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Why Take Painkillers?

David Bain, Nous 2017

Evaluativism

1) Your being in pain consists in your undergoing an interoceptive experience (the pain) that represents bodily damage.

2) Your pains being *unpleasant* consists in its additionally representing that damage as *bad for you* (2).

The evaluativist needs the unpleasantness of pain to be (or generate) a *good reason* to stop or mitigate the pain *itself*. According to evaluativists the unpleasantness of pain supplies good reasons to stop the pain because of its evaluative content, i.e. its representing the badness-for-you of bodily damage.

Normative condition:

Being in unpleasant pain could consist in being in state ϕ only if being in state ϕ is, in the relevant cases, non-instrumentally bad for its subject.

Self-elimination condition:

Being in unpleasant pain could consist in being in state ϕ only if being in state ϕ could, in the relevant cases, itself motivate actions aimed at minimising the subject's unpleasant pain.

Pain is not unpleasant in so far as it represents bodily damage. Pain is unpleasant in so far as it represents bodily damage as bad for you.

Evaluativists explain or account for the unpleasantness of pain in terms of this evaluative content: the badness-for-you of damage in a given body part.

But why should representing bodily damage as bad for you itself be bad for you? That is, why should unpleasantness itself be a bad state to be in, such that we have good reasons not to be in that state?

Bain considers and rejects several proposals to explain the badness of the unpleasantness of pain. He then proposes a perceptual strategy.

Instrumentalism

Forwarded by Martinez (2015), according to this account unpleasant pains are instrumentally bad for you because of their intrusiveness. They interfere with your plans and goals. They prevent you from doing certain things, or doing them to your satisfaction.

The unpleasant pain inserts into your motivation set a goal (to minimize the represented bodily damage), which in turn interferes with goals you rank highly.

Bain's objection: many things, including pleasures or silly superstitions, can also insert goals into our motivational set, that doesn't make them bad for us. Momentary pains also seem to be bad whether or not they are intrusive.

Second order desire (SOD) views

Second-order desire view (SOD):

(1) Your being in pain consists in your undergoing an interoceptive experience (the pain) that represents bodily damage.

(2) Your pain's being unpleasant consists in your having an intrinsic desire that it (the pain) not occur (7).

SOD views and evaluativism agree on (1) but disagree on what makes pain unpleasant. For SOD views, what makes pain unpleasant is an intrinsic desire for the pain experience not to occur (“anti-pain desires”).

Two SOD strategies to explain the badness of unpleasant pain

Desire Strategy: combines the unpleasantness of pain being constituted by an anti-pain desire and “(b) narrow-scope Humeanism: that if S has an anti-x desire, then it is pro tanto non-instrumentally bad for S that x obtain (7).

Bain’s objection: the desire strategy misallocates the badness of unpleasant pain. It is the *unpleasantness* of the pain that makes unpleasant pain bad, not the pain itself.

Desire-frustration strategy: combines the unpleasantness of pain being constituted by an anti-pain desire and “(b) wide scope Humeanism: that it is pro tanto non-instrumentally bad for S that S have an anti-x desire while x obtains (7).

Bain’s objection: Bain argues this is even less plausible than the desire strategy. It makes it irrational to want to end a pain, or remove a source of pain, in a hypothetical scenario with “anti-desire pills.”

First order desire views (FOD)

First-order desire view (FOD)

(1) Your being in pain consists in your undergoing an interoceptive experience (the pain) that represents bodily damage.

(2) Your pain being unpleasant consists in your having an experiencebased intrinsic desire that *that bodily damage* (represented by the pain) not obtain (10).

Bain discusses multiple strategies that try to show how FOD explains the badness of unpleasant pain.

Since FOD is an anti-damage rather than an anti-pain view, it is susceptible to the following objection Bain brings up:

Pain Illusion. You have an intensely unpleasant pain in your foot. But there is no damage in that foot. Rather, the unpleasant pain is illusory, caused by some central neuropathy (11).

The task for FOD is to explain how the unpleasantness of pain can be bad for you in a way that sidesteps problems caused by the pain illusion case.

Explanatory strategies of FOD

Claim (i) remains the same throughout:

FOD: Your unpleasant pain comprises a damage-representing experience plus an anti-damage desire

Believed-desire frustration: “Your unpleasant pain is non-instrumentally bad for you when and because you believe that desire to be frustrated”

Bain’s objection: you can come to know that the damage you believed was there was not in fact there. The anti-damage desire then evaporates. But the pain’s unpleasantness presumably would not.

Experienced desire-frustration: (ii) “Your unpleasant pain’s non-instrumental *badness* for you consists in your having an anti-damage desire while experiencing damage as obtaining”

Bain’s objection: there are cases, for instance visual illusions, where one experiences a state one desires not to be in but not actually be in those states.

Experienced desire-frustration (wide-scope) :(ii) Your unpleasant pain is non-instrumentally bad for you when and because you experience that the damage is *unwanted-by-you*, or experience that the damage *frustrates a desire of yours*.

Bain’s objection: locates the badness of unpleasant pain in a perhaps unnecessary additional condition, frustrating a desire not to be in an unwanted state.

Better FOD: “Your having an unpleasant pain consists in your having an experience representing an instance of damage as frustrating-a-desire-of-yours (16)”

Bain’s objection: a frustration relation might be too higher order, or at least unnecessarily so.

Best FOD: “Your having an unpleasant pain consists in your having an experience representing an instance of damage as bad for you, where something’s instantiating the relevant sort of badness-for-you is a matter of its frustrating an intrinsic desire of yours.”

Bain’s objection: this may end up being too evaluativist for FOD theorists. It locates the badness of unpleasant pain in its evaluative content. Therefore FOD view fail to account for the badness of unpleasant pain without devolving into a desire-based Evaluativism.

Additionalist second-order desire strategy

(i) Explain pain's unpleasantness in terms of a pain experience's evaluative content.

(ii) Hold that, given narrow-scope Humeanism, your unpleasant pain is bad for you when and because you intrinsically desire not to be undergoing unpleasant pain (17).

Bain's objection: the additionalist condition, a desire not to be undergoing unpleasant pain, fails to consider cases such as masochists as having unpleasant pains that are non-instrumentally bad for them. Bain thinks this is implausible (e.g. babies).

Perceptual Strategy

The perceptual strategy is Bain's preferred explanation of the badness of unpleasant pain. Why thing the unpleasantness (the perceptual experience of bodily damage) of pain is itself bad for you? Bain forwards the following reply:

The Leibniz's Law argument

- (1) Your pain's unpleasantness is bad for you intrinsically.
- (2) Your pain's unpleasantness is a matter of your undergoing a perceptual experience representing a damaged state of your body as bad for you.
- (3) Therefore, your undergoing a perceptual experience representing a damaged state of your body as bad for you is bad for you intrinsically (21).

“What is intrinsically bad for you about your unpleasant pain is its unpleasantness construed as a certain phenomenal feel. And, while evaluativists do indeed explain that feel in terms of the representation of a given bodily state’s badness for you, we invoke not just any representations, but *perceptual* representations (22).”

The unpleasantness of pain is intrinsically bad for you because the perceptual representation has a phenomenal feel of badness. This might seem vague but it is not a unique problem for evaluativism.