

CARRUTHERS (2017)  
'VALENCE AND VALUE'



# Outline of the paper

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**Section 1** sets out the main assumptions and the motivation for theorizing about the nature of valence.

**Section 2** introduces the two possible views on the nature of valence: the *representational view* and the *hedonic view*.

**Section 3** offers arguments against the hedonic view on the basis of considerations about practical reasoning and motivation.

**Section 4** explores the relation between valence and consciousness, offering arguments in favor of the representational view of valence.

# Section 1: Affect, Valence and Motivation

- Valence constitutes a single natural-psychological kind that all affective states have in common. Valence is thus a “common-currency” for decision making.
- Justification:
  - ▣ valence processing is undertaken by a single neurobiological network.
  - ▣ all affective states respond to similar interventions (Tylenol for grief) and are subject to top-down placebo and nocebo effects.

# Valence and Motivation

- Valence is intrinsically motivating and plays a fundamental role in all affective decision making.
- Valence provides the motivational component underlying *all* intentional action.
  - Goals and intentions can motivate independently of *current* affect but are originally formed on the basis of affect.
  - Evaluative *beliefs* don't motivate *directly*, though they can motivate *indirectly* (popularity, being principled, predictive coding, beliefs about preference --> heightened positive affect).

# Section 2: two views of valence applied to pain

- **Representational account:**

“the valence component of pain consists in the nonconceptually-represented *seeming badness* of a concurrent sensation of pain.”

- **Hedonic account:**

“the valence component of pain is a distinct qualitative property that pain *experiences* possess, where this property is, somehow, regarded as intrinsically bad.”

# Valence as a representation

## Why nonconceptual?

- ▣ Only states with nonconceptual content are phenomenally conscious.
- ▣ Valence can then ground our *better/worse* judgments in prospective reasoning (gradations of goodness like gradations of redness).

# Phenomenology and the two views

- Affective states generally seem to be **outward** focused
  - ▣ the threatening aspect of *the bear* seems bad, the *act of eating* the cake seems good, the *state of being* famous seems good.
  - ▣ The representational account coheres nicely with this phenomenology.
  - ▣ The hedonic account gives a less natural, self-focused account: the bear is bad *because* it causes a bad quality to be part of one's experience.

# Phenomenology of Moods

Seems to favor the hedonic account:

“When one is depressed, it might be said, one just *feels bad*, without there being any object or event that one feels bad *about*, or *represents as bad*”

But moods can also have an outward focus:

“It is *the world* that generally seems flat, colorless, and empty of meaning to those suffering from depression”

And even if they aren't outward directed:

“it can be one's bodily state—one's lassitude, one's slumped posture, one's inability to summon the energy to do anything—that is experienced as bad”



# Generalizing

- *Worldly* focused valenced states are better accounted for by the representational view.
  - *Inwardly* focused valenced states can be accounted for by the representational view as evaluations of sensations.
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- In contrast, the hedonic view accounts for *all* valenced states in the same *meta-experiential* way: it is the *experience* of *x* that is valued as good/bad rather than *x itself*.

# A problem for the hedonic account

- The hedonic account requires the experiencer to be sophisticated, to be aware of and evaluate her own experiences.
- This demand suggests creatures with lesser cognitive capacities are unable to experience various affective states and make valence-based judgments.
- But animals and small children seem capable of feeling pain and fear etc., as well as engaging in valence-based prospective planning.

# Pushback and Reply

Hedonic theorists may object:

“Is it the chocolate cake itself that is good, in the first instance, or one’s experience of the chocolate cake?” (Likewise for pains and orgasms.) For there is a natural tendency to respond, “One’s experience of the cake!” (Aydede, 2014).

Reply:

It is true that valence is experience-dependent, it exists as a component of some experience.

So, goodness and badness come as part of the experience of  $x$ , but this doesn’t mean they must be an evaluation of the experience. They can be an evaluation of  $x$ .

# Valence and Consciousness

- In order for valence to serve as a “common currency” for decision making, it must at least sometimes be access-conscious.
- It also seems to be phenomenally conscious.
- Carruthers relies on the “hard problem” thought-experiments to identify and individuate phenomenally conscious states (e.g. *Mary the color scientist*).

- According to Carruthers, “nonconceptual access-conscious content is what constitutes (or at least correlates with) phenomenally conscious experience” (15).
- “Hard problem” thought-experiments such as p-zombies and Mary the color scientist support the role of valence in phenomenal consciousness.
- Both the hedonic and representational accounts of valence agree that valence (can at least be) phenomenally conscious.

# Unconscious qualitative character

- Carruthers argues the hedonic account is committed to the claim that valence is *always* phenomenally conscious since an “unconscious qualitative character” is hard to accept.
- Side bar: We had similar questions with Nelkin (1986) on whether there can't be unconscious sensations.
- Carruthers argues that cognitive scientists assume valence is involved in unconscious brain processing, lending support for the representational over the hedonic account.

# Reducing representations

- Carruthers argues that representationalist accounts fare better than hedonic accounts of valence, since the latter are inconsistent with reductive accounts of phenomenal consciousness.
- Carruthers considers Aydede's (2006) challenge that there doesn't seem to be any natural property which negative valence represents.
- Cutter and Tye (2011) propose harmfulness, a potentially biological property, as what negative valence represents.

# Two problems with Cutter and Tye (2011)

- Caruthers points to two problems with Cutter and Tye's (2011) suggestion:
- 1) Harmfulness doesn't seem to be intrinsically motivating, while negative valence is, and
- 2) Harmfulness does not accord with the unitary account of valence suggested by cognitive science (E.g. there is not harm represented in being in a bad mood).



- If valence is the nonconceptual representation of goodness or badness, and cognitive science suggests valence is a single natural kind, the representationalist owes us an account of what valence represents.
- Informational/externalist approaches seem implausible as there doesn't seem to be a single natural property, for instance, which the badness of pain and fear track.

# Evolutionary approach

- One approach is to claim that what the goodness and badness track is the property of being adaptive or maladaptive, respectively.
- The goodness we represent in tasting sugar, orgasms, and the badness we represent in agonizing pain, fear of bears, etc. are the result of selection pressure.
- This requires a selected effects view of cognitive functions, which can be expanded to include malfunctions (e.g. fear of open spaces).

- The evolutionary approach is not the one preferred by Carruthers.
- Carruthers leaves it open what such an account is, but contends it must provide the correctness-conditions of value representations.
- Carruthers provides one minimalist possibility where “valence represents value correctly just in case it reflects the underlying dispositional properties of one’s affect-generating evaluative mechanisms” (18).