



Pains and Pain Sensations


Nelkin gives an account of pain that separates *having pain sensations* from *being in pain*.

Nelkin rejects the conditional: “one is in pain if one has a pain sensation.” He argues that one can be in pain without having pain sensations, and one can have pain sensations without being in pain.

The Aylon Concern: is this merely a semantic dispute?

Initial defense: many of our concepts suffer from same befuddled intuitions (e.g. meaning)

Substantive defense: pain is normatively consequential: 1) our pain concept can guide “scientifically fruitful” research into pain and associated phenomena and, 2) it matters in our moral lives what we consider pain to be and what kinds of beings we consider capable of pain.



Two facts pull us in different directions on the question of whether sensation and affective-cognitive-behavioral states (“attitudinal states”) can be separated.

Similar behavior suggests similar sensations between humans and nonhuman animals (the eagle swoops down to get the mouse; the cat squeals and runs away when stepped on) Yet humans and nonhuman animals have different neural architectures, suggesting (when combined with a commitment to physicalism) that they have different sensations.

Physicalist commitment: sensations are, or are instantiated by, neural structures.



Nelkin draws an analogy between vision and pain to support his thesis.

Nelkin defends the following thesis:

“The only way to classify sensations as pain sensations is in conjunction with certain affective-cognitive-behavioral states, those I called the "attitudinal" states. Thus, it is the attitudinal states that are primary (139)”

Why think pain is “attitudinal”?

Pain sensations are influenced by highly complex cognitive processes.

Feeling of pain is sensitive to cultural differences.

For people who suffer from chronic pain, bouts of pain can be brought about by stress or worry.

Shock experiment: presence of pain on word list elicits reports of pain.

Reducing peoples worry about pain they are about to experience (dental pain), reduces the intensity of the pain they experience.

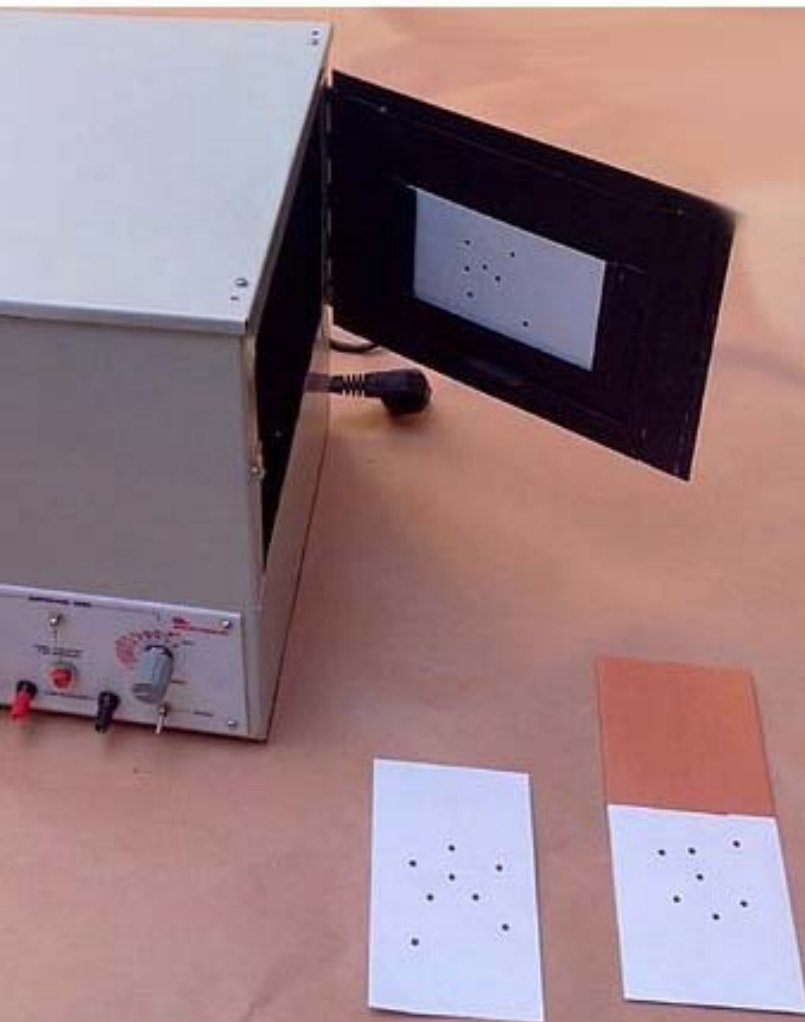
Visual case

Nonhuman animals lack crucial parts of the neural architecture which we know are required for sensations in humans (e.g. neocortex).

In the case of vision, eagles, frogs, flies, etc. have different kinds of “visual” sensations giving rise to the same kind of processing. It is the kind of processing that counts in our judgements about vision.

- E.g. when the frog projects its tongue on a moving red dot, its not making an auditory or tactile judgement but a visual judgement.

“Quite sophisticated visual processing can go on without the existence of visual sensations, and (ii) the only evidence we have for conditions sufficient for the existence of visual sensations when visual judgments are made is provided when people have enough linguistic ability to describe what their visual sensations are (143)”



Support from “blindsight” and “split-brain” patients

Weiskrantz *et al.* (1977) showed individuals lacking visual sensations (due to damage or loss of the striate cortex) are still capable of visual processing.

Split-brain patients claim not to see things in their left field of vision yet grasp objects with their left hand that have been shown to them on a tachistoscope.

These lines of evidence visual processing can occur in the absence of visual sensation.

Analogy to pain

It seems sensation and perception do not form a clean fit. The facts on the ground underdetermine which of the two, sensation or affect-cognition-behavior, to consider the referent of *being in pain*.

Nelkin argues there are *normative* reasons to hold that being in pain is an attitudinal state:

- 1) treating pain as attitudinal is more “unificatory.” Psychologists treat other mental phenomena functionally. We should treat pain as such as well.
- 2) Sorting pain by attitude coheres with more of our intuitions than sorting by sensation.

Moral consideration

It may turn out that animals have very different pain sensations, or none at all. But our concern for them should disregard this empirical possibility. What matters is that animals display the attitudinal states of pain.

Given these considerations, Nelkin argues we should treat pain definitionally as an attitude and not as a sensation.