

Chapter 1

Introduction

If anything is intrinsically bad, pain is. Even the staid skeptic should accept this conditional. For anyone who cares about the nature of value, consequentialist, Kantian, virtue ethicist, and even those who deny the intelligibility of mind-independent value, an account of the putative intrinsic badness of pain is compulsory. If one believes that moral evaluations attach only to agents, she must explain why pains, which seem to be mental states, are bad. If she holds that nothing is intrinsically bad, she must account for the seeming wrongness of my stomping on your gouty foot. And if she agrees that pains are, in fact, intrinsically bad, she must at least say what she means, if not why this is the case.

I believe all existing accounts of pain's intrinsic badness are false. Their mistake has two sources. First, these views assume a virtually universal but false conception of what pains are. Second, accounts of pain's intrinsic badness are usually developed in tandem with accounts of the intrinsic goodness of pleasure.

But there are some important disconnects between the source of pain's intrinsic badness and the source of pleasure's intrinsic goodness.

At the least, assuming that we can seamlessly transpose claims about pain's intrinsic badness to pleasure's intrinsic goodness, and vice-versa, obscures what is distinctive about pain and its intrinsic badness. Thus in this dissertation I shall focus solely on understanding pain and its intrinsic badness. This will yield new insights that extend to other areas of value theory. In particular, I shall argue that when we correctly understand the nature of pain and its intrinsic badness we must revise the existing theories of the nature of intrinsic value.

In this chapter, I'll sketch the main claims and arguments of this dissertation. I'll start with a quick overview and then sketch the content of each chapter. Before I begin, one note about terminology. I shall use 'intrinsic value' and 'value' to include the positive, neutral, and negative valences — thus pain's intrinsic badness will be an intrinsic value. Many prefer to reserve 'value' for the positive valence, and use 'disvalue' for the negative. But the difference in terminology does not reflect a substantive difference.

§1.1

Synopsis

Let me begin with a quick synopsis of the arc of this dissertation and its main claims. I'll then discuss each chapter in a bit more detail.

Nearly everyone believes that pain is just a sensation. More specifically, they believe that everything normatively significant about a pain is contained in the way it hurts. The nature of a stubbed toe's pain is exhausted by the way it stings and throbs. This is the kernel view of what pains are.

Pains certainly involve a particular kind of sensation. But I believe that the sensation is not all that is normatively significant in pain. Pains are reliably accompanied by affective states such as fear, conative states such as the urge to flee, cognitive states such as the pain's perceived meaning (for example, the way a cancer patient's headache throbs *memento mori*), and many others. I believe these can affect a pain's intrinsic value. I also believe that they are themselves intrinsic properties of the pain. If I'm right, we must reject the kernel view.

Once we reject the kernel view and take on a view which allows these affective, conative, desiderative, and cognitive states to be part of the pain, I think we are led to reject all of the traditional accounts of pain's intrinsic badness.

The traditional accounts of pain's intrinsic badness fall into four families. On dislike theories, pains are bad because they are disliked; on mental state theories, pains are bad because they are unpleasant; on motivation theories, pains are bad because they involve the urge to flee; and, on representation theories, pains are bad because they represent bodily damage.

Each of these theories select a very narrow set of the elements which compose a pain and anoint it as the source of pain's intrinsic badness. The dislike theory seizes on the desiderative components, while the motivation theory seizes on the conative components. But since all the components of a pain affect its intrinsic value, each of these theories has only captured part of the truth. Thus we should reject them in favor of an aversion theory on which all the components of a pain together form the source of its intrinsic value.

I believe that many pains have two distinct intrinsic values with different sources. Pain's second intrinsic value lies in the way its presence makes the intrinsically good impossible. This is because pain threatens a particular kind of self-control which is a necessary condition of intrinsic goods like autonomy, deep personal relationships, well-being, and having one's desires satisfied. For example, autonomy requires some measure of control over the train of one's thoughts and the movements of her body. Thus with many pains a person in pain is ipso facto not fully autonomous. That makes pain intrinsically bad.

The conclusion that pain is intrinsically bad in these two ways has important implications throughout value theory. In this dissertation I explore just one: its implications for our understanding of the nature of intrinsic value.

On my account, pain's intrinsic value depends on its relational properties and derives its value from other things of intrinsic value. But insofar as it undermines intrinsic goods, it also has its value essentially. This is incompatible with all of the existing accounts of the nature of intrinsic value.

§1.2

Overview of chapters

These are the main claims of this dissertation. Let me now sketch each of the chapters and their arguments in a bit more detail. I'll take each chapter in order.

1.2.1 Intrinsic value, pain, and method

Chapter two is in some ways more of an introduction than the present chapter. It sets the background and conceptual terrain for this dissertation.

I begin with some claims about my methodology and the general aims of my project. The distinctive feature of my approach is that, unlike other projects, I focus solely on issues in value theory as they pertain to pain. This project revolves around one question: Why is pain intrinsically bad? I shall address this question without also discussing any other exemplar of intrinsic value. I shall ignore, for example, the intrinsic goodness of pleasure.

This attempt to address pain's intrinsic value in isolation faces a conceptual impediment from the outset. Suppose we believe that the intrinsic value of x is the value which depends solely on x 's non-relational properties.

Being disliked is a relational property. Therefore pain cannot be intrinsically bad because it is disliked —the dislike theory is false. We have thus ruled an intuitively attractive account of pain's intrinsic value out of court by our definition of intrinsic value.

This is problematic in several ways. To mention just one, my project aims to gain insight into the nature of intrinsic value from an account of why pain is intrinsically bad. But this seems to show that we must understand the nature of intrinsic value before we can address pain's intrinsic badness.

To avoid this and other problems, my approach has two twists. Both require a bit of philosophical apparatus, but we can set that aside for now. Instead, I'll just sketch their central features. First, the scope of my project and its conclusions is narrower than I have so far suggested. Instead of reaching conclusions about the nature of intrinsic value in general, my conclusions will only apply to the nature of pain's intrinsic value. For example, instead of asking whether intrinsic value can depend on non-relational properties, I shall only ask whether pain's intrinsic value depends on non-relational properties. I shall not

assume that the answer for pain will entail answers for more general debates about the nature of intrinsic value. That is, I shall not assume that my conclusions herein can be extrapolated to, say, the intrinsic goodness of pleasure. This may seem to greatly diminish the significance of my project. But the fruits of this dissertation will show otherwise.

Second, with the scope of my project thusly restricted, the discussion of why pain is intrinsically bad can be made into a proxy for the more general debates about the nature of pain's intrinsic value. That will avoid the problem above of needing to decide on the nature of intrinsic value before starting out on pain's intrinsic badness. I shall take the existing theories which purport to explain pain's intrinsic badness at face value as theories of intrinsic value. Thus we need not worry ahead of time about whether, for example, intrinsic value can depend on relational properties. Instead, we can wait to see whether the best theory of pain's intrinsic badness invokes relational properties. If it does, then intrinsic value, in the case of pain, can depend on relational properties.

The remainder of chapter two prepares the ground for the rest of the dissertation. I first set out the kernel view of pain and discuss how it fits with existing views. I then introduce the existing theories of pain's intrinsic badness and place them in a somewhat novel taxonomy to aid my discussion in chapter three.

1.2.2 Contexts vs. kernels

In chapter three I argue that the kernel view is false and that it should be replaced with a composite view on which a pain is a composite of a painful sensation kernel and a reaction to the kernel. I then argue that adopting a composite view implies that the existing theories of pain's intrinsic badness are false. I conclude by setting out my aversion theory of pain's intrinsic badness.

I attack the kernel view by arguing that two qualitatively identical pains can have different intrinsic values in different contexts. While any change in value between the cases would do, I set out some examples in which a pain is intrinsically good in one case and intrinsically bad in another. Supposing that there can be no difference in intrinsic value without a difference in intrinsic

properties, this shows that the two pains have different normatively significant intrinsic properties. Since the kernel view claims that the sensation kernel contains all of a pain's normatively significant properties, this is incompatible with the kernel view. We should therefore reject the kernel view.

We should replace the kernel view with a composite view of the nature of pain. As indicated, on this view a pain is a composite of a painful sensation kernel and a reaction to that kernel. This reaction can be influenced by the context in which the pain occurs. For example, the fact that I know my stomachache is the product of cancer makes the reaction much more negative than it would be if I merely had indigestion.

I then turn to what constitutes the pain's reaction component. I argue that the phenomena which affect a pain's intrinsic value, such as fear, meaning, desires, beliefs, attention, depression, anxiety, and many others, are themselves intrinsic properties of the reaction component. For example, suppose you must undergo a lengthy unanesthetized surgery. The first incision causes a sensation kernel that is qualitatively identical with the sensation kernel I experience when I

slice through a tomato into my hand. But our pains are very different. For one, the reaction component of your pain contains a great deal of fear which the reaction component of my pain lacks. Your pain is thus intrinsically much worse than mine by virtue of the fear it contains.

On first blush, the composite view seems to fit nicely with a dislike theory of pain's intrinsic badness. Combining the two yields the plausible claim that pain is bad because the sensation kernel is disliked and that the dislike is itself an intrinsic property of the pain. But the dislike of the sensation kernel is just one of the reaction component's many elements. In fact, we find all of the traditional candidates for pain's intrinsic badness among the reaction component's affective, conative, desiderative, and cognitive, elements. This leads me to conclude that all of the existing theories of pain's intrinsic badness are false. Each account held part of the truth. We capture the whole truth with the aversion theory on which a pain is intrinsically bad in virtue of the conjunction of all the elements of its reaction component.

1.2.3 Pains as usurpers

In chapter four I set out the second intrinsic value of pain. Many pains undermine intrinsic goods by undermining a certain kind of control we have over ourselves. This user control is involved in nearly every aspect of our lives as agents. I am presently exercising user control over my fingers in typing this sentence. I am simultaneously exerting user control over my train of thought as I write.

Everything that is intrinsically good for a person depends on her having certain forms of user control. For example, autonomy requires a certain measure of user control over one's train of thought. A person cannot be autonomous if her thoughts are nothing but unconstrained babble. Pain is thus intrinsically bad because its presence makes autonomy and other intrinsic goods impossible by undermining the user control they require.

It seems clear that the source of pain's intrinsic badness must lie in the way it feels. I believe the undermining of user control is present in the experience of pain. Once we reject the kernel view and allow the reaction component to be complex, the phenomenology of pain — the way a pain hurts— is much more

nuanced. Thus I believe the experience of pain involves the experience of user control being undermined. We find this in the particular way a pain seems to invade its sufferer and seize control over parts of her mind and body.

To see how this is part of the pain's phenomenology, imagine trying to hold your hand in a pot of water as it is slowly brought to a boil. Part of the pain is the feeling that your hand is in rebellion, that it is pulling itself from the water. The pain also wrests away your attention. The worse it becomes, the harder it is to ignore. As it worsens, the pain's control begins to penetrate into the contents of your thoughts. Suppose I threaten to kill your child if you remove your hand before the water boils. At some point, you will find yourself — against your will— rationalizing removing it and letting your child die.

This is the experience of pain wresting away your user control and undermining the possibility of intrinsic goods like autonomy. The source of pain's intrinsic badness does lie in the way a pain hurts. The friends of the kernel view were right about that. But they were deeply mistaken about what is involved in a pain's hurting, and thus about why pain is intrinsically bad.

1.2.4 Pain and intrinsic value

In chapter five, I turn to what we have learned about the nature of intrinsic value from discussing the source of pain's intrinsic badness. I argue that neither of the leading accounts of the nature of intrinsic value fit pain's intrinsic badness.

The existing accounts of the nature of intrinsic value differ on what combinations of six kinds of value make up intrinsic value. I'll begin with a sketch of these kinds of value. I'll then say what combination fits pain's intrinsic value, and show that this entails a new conception of the nature of intrinsic value.

The first variety is non-derivative value. An x has non-derivative value when we can want x strictly for its own sake. x is desired as an end; it does not inherit its value from anything else. The goodness of pleasure and happiness are standard examples. Its opposite is derivative value. Instrumental value is one example of derivative value.

Non-relational value is the value an x has solely in virtue of its non-relational properties. Its opposite is relational value which something has (at least partially) in virtue of its relational properties. Instrumental value is also a relational value.

Finally, essential value is the sort of value a thing has necessarily. That is, an x has its essential value no matter in what circumstances it occurs; x's essential value thus depends solely on x's essential properties. This is what Moore had in mind with his famous isolation test for intrinsic value:

In order to arrive at a correct [answer to the question 'what things have intrinsic value?'] it is necessary to consider what things are such that, if they existed *by themselves* in absolute isolation, we should yet judge their existence to be good¹

Many things have non-essential value. That is, value which depends on some contingent property. Ice cream is good only insofar as people like it.

One standard account of intrinsic value stands in Moore's shadow by holding that an x's intrinsic value is its non-derivative, non-relational, and essential value. An alternative account takes x's intrinsic value to be its non-derivative value. These are the two main accounts of the nature of intrinsic value.

¹ Moore (1903), 187.

On my view, at least one of pain's intrinsic values depends on its necessary relationship to that which is intrinsically good. I argue that this makes pain's intrinsic badness a relational, essential, and derivative value. It is thus closest to the second existing view. But, while intrinsic value can be essential on the second view, it need not be. My account of pain entails that intrinsic value must be essential. Therefore, the nature of pain's intrinsic value is not covered by either of the existing accounts of the nature of intrinsic value.

1.2.5 Out of the harbor

This dissertation is just part of a much larger project. I believe we can make progress in many areas of value theory by focusing solely on pain. In the concluding chapter six I summarize my conclusions and arguments herein. I then point to some implications which my understanding of pain's nature and intrinsic value may have in other areas of value theory. These include, in no particular order: naturalism about value; the tenability of value hedonism; the moral status of animal and fetal pains; the nature of torture; whether there is just one kind of intrinsic value; the evil of death; the nature of autonomy; the

subjective-objective distinction in value; and the difference between agent-relative and agent-neutral value. I then spend the remainder of the chapter discussing some of the implications of my conclusions about pain for our understandings of hedonism, the calculation of hedonic values, and the intrinsic value of pleasure.