt that such a mechanism exists. Those

⁷ Another way to understand wanting and liking is to identify them with the *realizers* of motivation and pleasure, respectively. I am fairly confident that the point of this section can be made also when we adopt this weaker understanding.

dissociations thus present a *prima face* challenge to the SM assumption. Pleasurable feelings can be activated independently of any motivational effects. There are thus psychologically possible cases in which attributing self-maintenance motivation to a pleasurable feeling is inconsistent with the actual motivational structure of that feeling (i.e., there is no self-maintenance motivation).

De Lazari-Radek and Singer (2014: 246) have presented a comparable objection to desire theories of pleasure in particular, drawing from the research on wanting-liking distinction. They argue that if there are cases in which feelings cause desire for those feelings to be stimulated further but do not cause pleasure, then this suggests that desire to maintain a feeling does not entail taking pleasure in that feeling. My objection is different, however. While de Lazari-Radek and Singer appeal to cases where a person wants to continue having a feeling but does not like it (i.e., does not take pleasure in it), I appeal to dissociation in the other direction: to cases in which a person likes a feeling without wanting to maintain it.

That being said, it could be argued that there are objections to de Lazari-Radek and Singer that apply also to my argument. For instance, Shaver (who himself is not a proponent of desire theory) responds to Lazari-Radek and Singer by pointing out that it is unclear in such cases if people really want to continue to have the feeling. What can be gleaned from the data is only that people with wanting without liking want to be stimulated further, but wanting the stimulation is not the same as wanting to have the feeling that is generated by the stimulation (Shaver, 2016: 916). At first glance, Shaver's response may seem to be extendable to my argument: in the case of liking without wanting, it may appear as if the person in question likes the feeling but does not want to maintain it. However, if more accurate way of understanding the situation is that she likes the feeling but does not want to maintain the stimulation that causes it, then wanting-liking dissociations are not immediately relevant for evaluating SM assumption. Wanting and liking would take different targets (stimulation and feeling, respectively).

What is required for wanting-liking dissociation to constitute a counterexample to the SM assumption, then, is that they both can take feelings as their proprietary targets but can be dissociated. Only then we have a possible case in which the same sensation is liked but not wanted. I think, however, that the idea that both wanting and liking can take feelings as their targets is reasonable and that also a proponent of SM assumption should recognize and accept it. After all, SM assumption states that people are motivated to maintain a feeling but motivation needs to be realized somehow in the brain. It is reasonable to think that wanting system generates feeling-directed motivation as well, not only stimulation-directed motivation. As far as I am aware, there is no empirical evidence that supports the bifurcation of motivational systems into one that is directed at external stimulation and another that is directed at feelings. On the other hand, if a proponent of SM assumption denied that wanting can take a feeling as its target, then they wouldn't be able to explain, in an empirically feasible way, how the self-maintenance motivation is realized in the brain in the first place. To explain it, they would have to posit a mysterious motivational capacity, alongside with wanting.

The defender of SM assumption thus faces a dilemma. If they affirm that wanting can take a feeling as its target, they cannot make sense of liking-wanting

dissociations. If they deny that wanting can take a feeling as its target, they struggle to explain the kind of self-maintenance motivation that they proclaim pleasure to exhibit.

Another way to dispute my argument is to argue that there is no empirical evidence that those dissociations that are relevant for my argument actually occur because there is no proven case where a person would like a feeling without wanting to maintain it. Dissociations that were uncovered in studies like Smith and Berridge (2005) or Peciña et al. (2003) are cases of wanting without liking, not liking without wanting, and they don't really address the SM assumption, even if we agree that wanting and liking correspond to motivation and pleasure in the ordinary sense and that they both can take sensations as their targets.

I agree that the cases of wanting without liking are more paradigmatic in the empirical literature. However, there are studies which do suggest that cases of liking without wanting are empirically realistic as well. For instance, people do not perceive chocolate milk as less pleasant when they have lost dopamine neurons in Parkinson's disease, where Parkinson's disease involves a motivational deficit (Sienkiewicz-Jarosz et al., 2005) and while dopamine antagonists reduce cravings for cigarettes, they do not reduce the ratings of liking them (Brauer et al., 2001). The dissociations in both of these studies are in the direction of liking without wanting. Furthermore, in both cases, it is plausible that it is not only the activity of drinking chocolate milk and the activity of smoking for which the motivation is lacking while pleasure remains, but also the *experience* of drinking chocolate milk and the *experience* of smoking. There are also data regarding nonhuman animals that lend further credence to the empirical reality of liking without wanting: rats with damaged dopamine neurons or blocked pharmacological dopamine do not approach sweet food but nevertheless exhibit liking responses when they receive the food in their mouths (Anselme & Robinson, 2016: 215).

Another objection is that empirical evidence regarding dissociations does not really demonstrate that there are cases of liking a feeling without *any* wanting. It only shows that the intensity of wanting and the intensity of liking are independent of one another. It is true that the studies that I have cited do not prove that wanting was entirely missing. Instead, they show that wanting can be reduced without a reduction in liking. To that I can only respond that it is plausible that if, with respect to a feeling, wanting can be reduced without a reduction in liking, then it is also plausible that the former can be reduced to nil while a feeling is still liked.

That said, it is true that the evidence from wanting-liking dissociations against SM is not conclusive. Let us then turn to other counterexamples.

2.2 Dynamic pleasures

Another problem case for SM assumption concerns what I call 'dynamic' pleasures. These are pleasures whose functional profile is such that the agent who feels them is more inclined to open up to and engage with other features of the world than the original stimulus. There is evidence that positive affect broadens attention, making one less focused on the stimulus that caused it and stimulating one to explore

one's environment (Fredrickson, 1998; Rowe et al., 2007). For instance, in their study, Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) showed the participants affect-inducing videoclips and then, using the Twenty Statements Test, asked them to list things that they would like to do, given the feeling that they got from watching the clip. Those participants who were exposed to clips that induced positive affect produced larger thought-action repertoires than those who watched affectively neutral or negative clips. That positive affect induces exploration of options other than the original stimulus that caused it has also been revealed in people's food choices (see Isen, 2000). For instance, Kahn and Isen (1993) found that people with positive affect sampled a wider range of products like crackers and snacks, suggesting that positive affect is conducive to variety-seeking.

Given these data, think of a situation wherein a person attends a food tasting event, with the initial intention to focus on the seafood options. After tasting some of the seafood and finding it pleasurable, one's attention is broadened, and instead of continuing to be motivated to continue eating seafood, one's attention is turned toward other options in which one can now take pleasure, which in turn motivates one to explore further options. In that case, dynamic pleasure does not motivate to maintain the original mental state but instead signals the value of further exploration.

The dynamic pleasures fit well with the control theoretic model of affect that understands motivation in terms of approach and avoidance systems. These systems are organized as feedback loops, where feedback signals the extent to which the state one is in diverges from the target state (Carver and Scheier, 1990; Carver, 2003, 2006). According to the control theoretic model, affect is a signal in the *metamonitoring* system that measures the rate of progress toward one's goal. The criterion by which the rate of progress is measured is the reference value of the metamonitoring system. Positive and negative affect are error signals that negative feedback systems use to monitor and manage the extent to which an organism is progressing or moving away from the reference value. Insofar as the rate of progress exceeds a contextually specified criterion, it is experienced as positive affect. Thus, according to the model, positive affect is a signal that an organism is progressing toward its goal at a faster rate than it is needed. Positive affect therefore motivates one to reduce the effort in progressing toward the goal and motivates directing one's attention at other domains of interest. Applying the control theoretic model to our seafood example, we can say that what happens in that case is that the agent's pleasure in tasting seafood indicates that the goal to eat seafood is being fulfilled at a higher rate than the relevant reference value. This in turn motivates directing attention to other food options.

Why do dynamic pleasures pose a challenge to SM assumption? Well, they seem to pose a challenge in that it is *prima facie* difficult to find a place for self-maintenance motivation in the motivational structure of dynamic pleasures. The experience in which dynamic pleasure is taken in does not seem to be the motivational target of that that kind of pleasure. Instead, the target (other options) is external to that experience.

A proponent of SM could insist that the attentional and motivational broadening that dynamic pleasure induces is not directly relevant for evaluating the question of whether pleasure involves self-maintenance motivation. It is arguably not

relevant, because the broadening in question primarily concerns worldly stimuli, not the experience in which the pleasure is taken. It is consistent with the SM assumption – or so the argument would go – that pleasure, aside from motivating mind-directed self-maintenance – also often motivates word-directed search for novel stimuli. The broadening of one’s attention and motivation with respect to worldly stimuli does not preclude the motivation to sustain the experience.

However, I don’t think that the proponent of SM can so easily get off the hook. That dynamic pleasures still pose a challenge to SM can also be supported by the following reasoning. When pleasure taken in an experience of a worldly option X motivates broadening one’s attention to and exploration of options other than X, then the natural result of this is that the experience in question changes because the motivation results in new experiences. But if the experience changes, then either the motivation that the pleasure supplied was not to maintain the experience in the first place, in which case SM assumption is false, or there was still motivation to maintain the experience, but that motivation failed. A proponent of SM motivation needs to pick the second interpretation: pleasure still motivates mind-directed self-maintenance, but this motivation fails. I find the first interpretation more plausible, however, because it is more economical. The assumption that one was also motivated to maintain the experience is an unnecessary hypothesis and does not do any explanatory work when we try to understand a person’s exploratory activity on the basis of dynamic pleasure. I thus take it that dynamic pleasure does not contribute to the maintenance of the experience that it characterizes.

It could be argued that we can defend SM assumption if we focus on the individuation of the relevant experience at an appropriate level of grain. In the example of food tasting, for instance, it could still be argued that pleasure motivated to maintain the *experience of eating*. That motivation did not fail when the agent started to try options other than seafood.

The success of this response depends on whether such a coarse-grained individuation is justified. After all, when we elaborate on our case in a different direction, it is also possible that the dynamic pleasure that the agent gets from eating seafood motivates turning the attention away from the exploration of culinary options entirely and turn to socializing instead. Of course, the proponent of SM assumption could then respond that in that we need to individuate the original experience at an even more coarse-grained level. For instance, it could be argued that the experience that the agent took pleasure in and that was the target of SM-motivation was the experience of enjoyment. However, this looks more like an ad hoc attempt to save the SM-assumption than a principled way of dealing with counterexample. Furthermore, at the present juncture, it suffices to say that in the example we considered, we can just stipulate that the initial pleasure was taken in the experience of tasting seafood in particular and insofar as tasting seafood was pleasurable, the proponent of SM is committed to saying that the agent was motivated to maintain the experience of tasting seafood. Thinking otherwise already indicates that the SM assumption needs to be at least revised, by specifying the appropriate level of grain at which the evidence is to be individuated.

In the next two sub-sections, we will look at kind of pleasures which do not motivate to maintain the experience, no matter at what grain that the experience is individuated.

2.3 Pleasures of relief

Another problem case for SM is what Matthen (2017; see also his 2015) calls r-pleasure (pleasure of restoration or relief). R-pleasure is felt when either a mental or a bodily state of disequilibrium comes to an end; after that, r-pleasure quickly fades away. The examples include pleasures that one can get from sneezing, coughing or defecating, for instance. Although r-pleasures lack sophistication, they clearly qualify as pleasures. The idea of r-pleasures also has a reputable history, given that it was considered as one of the paradigm cases of pleasure in the antiquity.⁸

Why are r-pleasures relevant for evaluating SM assumption? They are relevant because it is unclear how self-maintenance motivation can figure in them. Because r-pleasures are by nature disposed to fade, they do not seem to generate any motivation to sustain the experiences that they are taken in. In fact, it is difficult to see what self-directed motivational effects r-pleasures have in the first place. At least there is no good reason to posit that r-pleasures generate self-maintenance motivation. In fact, we should not even take for granted that r-pleasures have any intentionality at all, given that they can arguably be understood in merely causal terms. It is unclear what explanatory purchase the attribution of intentional content to r-pleasures exactly offers.

If we do take them to be intentional, though, then the most plausible interpretation of their intentionality is that they play the functional role of signaling that things are improving for the organism (i.e., returning to the equilibrium), and, if that is the case, they function as indicative and not imperative signals, i.e., they do not directly motivate anything and instead just register what is the case.⁹

However, even if we allow that r-pleasures are motivational, it is implausible that the relevant motivation is directed at the experience in which r-pleasure is taken. The most plausible candidate for the motivational effect of r-pleasure is that r-pleasure facilitates the physiological process of returning to the equilibrium where the equilibrium is the functional aim and the success condition of that process.¹⁰ This is, after all, what happens right after the agent feels r-pleasure in normal conditions. The functional aim and the success condition of SM motivation with respect to r-pleasure, however, would be the continuation of the experience of returning to the equilibrium, not the equilibrium itself. That success condition of the

⁸ “Characteristic of the whole of Greek philosophy was the idea of a relation between pleasure and the restoration or preservation of the natural state of the organism.” (Nikolsky, 2001: 445).

⁹ For the analysis of the distinction between imperative and indicative signals, see Klein (2015: Ch. 1–2). Although Klein understands homeostatic signals in terms of imperative content, I take r-pleasure, insofar as it counts as a homeostatic signal, to be an exception to the rule. R-pleasure functions as a signal that figures at the end of the homeostatic regulatory process and does not directly motivate any further activity. Instead, it signals that the regulatory process is close to the successful completion.

¹⁰ That said, I find the previous interpretation in terms of indicative content much more plausible.

self-maintenance motivation would thus conflict with the functional aim of the process of actually returning to the equilibrium because it would entail that the equilibrium is not yet achieved. Since r-pleasures in normal conditions do lead to achieving the equilibrium, however, this suggests that r-pleasures in normal conditions result in the failure of SM motivation.

A proponent of the SM assumption could perhaps just endorse the implication that in the case of r-pleasures, the SM motivation that they generate is bound to fail. Positing a motivation that in normal conditions is bound to fail is something to be avoided, however, because motivation to maintain the pleasure should have at least some adaptive value. If it is bound to fail, then there is a reason to think that it lacks such value and that the assumption that pleasure generates such a motivation is an unnecessary hypothesis.

The challenge to SM assumption from r-pleasures is analogous to the challenge from dynamic pleasures in that it appeals to the idea that the postulation of self-maintenance motivation is an unnecessary hypothesis that does not add any explanatory value to our understanding of how pleasure works. However, unlike the case of dynamic pleasures, there does not seem to be any room to argue that r-pleasures induce SM-motivation to sustain the experience that is individuated at an appropriate level of grain. There is no determinable experience of which the experience of returning to an equilibrium is a determinate and whose maintenance the r-pleasure could motivate in a way that does not result in failure.

We have thus seen that r-pleasures do not easily lend themselves to the terms of the SM assumption. First, it is unclear if they have any content and if they do, then it is probably indicative, not imperative. Second, even if they are motivational, then the success condition of that motivation does not concern self-maintenance of the experience of returning to the equilibrium because positing such a motivational content defeats the most plausible function of r-pleasure. Self-maintenance assumption does not have any footing in pleasures of relief.

2.4 Phenomenology of pleasure

Finally, there is a phenomenological consideration against the assumption that all pleasures are self-maintaining. Think of some sensory experience that feels pleasurable and imagine how that experience unfolds over time. If being in a pleasurable experience entailed a motivation to maintain it, then, keeping equal other motivations, there should never be a point in time during the experience when one is not motivated to continue having it. However, at least for some experiences, for them to have their pleasing phenomenal character that they have, they arguably have to be temporary, i.e., it is the necessary condition of their pleasurability that they have a specific temporal shape with a natural endpoint.

To illustrate what I mean, consider the kind of pleasure that one takes in the experience of listening to a song that one likes. Such an experience has its proper time: it develops in response to the unfolding of the melodic and rhythmic structure and the instantiation of expressive properties and finds its closure when the song ends. It belongs to the nature of that experience, and of the pleasure taken in it, that it

unfolds in a specific way and comes to a close at a specific point in time, i.e., it has an intrinsic temporal shape that individuates it as the particular experience it is. It does not make sense to continue having that same experience after it has run its course because in that case it would be a different experience and a different pleasure. Because of this, the attribution of self-maintenance motivation to pleasures that are taken in such experience does not make sense either.

It could be responded that the experience of listening to a piece of music consists in self-standing auditory instants and that what happens after the instant that one is presently experiencing has no significance for the experience at that instant (compare Chuard, 2011 who claims this about all perceptual experience). If that were the case, the appeal to the intrinsic temporal shape of musical experience could be disputed. However, such a “snapshot” view is highly implausible, especially in the case of auditory experience.¹¹ We experience sequences of sounds as unified groups (Nudds, 2010: 106), which means that even the minimal unit of auditory experience is temporally extended. The character of the experience of an auditory instant is determined by the wider auditory context in which it is embedded and cannot be considered apart from that context. For instance, the same chord at the end of a musical phrase sounds different, depending on whether the phrase which it completes ends in a perfect cadence or in an interrupted cadence (Munton, 2022: 346).¹²

To elaborate further on our example, pleasure that is taken in listening to a song can also be considered on different timescales. On a shorter timescale, there is pleasure₁ in hearing a particular passage₁ at t_1 that gives way to pleasure₂ in hearing the following passage₂ at t_2 .¹³ The SM-assumption entails that pleasure₁ motivates maintaining the experience of listening to passage₁. However, why should we accept this, given that the nature of the experience of passage₁ is such that it is bound to end and give way to the next experience (of passage₂)? The SM-motivation would call for retaining the experience of passage₁ but it is the nature of the pleasurable experience to move forward, so to speak, by involving an anticipation of how the music will evolve into the future and motivation to experience that future evolution. If anything, pleasure in listening to passage₁ motivates listening and thereby experiencing passage₂. Therefore, in order to enjoy a song as a dynamic whole where its different passages are enjoyed in different ways and in a particular order, pleasures in those different passages can't be self-maintaining because this would result in a repetition of the experience of the first passage without any progression.¹⁴

¹¹ The snapshot view is also difficult to make sense of from the perspective of SM assumption, since it is unclear what it even means to maintain an instant of experience.

¹² Munton herself focuses on visual experience and defends the Dynamic Priority thesis, according to which “the minimal “unit” of visual experience to which a subject is related is temporally extend” (Munton, 2022: 344).

¹³ The distinction between pleasure₁ and pleasure₂ is a simplification because there are no clear boundaries between pleasures in different passages. Contiguous pleasures blend into one another. In addition, both anticipation and memory figure in and factor into those pleasures. That being said, the simplification still helps to illustrate my point about pleasure not maintaining itself but giving way to the experience that follows.

¹⁴ At most, SM-motivation with respect to specific musical passages could perhaps fit with pleasure taken in drone music or other highly repetitive musical forms.

With respect to pleasure on a short timescale, it could be argued that what the pleasure is taken in is the experience of the musical *transition* from passage₁ to passage₂, not any particular passages. If that were the case, it could be claimed that pleasure motivates maintaining the experience of transition. This proposal is problematic, however. The first issue is that it is unclear if there is a phenomenologically substantive difference between an experience of a musical passage and of a transition between two passages. Both involve the temporal unfolding of auditory structure and thus both have intrinsic temporal shape. Because of this, both pose a phenomenological challenge to SM-assumption. Another issue with the proposal is that it suggests that the experiences of transition throughout the song are the same experiences which also can be maintained throughout listening to the song. But experiences of different transitions in a piece of music are almost always phenomenologically different from one another. Because they are different, experience of an earlier transition gives a way to the later one and attributing SM motivation to the former is still problematic.

On a longer timescale, we can consider the pleasure in listening to the song as a whole. It is plausible to think that an experience of a song is generally phenomenologically unified, at least when it is not too complex or too long and when the listener has the relevant musical understanding and experience with the genre. In so far as the experience of the song as a whole is pleasurable, that pleasure finds its closure when the song ends, together with the experience. The proponent of SM assumption is committed to the claim that while one goes through the experience of listening to the song and that experience is pleasurable, one is also motivated to continue having that experience indefinitely. However, the experience of a song does have a definite end. After all, it is individuated by the temporal shape and limits of the song in question and the extending the song would result in a different experience. Attributing SM motivation to the pleasure in the song as a whole is therefore problematic. The kind of motivation that is fitting for the pleasure in listening to a song is sensitive to the song's temporal nature.

It is important to stress is that the present challenge is *not* that attributing SM motivation to the pleasure in the experience of a song entails that the agent has that motivation after the song has ended. SM assumption only claims that an agent is motivated to continue being in the pleasurable state *while* they are in that state. After the song has ended, also the experience ends, and the agent is supposed to stop having SM motivation together with it. The challenge to SM comes from the fact that that content of SM motivation that the agent is supposed to have during the pleasurable experience does not specify the natural endpoint of that experience.¹⁵

¹⁵ It could be argued in response to this challenge that it is possible to maintain the pleasurable experience of the song as a whole, by listening to a replay or playing it through in one's head, for instance. This might leave an impression that SM motivation with respect to song experience is not self-defeating. I don't think that this response really grapples with the challenge I have presented. I can grant that people often are motivated to go through the replay when they really like the song. However, this seems like a contingent effect of musical pleasures, not their necessary consequence. Furthermore, the experience of the replay does not really satisfy the putative SM motivation, given that it is a *repetition* of the original experience, not its continuation. Or, to be more precise, the motivation concerns experiencing something very similar, given that it is unlikely that the experience of the replay is qualitatively identical with the original experience.

In this section, I have argued that there are pleasurable experiences which have intrinsic temporal shapes, such as the pleasure in listening to a song, and that attributing SM motivation to pleasures that are taken in those experiences conflicts with the way in which they unfold over time and have their natural endpoint. This fourth challenge to the SM is a bit different from the previous two, in that it does not merely entail that attributing self-maintenance motivation to pleasure is a redundant hypothesis. Instead, it appeals to the idea that attributing self-maintenance motivation conflicts with the nature of some kinds of pleasure, namely, those to which their specific temporal shape is essential.

There is one more possible way out for a proponent of SM assumption. They could claim that intrinsically temporal pleasurable experiences do not constitute a counterexample because they are cases where one is motivated to maintain the experience of listening to a particular passage or to the song overall, but that motivation is just defeated by some other countervailing motivation. If that were the case, the present challenge could be dismissed just appealing to the idea that SM motivation is defeasible. As I underlined in the introduction, cases where other motivations that run against SM win out do not constitute a counterexample to SM assumption because SM motivation is meant to be defeasible. In the case of a pleasure in passage₁, that defeating motivation would be SM motivation to maintain the experience of passage₂; in the case of pleasure in passage₂, that countervailing motivation would be SM motivation to maintain the experience of passage₃, etc. In the case of pleasure in the song as a whole, the defeating motivation would originate in something else, say, in the pleasure of fulfilment after the song ends, or something like that.

I grant that there probably are cases of music experience where pleasure in an earlier passage continues to motivate attending to it (in memory, for example) despite the fact that the earlier passage has made way to the later one. In such cases, it makes sense to think that the pleasure in the earlier passage motivates maintaining the experience of it and competes with the motivation that the later passage provides. However, this kind of competition does not seem to be something that applies to experience of music across the board. The proponent of SM assumption is forced to make exactly such a general claim. I find it implausible that in all cases of intrinsically temporal pleasure, the relevant experience is such that there is a competition between the SM motivation and countervailing motivations, such that in the majority of cases, the latter win out. One would expect that this competition has an introspectable signature. This expectation is not met in the ordinary music experience, however.¹⁶

3 Concluding thoughts

In this paper I argued that self-maintenance assumption that some theories of pleasure and positive affect have been taking for granted is false. Pleasure can dissociate from wanting, different kinds of pleasure have different future-oriented functional

¹⁶ In principle, one could dismiss introspection entirely as a source of evidence. This, however, seems to be a move that most authors who work on pleasure would deem unpalatable.

profiles, at least some of which contradict the self-maintenance assumption, and the assumption is phenomenologically implausible, at least if it is generalized to all pleasures.

The rejection of SM implies that those theories that have treated it as an explanandum that any satisfactory theory of positive affect should explain lose one of the legs that they are standing on.¹⁷ In addition, given that different pleasures seem to motivate different things – what r-pleasure motivates one to do, for instance, is very different from the motivational profile of dynamic pleasures – the discussion in this paper warrants the thought that we should give up the assumption that there is a type of functional profile that is shared by all pleasures. Given that we can distinguish between different kinds of pleasure with different kinds of functional profiles, there is some reason to suspect that what pleasure motivates varies quite radically across contexts. Just like the motivational structure of thirst is multifaceted (see Fulkerson, 2021), so is that of pleasure.¹⁸

But why have so many people, both philosophers and psychologists, found self-maintenance assumption so plausible? I conclude with a speculative answer to that question. My suggestion is that the assumption reflects intuitions that pleasure is intrinsically good and that intrinsically good things deserve maintaining. Those two intuitions are arguably quite robust and they color our commonsense understanding of the nature of pleasure. However, to take pleasure to be self-maintaining is to project evaluative judgments onto descriptive facts. If my guess is on the right track, SM assumption is just a natural, yet false, outcome of people's normative intuitions regarding the value of pleasure. Further inquiry into this explanation will be left for another occasion.

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Conflict of interest The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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¹⁷ I should stress here that the rejection of SM does not imply that pleasures couldn't be intrinsically motivating. It is perfectly consistent with the idea that pleasure motivates world-directed activities, for instance, or that their motivational effects depend on the context.

¹⁸ "I argue that thirst motivates in multiple ways, and that no single explanatory mechanism fully captures its motivational force. The motivational power of thirst is not the result of any simple, unitary power, but occurs through the flexible aggregation of multiple motivational constituents." (Fulkerson, 2021: 2).

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