

Chapter 6

Out of the Harbor

This dissertation is part of a broader project. I believe that by thinking only about pain we can open a new window into many old questions in value theory. This dissertation was focused narrowly on what pain's intrinsic value can show us about the nature of intrinsic value and its bearers. The last chapter completed that project. That was, I think, the first of many of this approach's larger scale payoffs.

I now want to close this thesis by mentioning a few directions in which my conclusions herein might be extended to other issues in normative theory. I won't pursue any of these suggestions — I'll simply list most of them. But I hope that they will be suggestive and thus help place this dissertation in the context of a large and fruitful project.

I'll begin in §6.1 with a quick list of some important issues the conclusions of this dissertation may impact. Then in §6.2 I'll suggest some similarities and differences between the intrinsic values of pain and pleasure, and discuss some of their potential upshots. I'll conclude this chapter and dissertation in §6.3

§6.1

Bigger issues

Throughout this dissertation my arguments have touched on many large issues. Most prominently, I suspect the link I've unearthed between user control

and intrinsic value will be useful in many other debates. Thinking about user control may, for example, get to the heart of certain conceptions of autonomy with implications for topics ranging from free will to paternalism in social policy. Also, if I'm right that the intrinsic value of desire satisfaction usually hinges on the possession of certain kinds of user control, then we will have found a thread connecting two very different kinds of value. That may be significant given the close intuitive link between user control and autonomy, and the traditionally deep tension between those who base all value in desires and those who accord autonomy an independent and fundamental moral significance.

Closer to home, I think that the relationship between user control, autonomy, and pain, take us to the heart of what is distinctively evil about torture. Torture, I suspect, necessarily involves an attempt to exercise user control over another person's thoughts, preferences, desires, or actions. It may therefore be that pain tends to be an effective means to this end because it essentially breaks down the sufferer's user control.¹

I also suspect that my conclusions may be useful in addressing whether normative facts can be reduced to natural facts. For example, some naturalists suppose that pain and pleasure are phenomena where the natural and normative are one. That leads them to suggest that normative facts like 'It's bad that I'm in

¹ Sussman recently published a somewhat similar account in Sussman (2005). Also, roughly this idea appears in Griffin's unpublished manuscript on human rights. His discussion inspired my thought on this topic.

pain' can be reduced to natural facts like 'I'm in pain'. But as we have seen, pain, as it is normatively significant, has its identity in virtue of its being a usurper. For example, we understand which mental states are part of the pain by considering whether they play a role in the usurpation of user control that the pain constitutes. But the usurpation of user control is an essentially normative phenomenon. Thus I suspect that there isn't a viable independent and wholly naturalistic notion of pain to be appealed to for a reduction. That is, if we ignore normative facts, there will be no way of telling which sets of mental states are pains.

These are just a few examples of the larger debates into which this discussion of pain and its intrinsic value may provide some insights. I cannot say more about any of these here. Instead, I want to conclude by sketching some possible relationships between pain and pleasure. Pain and pleasure are usually assumed to be fellow travelers in normative theory. Most writers assume that whatever theory covers pain and its intrinsic value will be easily transposable onto pleasure, and vice-versa. But the results of this dissertation may provide reason to doubt this. Thus I want to mention a few ways in which I suspect that they are different and how these differences might have some significant implications for normative theory.

§6.2

Pleasure

I shall briefly sketch two topics in the relationship between pleasure and pain. First, I believe my account strongly suggests that hedonistic theories of value — that pleasure and pain are the only things intrinsically valuable — are non-starters. Second, I shall consider some differences between the intrinsic values of pain and pleasure, and their implications.

6.2.1 Hedonism

From Epicurus on, hedonistic theories about value have been perennially attractive. For one, these theories provide a clear and unambiguous foundation for moral theory. Bentham famously began *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* with

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.²

Similarly, in *Utilitarianism*, Mill writes

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure; by unhappiness pain, and the privation of pleasure.³

² Bentham (1781), 14.

³ Mill (1863), 10.

More generally, all hedonistic theories of value seem to hold some version of the following two theses:

HT: Pleasure and pain are the only phenomena with non-derivative value.
and

J: All evaluative justification ends in a non-derivative value.
My conclusions about the nature of pain and its value show that HT is false and cast serious doubt on the tenability of any hedonistic theory of value.

The argument is straightforward. At least one of pain's twin intrinsic values is a derivative value (see §5.1.3). On my view, pain is intrinsically bad in one way because it is the undermining of certain intrinsic goods. Thus there is a list of intrinsic goods threatened by pain. These goods will either be non-derivatively good themselves or grounded in non-derivative goods. Let,

γ = The set of non-derivative goods threatened by pain.
I have suggested that γ includes more than just pleasure. I have often invoked goods like autonomy, desire-satisfaction, deep personal relationships, and well-being. Hence I have claimed that the intrinsic value of pain depends on non-derivative values other than pleasure. Therefore, if pain is intrinsically bad, pleasure is not the only non-derivative value. HT is false.

But this argument is incomplete. Throughout this dissertation, I've avoided substantive commitments to what intrinsic goods there are. I've only claimed that some members of the ultimate list of intrinsic goods will appear in

γ . The present attack on hedonistic theories of value assumes that pleasure is not the only good in γ . Thus this objection must await an independent argument that something other than pleasure is intrinsically good. Moreover, this suggests that this objection to HT is nothing more than the standard attempt to rebut hedonism by arguing that pleasure is not the only intrinsic good. That would have no interesting connection to the theses of this dissertation.

But while my argument is incomplete in this way, my claims about pain have already revealed an important conclusion. The hedonist is mistaken about her own view when she claims that pleasure and pain have non-derivative value. At least one of pain's intrinsic values is a derivative value. Therefore the hedonist cannot hold HT. Instead, she must hold:

HT*: Pleasure is the only phenomenon with non-derivative intrinsic value. Combined with J, this is the claim that all value derives from the goodness of pleasure.⁴ The purview of this dissertation prevents me from evaluating this claim. Nonetheless, we have seen that hedonism as it is normally conceived — via HT — is too capacious. Therefore, if my claims about pain and its intrinsic value are correct, hedonistic theories of value can only claim that mankind has just one sovereign master: pleasure.

⁴ The hedonist will have to somehow keep the disvalue of the absence of pleasure separate from the intrinsic badness of pain. The intrinsic badness of pain would be grounded in its being, to some degree, the privation of the possibility of pleasure.

6.2.2 Pleasure and an attraction theory?

Let me change gears now to consider what evaluatively significant similarities there are between the claims I've made about pain and their counterparts with pleasure. We've seen that pains have two intrinsic values. Thus in §6.2.2 I'll focus on the metaphysics of pain and the aversion theory, and how they might relate to pleasure's metaphysics and intrinsic goodness. In §6.2.3 I'll make some comments about how pain's intrinsic evil as a privation relates to the intrinsic value of pleasure and some implications that might have.

In Sentry and Ascetic** we saw that, in certain contexts, some pleasures can be intrinsically bad as usurpations of user control. This is enough to show that we should reject the kernel view of pleasure and move to a composite view. That is, a pleasure is not merely a pleasurable sensation kernel but rather the composite of a sensation kernel and a reaction to that kernel. In §3.2.3 I argued that adopting a composite view for pain presses us to reject the existing accounts of pain's intrinsic value and adopt the aversion theory. In this section, I want to consider whether adopting the composite view for pleasures presses us to adopt an attraction theory which makes a diverse reaction component the source of pleasure's intrinsic goodness.

My argument from the composite view to the aversion theory had several steps. Here I'll just consider whether one of them holds for pleasure. I argued that one way context affects pains is by determining the constituents of their

reaction components. Because it is the beginning of a long and painful ordeal, the reaction component of the pain in Operation contains an element of fear that is absent when I slice through the tomato into my hand. I'll now suggest that contexts sometimes affect the identity of the elements in a pleasure's reaction component. That will in turn suggest that the composite view of pleasure pushes us toward an attraction theory of pain's intrinsic goodness.

With some pleasures, it's clear that their reaction components are affected by context. The joy accompanying the achievement of a lifelong goal or the birth of one's child, or the pleasure of some orgasms, may involve very complex reaction components and be affected in this way. Though it may seem that such cases are few and far between.

Let me thus look to a category of pleasures where we would expect to find contexts having an impact on the identity and value of pleasures. The higher pleasures — the pleasures of intellect, refined sensibility, et cetera — and how they differ from the lower pleasures seems a good place to look for contexts impacting the constituents of the reaction components.⁵ Consider

Oenophile: Ruth and I are both served a fine Claret. She is a dedicated oenophile. My sensibilities are relatively unrefined. We both report that it is the best wine we've ever had.

⁵ See for example Mill (1863), 8ff. In what follows I'm going to ignore the deep and central question of the connection between perception via refined tastes and higher pleasures. This may be another impediment to an attraction theory of pleasure following from the composite view.

As an experienced oenophile, Ruth's palate and vocabulary are much more sophisticated than mine. Where I taste only ripe fruit, she tastes strawberries, raspberries, cassis, dark chocolate, and a hint of fig. Because she can find these in the wine and appreciate how they play off of each other, her pleasure is more refined. Indeed, her pleasure may also be influenced by her knowledge of the varietal, the winemaker's style, the circumstances of the particular vintage, the expected terroir, and the history of the chateau. We should thus say that her pleasure is intrinsically better than mine.

It seems likely that our pleasures differ in their sensory and reaction components. The question is whether the reaction component of her higher pleasure has elements which my lower pleasure lacks.

I suspect that these higher and lower pleasures do differ in the constituents of their reaction components. We both like the sensation, want it to continue, find it pleasant, et cetera. Of course it may be that these reactions are much stronger in her. It also seems plausible that the sensation component of her pleasure may be richer than mine. That may be partially the product of her training in differentiating the components of the taste and her knowledge of what to look for. Indeed, we can imagine that states like fear affect the reaction components of pleasures. Suppose I know that the flavonoids in a particular kind of wine will give me a particularly intense hangover in the morning. When you

and I drink a bottle of this wine, my pleasure may contain some background dread of the hangover to come. Consequently, my pleasure may be significantly less than it would have been if I didn't know its aftereffects.⁶

With pain, the argument from the claim that the reaction components differ in their constituents to the aversion theory was somewhat complex. Thus there may be additional obstacles to showing that when we accept the composite view of pleasure, we should adopt an attraction theory of pleasure's intrinsic value and reject the existing accounts.

6.2.3 An analogue to the privation of user control?

Whether or not we are led to accept an attraction theory of pleasure, pain also has a second intrinsic value. I think its clear that pleasure has no analogue of the privation of user control. Thus I want to briefly make clear why that is and then suggest one potential upshot of that.

Pain is intrinsically bad as a privation of user control. But pleasure has no necessary relationship to user control. Increasing the amount of pleasure one feels does not necessarily lead to more user control. Of course, it is true that getting more pleasure from a task often does lead, for example, to an increased ability to focus on it. But it is also true that feeling a great deal of pleasure often involves a loss of user control. That shows that there is no necessary relationship

⁶ Larry Temkin gave me this example. He also guided me away from several serious errors in this and the next section.

between increases in pleasure and increases of user control. Moreover, we have seen that while increases in user control are often useful, they are not always normatively significant. Multitasking is not intrinsically good (see §4.3). Therefore there is no necessary connection between pleasure and user control related values.

Hence pain has an additional intrinsic value which has no analogue in pleasure. Let me now consider one possible implication of this result.

Acknowledging that pain has two intrinsic values likely requires some revision in any hedonic calculus. I'll now suggest that one revision this result makes possible may help utilitarians account for the alleged moral priority of relieving pain. I'll begin by sketching a central question which will affect any revision of the hedonic calculus to accommodate the dual intrinsic values of pain.

I have said nothing about how we are to evaluate the all things considered value of a pain. That is, I have said nothing about how we weigh the badness of the aversion and the badness of the usurpation. Do we simply add them so that a pain with $\text{bad}_{\text{usurpation}}=25$ and $\text{bad}_{\text{aversion}}=30$ figures in our normative calculations as bad_{55} ? Or is the relationship more complex? Perhaps the usurpation acts as a multiplier on the aversion, or vice-versa. Or perhaps the aversion's badness is somehow capped in our all things considered judgment whereas the usurpation

has no limit. There are several important and interesting issues here which I cannot take up.

But even without answering this question, I think this suggests that the two intrinsic values of pain will make pains of moderate intensity more normatively significant than pleasures of greater intensity. Again this is just a suspicion and its tenability will depend on many further issues —including how we evaluate the all things considered value of pain. But if it is correct, it may have several interesting and important upshots. I'll mention just one here.

I am not a utilitarian. Nonetheless, I think this result may provide a way of reforming the utilitarian's hedonic calculus to deal with the common intuition that we ought to prioritize the alleviation of pain over the provision of even greater amounts of pleasure. Let's take a very simpleminded utilitarian view on which

- (1) The best outcome is the one with the greatest amount of overall utility.
- (2) The overall utility of an outcome is the amount of pleasure minus the amount of pain present.
- (3) The overall utility of an outcome where the pleasure is $good_n$ and the pain is bad_{0-n} is 0. That is, units of pleasure and units of pain count equally in the calculation of overall utility.

The problem stems from (3). The supposition that units of pleasure and pain count equally in the calculations of overall utility seems to conflict with the belief that we ought to prioritize the alleviation of pain over the promotion of pleasure.

Recognizing that pain is intrinsically bad in two ways while pleasure is only intrinsically good in one way may provide a solution. Let's consider a very simple example with several crucial suppositions.

Machine: Scarlet and Violet are hooked up to our machine. On its face are two dials. Each turn of the left dial gives Scarlet one additional unit of pleasure. Each turn of the right dial gives Violet one additional unit of pain. We have calibrated the dials so that each unit represents the smallest noticeable increase from the previous amount of pleasure or pain.

Suppose that each turn of the pleasure dial creates an attraction that is one unit greater than before; each turn of the pain dial creates an aversion that is one unit worse than before. Thus each turn of the pleasure dial creates one additional unit of utility; each turn of the pain dial creates one additional unit of disutility. Also, suppose that the usurpation does not become bad until we reach 10 on the pain dial. Finally, suppose that the all things considered badness of a pain is the sum of the badness of the aversion and the badness of the usurpation. All of these assumptions are at least controversial —some surely false because they greatly oversimplify the computations. Nonetheless, this is enough to sketch the structure of a plausible response to the intuition that we must prioritize pain.

Given these assumptions, the dial settings and the overall utility are:

Table 1

Pleasure dial	Pain dial	Good	Bad (aversion)	Bad (usurpation)	Overall utility
0	0	0	0	0	0

1	1	1	-1	0	0
2	2	2	-2	0	0
3	3	3	-3	0	0
...
9	9	9	-9	0	0
10	10	10	-10	-1	-1
11	11	11	-11	-2	-2
12	12	12	-12	-3	-3
13	13	13	-13	-4	-4
...

Thus if pleasure and pain count equally in the calculation of overall utility, we should be indifferent between the settings 0/0, 1/1, 2/2...9/9. Each of those has exactly 0 overall utility. But when we turn the dial to 10/10, we've suddenly created negative overall utility. While the values of the aversion and attraction continue to cancel each other out, the additional badness of the usurpation kicks in and makes the pain worse. Thus the pleasure dial setting 17 is equivalent to the pain dial setting 13. That is, we can only be justified in turning the pain dial to 13 if we also turn the pleasure dial to 17 or greater. That shows that we must

give Scarlet a significantly larger amount of pleasure to balance out the lesser amount of pain we give to Violet.

Now, without a sense of how to evaluate the all things considered badness of pain, it is hard to see whether this result is at all significant. In this example, the disparities between the pleasure and pain's values are minor enough that it may not seem much help in avoiding the problem for (3). But the basic structure is here for a response. Suppose instead that a pain's all things considered value is obtained by multiplying the badness of the aversion and the badness of the usurpation. The relevant values would thus be:

Table 2

Pleasure Dial	Pain dial	Good	Bad (aversion)	Bad (usurpation)	Overall utility
10	10	10	-10	-1	0
11	11	11	-11	-2	-11
12	12	12	-12	-3	-24
13	13	13	-13	-4	-39
14	14	14	-14	-5	-56

This begins to make it more plausible that the additional value of pain can help the utilitarian answer the intuition that we ought to prioritize alleviating pain over providing pleasure. She can claim that we have been overlooking the

fact that pain has a second intrinsic value. When we turn the pain dial from 13 to 14 we create a pain that involves a slightly greater aversion and is thereby slightly intrinsically worse. But when we add in the second intrinsic value of pain we see that even a pain which is only a little bit worse in terms of the aversion can be much worse all things considered. Thus with a pain and pleasure whose aversion and attraction cancel out, the pain can still be much worse. Thus, for example, it is only justifiable to turn the pain dial to 14 if the pleasure dial is turned to 56 or higher. This is a fairly striking result. In terms of the aversion, the pain produced by setting 14 isn't very bad, but we have to give Scarlet a pleasure that involves an attraction that is almost four times stronger than the aversion in Violet's pain to justify that balance of pain and pleasure.

Of course, this argument depends on several controversial assumptions and depends on an account of how we evaluate the all things considered value of pain. Nonetheless, it does suggest a way for a utilitarian to modify the hedonic calculus to answer the intuition that we ought to prioritize pain over pleasure.

6.2.4 Pleasure and pain

In this section I've made three claims about pleasure and pain's intrinsic values. Because pain has two intrinsic values while pleasure has only one, we have seen that hedonism, as it is normally put forward, is likely false. And we've seen that the dual values of pain impact our normative thought about how we

weigh pleasure and pain. But we've also seen that the relationship between pleasure's intrinsic goodness and its context may mirror the relationship we found with pain. That suggests that we should reject the existing theories and accept a new account of pleasure's intrinsic goodness.

All three of these claims are somewhat tentative. They all depend on further issues beyond the purview of this thesis. But, even if they aren't born out in the end, the fact that we must seriously address them is itself important. We have seen that we cannot simply assume that what goes for pleasure will go for pain. However, in the course of my research, I have yet to see anyone question whether we can smoothly transpose claims about pain and its intrinsic value onto pleasure, and vice-versa. For example, even Sidgwick, one of the greatest writers on hedonic theories of value, writes that

In dealing with this point, and in the rest of the hedonistic discussion, it will be convenient for the most part to speak of pleasure only, assuming that pain may be regarded as the negative quantity of pleasure, and that accordingly any statements made with respect to pleasure may be at once applied, by obvious changes of phrase, to pain.⁷

But we have now seen this assumption conceals several live issues. Indeed, to address the three claims of this section, we must give serious thought to the relationship between pleasure and pain — the relationship that was supposed to be transparent.

⁷ Sidgwick (1884), 125.

On reflection, I personally find the silence on the assumption that we can seamlessly transpose between pleasure and pain rather surprising. Apart from my arguments in this thesis, it just seems, at least to me, that there is a gap here to be closed. Though they are both in our broad sense sensations and both exemplars of intrinsic value, pain just seems to have a particular evil that has no analogue in pleasure (cases like Ascetic** notwithstanding). I think I have identified that difference in this project. Pains are usurpers. They undermine our autonomy. They alienate us from our desires. They destroy who and what we are. That has no analogue in even the most rapturous joy or most intense orgasm. Pleasure can certainly inundate a person's world, but it doesn't take it away.

§6.3

Coda

I admit that many of my conclusions in this dissertation are radical and counterintuitive. I have claimed, *inter alia*, that pains are not what we think, that all existing accounts of their intrinsic badness are wrong, that they have two distinct intrinsic values, that a privation theory of their intrinsic badness is correct, that this privation is found in their phenomenology, and that intrinsic value can have properties no one has thought to combine. Radical and counterintuitive are usually okay in small doses, but in this dissertation the dosage may seem lethal.

I suspect that much of what is worrisome here is due to the shadow of the kernel view. All of these conclusions flow from the rejection of the kernel view. If pain kernels are not what we care about from the normative standpoint, then we can take a much more capacious view of what pains are and what we are referring to when we say that a pain ‘hurts’. That opens the door to progress and the conclusions of this dissertation.

Several years ago, in the middle of a judo match, I broke my collarbone. As is often the case with severe trauma, the immediate pain was surprisingly mild. In many parts of this dissertation I have been painting a picture of what I felt for just a few moments when I later attempted to get out of the car in the hospital parking lot. It’s true that my memories may be tainted by theory; and it has been several years since the accident. But it was not me whose body twisted and crumpled or me who shrieked and screamed.

As philosophers we must follow our arguments where they take us. But we must also be conscious of when they’ve taken us over a cliff. I, of course, believe my arguments. But it is my reflections on countless stubbed toes, headaches, and memories of pains past, as well as my research into pain science and the depictions of pain in literature, which convince me that we are still on the right side of the precipice.

Finally, even if some of my arguments have taken us astray, I hope that this dissertation's approach has been suggestive. Working on pain, and just pain, can, I think, keep us close to the foundations of normative theory and illuminate many of their joints and fissures. Pain is both a window into and a microcosm of much of value theory. After all, if anything is intrinsically bad, pain is.