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ABSTRACT

Pure phenomenalism about hedonic states says that what makes any given mental state a pleasure or a pain (or neither) is just the way that it feels. Theories on which pleasure and pain can be felt, but which reject pure phenomenalism, imply that it’s possible to have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you, but isn’t pleasure; that it’s possible to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you, but isn’t pain; or both. We should not accept any view that has either of these implications. Therefore, insofar as hedonic states exist and can be felt, we should embrace pure phenomenalism about pleasure and pain.

AN ARGUMENT FOR PURE PHENOMENALISM ABOUT PLEASURE AND PAIN

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I hold a view about hedonic states that I call “pure phenomenalism”. This view says that what makes any given mental state a pleasure or a pain (or neither) is just the way that it feels. In this paper I will give an argument for pure phenomenalism.

The gist of the argument is just this. Call non-pure-phenomenalist theories of hedonic states “dissenting” views. Dissenting views of pleasure imply that it’s possible to have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you, but isn’t pleasure. Dissenting views of pain imply that it’s possible to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you, but isn’t pain. We should not accept any view that has either of these implications. Therefore we should reject all dissenting theories of hedonic states and embrace pure phenomenalism.

My plan for the paper is as follows. First, I will explain how I am using the terms “pleasure” and “pain” and what I consider to be a “dissenting view” in the relevant sense. Second, I will contrast pure phenomenalism with a prominent competitor: the attitude-based approach, on which every instance of a hedonic state necessarily involves its subject having some kind of attitude toward something. Third, I will show that all attitude-based theories, including “hybrid” theories on which the relevant attitudes themselves have phenomenologies, produce one or both of the damning implications mentioned above. Fourth, I will try to show that these implications are indeed damning, using a pair of thought experiments. Fifth, I will demonstrate that all dissenting views, not just attitude-based ones, have these implications, and therefore all should be rejected in favor of pure phenomenalism. And finally, I will comment on some implications of my conclusion for value theory.

1. **Terms and Conditions**

I will be using the terms “pleasure” and “pain” broadly, to refer to both physical and emotional states. To my way of thinking, the feelings you get from a nice massage, a warm hug from a loved one, or laughing with friends can all be pleasures; the feelings you get from stubbing your toe, hearing an annoying sound, or being depressed can all be pains; and so on.

In using the terms this way, I am assuming that physical and emotional states like these can be grouped into coherent categories, and that “pleasure” and “pain” are appropriate terms for these categories. The first of these assumptions is essential, but the second can be dispensed with. If you are willing to grant that these are coherent categories, but think the terms “pleasure” and/or “pain” are inapt, then you can just mentally replace “pleasure” and/or “pain” with whatever terms you think are preferable.[[1]](#footnote-1)

My argument also relies on the assumptions that pleasure and pain exist, and that at least some token pleasures and pains involve feelings. These assumptions are essential too. If you think that pleasure and pain are crude folk-psychological categories that should be eliminated altogether, or that pleasure and pain never involve feelings, then this paper will not be of interest to you. Accordingly, I do not include such views in the category of “dissenting views” in this paper, even though they do conflict with pure phenomenalism.

Lastly, though I come to this topic from value theory, I will mainly be discussing pleasure and pain in entirely non-evaluative terms. I take no position here on whether hedonic states have any value at all, and nothing I say should rely on any assumption to that effect. But I will discuss some implications for value theory at the end.

1. **Pure Phenomenalism and Attitude-Based Theories**

Pure phenomenalism is a broad approach to the philosophy of hedonic states, one that can be shared by various theories that differ in other important respects. A pure phenomenalist theory can be monistic, saying that all pleasures feel fundamentally the same. Or it can be pluralistic, affirming pure phenomenalism but denying that there need be any respect in which all pleasures feel alike.[[2]](#footnote-2) Some pure phenomenalists hold that the defining phenomenology of pleasure can, in principle, be felt in isolation from other qualia, such that it is possible to feel “pleasure itself”; others say that pleasure is a phenomenal element of various experiences that cannot be felt on its own.[[3]](#footnote-3) Each of these approaches has further sub-types, and for each there is a corresponding position that says the same, *mutatis mutandis*, about pain. But the differences among these will not be relevant here. I will be arguing for pure phenomenalism in general, not for some specific version of it.

The most prominent alternative to pure phenomenalism is the “attitudinal” view of hedonic states, which defines pleasure and pain in terms of occurrent attitudes. On the attitudinal approach to pleasure, every instance of pleasure involves an occurrent favorable attitude; on the attitudinal approach to pain, every instance of pain involves an occurrent disfavorable attitude. Specific attitudinal theories differ as to what the relevant attitudes are and what sorts of things they can be directed toward.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For example, consider Heathwood’s (2007: p. 32) definition of sensory pleasure. On his view, the relevant attitude is that of desire - specifically, intrinsic desire, i.e. desire directed at an object for its own sake. And, being a definition of sensory pleasure, the object of desire in this account is a sensation:

A sensation S, occurring at time t, is a sensory pleasure at t iff the subject of S intrinsically desires at t, of S, that it be occurring at t.[[5]](#footnote-5)

On this view, to be in a state of sensory pleasure is to desire to be having the sensation that you are currently having, and to desire this for its own sake (i.e. not because you believe it to be a means to, or indication of, anything else). For example, if a massage is bringing you sensory pleasure, this is because it is giving you sensations that you want to be having, while you are having them, just for their own sake and not for anything else (such as anticipated benefits to your physical health or state of mind).

Heathwood indicates that he would accept a corresponding view of sensory pain, which might look like this:

A sensation S, occurring at time t, is a sensory pain at t iff the subject of S intrinsically desires at t, of S, that it not be occurring at t.

On this view, to be in a state of sensory pain is to desire not to be having the sensation that you are currently having, and to desire this for its own sake (i.e. not because you believe it to be a means to, or indication of, anything else). For example, if a stubbed toe is bringing you sensory pain, this is because it is giving you sensations that you want to not be having, while you are having them, just for their own sake and not for anything else (such as a fear that the pain will cause you to drop something you’re carrying).

Attitudinal views have been criticized for being too permissive about what can count as a hedonic state. On an account like Heathwood’s, any sensation whatsoever can be a sensory pleasure, so long as its subject desires it in the right way. In principle, there is nothing preventing someone from taking great pleasure in the sensation of a stubbed toe or the sound of nails on a chalkboard, even if those sensations feel exactly the same for this person as they do for the rest of us. And so too for the corresponding view of pain: any sensation whatsoever can be a sensory pain, so long as the subject has the right sort of intrinsic desire for it not to be occurring.

For some, this is an appealing aspect of the attitudinal approach. It seems to give us a way of explaining what is happening when something that is pleasurable for you is painful for me or *vice versa* (i.e. we have the same sort of feeling, but the opposite sort of attitude toward it). But some critics argue that it leaves the relationship between hedonic states and phenomenology too loose, as it seems to allow for a person to undergo a change in hedonic state without any change in phenomenology, and for situations in which two people have identical phenomenologies, yet one is in a hedonic state and the other is not (see Labukt 2012: pp. 183-184).

This problem is part of what motivates Lin (2019: p. 520) to chart a middle course between attitudinal theories and pure phenomenalism with what he calls a “hybrid theory” of pleasure:

**The Hybrid Theory:** There is a kind of favorable attitude, A, that is partly constituted by a certain phenomenology, P. An attitudinal pleasure is an experience consisting, at least in part, of your tokening A toward a state of affairs. A sensory pleasure is an attitudinal pleasure whose object is an obtaining state of affairs consisting of your presently experiencing a particular sensation.

Like pure attitudinal theories, this view affirms that every pleasure necessarily involves a favorable attitude. And in specifying that the attitude involved is only partly defined by its phenomenology, it dissents from pure phenomenalism. But, Lin suggests–incorrectly, as we’ll later see–the hybrid approach incorporates phenomenology in a way that sidesteps the sorts of objections to attitudinal theories mentioned above:

[I]t is not clear that attitudinal views can accommodate the claim that there cannot be changes in someone’s pleasures without changes in her phenomenology. But the Hybrid Theory avoids these problems. Since it says that the relevant favorable attitude is one with a certain phenomenology, it is compatible with the claim that facts about pleasure supervene on facts about phenomenology . . . Thus, the Hybrid Theory shares a significant advantage of phenomenological theories over attitudinal theories. (Lin 2019: p. 521)

In what follows, I will lump attitudinal views like Heathwood’s in with Lin’s hybrid account under the heading of “attitude-based” theories of hedonic states. As I will use the term, attitude-based theories are just those theories that reject pure phenomenalism and say that each instance of a hedonic state must involve an occurrent attitude. In the next section, I will give my argument against attitude-based theories so understood. In the section after that, I will extend these arguments to all views on which hedonic states can be felt, but which dissent from pure phenomenalism. In this latter section I will address the idea of a theory based on counterfactual attitudes rather than occurrent ones.

1. **Against Attitude-Based Theories**

My central objection to attitude-based theories of hedonic states is this. Attitude-based theories of pleasure, without exception, imply that you can have an experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from pleasure for you without having any pleasure at all. And attitude-based theories of pain, without exception, imply that you can have an experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from pain for you without being in any pain at all. Or, as I put it earlier: these theories imply that it’s possible to have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you, but isn’t pleasure, or to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you, but isn’t pain. And these implications are so implausible that we should reject attitude-based theories of hedonic states altogether.

In still other words: Take any experience that is typically pleasurable for you. Attitude-based theories imply that you could have an experience that feels exactly like that in every way, down to the most minute phenomenological detail, right this very second, and yet have no pleasure at all. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis,* for any experience that is typically painful for you. And this will be true regardless of what kinds of experiences you typically find pleasure or pain in. The point is not that attitude-based theories allow for too much variation in what things or activities can bring people pleasure or pain. Rather, the point is that no matter how ordinary or idiosyncratic you are, hedonically speaking, attitude-based theories imply that you can have an experience that feels just like the most intense pleasure or horrible pain - feels that way to you, specifically - without your being in any hedonic state at all.

For the reader who does not find these implications implausible, I have some things to say later on that I hope will bring you around. But for now, I turn to the task of showing that these are indeed implications of all attitude-based theories of hedonic states.

Let’s start with non-hybrid attitude-based theories, i.e. theories that do not say that the relevant attitude comes with any feeling of its own. According to these theories, every instance of felt pleasure or pain can be understood as having two parts:

1. A phenomenal state
2. An attitude directed at (1)

In Heathwood’s account of sensory pleasure, for example, each sensory pleasure consists of (1) a sensation felt at time t, and (2) an intrinsic desire for that sensation to be occurring at t. And in the corresponding view of sensory pain, each sensory pain consists of (1) an sensation felt at t, and (2) an intrinsic desire for that sensation not to be occurring at t.

What we need to notice here is that it is logically possible to have (1) in the absence of (2). There is no necessary logical connection between any phenomenal state and any favorable or disfavorable attitude, such that you cannot have the former without the latter. It may be that for humans, or sentient beings in general, certain feelings are virtually always the objects of certain attitudes. It may be, for example, that there are some sensations that we virtually always intrinsically want to be having or not having while we have them. So it might be strange to have a good laugh with your best friends, feel everything you would normally feel during that kind of experience, and yet have no favorable attitude toward what you are feeling. And it might be strange to stub your toe, feel all the usual stabbing and aching and throbbing sensations, and yet have no disfavorable attitude toward what you are feeling. But these things are logically possible.

So, if any non-hybrid attitude-based theory of pleasure is right, then it is possible for you to have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you, but isn’t pleasure. And if any non-hybrid attitude-based theory of pain is right, then it is possible for you to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you, but isn’t pain.

Hybrid theories, as defined by Lin, have the same implications. Positing that the relevant attitudes feel a certain way to have does not solve the problem. But the proposal is useful, because it helps to draw the boundaries between attitude-based views and pure phenomenalism more clearly. On the hybrid approach, every instance of felt pleasure or pain can be understood to consist of:

1. Some state of affairs (which can, but need not be, a phenomenal state)
2. An attitude directed at (1), which itself has two parts:
   1. A phenomenal component
   2. A non-phenomenal component

For example, we can turn Heathwood’s account of sensory pleasure into a hybrid theory just by adding the claim that the attitude of intrinsic desire is itself partly constituted by a distinct phenomenology, i.e. that it necessarily feels a certain way to intrinsically desire something. That feeling would be the phenomenal component (2a) of the attitude. As for the non-phenomenal component, let’s say, for the sake of illustration, that it is a behavioral disposition: a disposition to act so as to continue feeling the sensation you currently feel.[[6]](#footnote-6) On this hybridized version of Heathwood, every instance of sensory pleasure can be understood to consist of:

1. A sensation at t
2. An intrinsic desire for (1) to be occurring at t, which itself has two parts:
3. The distinctive phenomenology of intrinsic desire
4. A disposition to act so as to continue feeling (1)

This time, what we need to notice is that it is logically possible to have (1) and (2a) in the absence of (2b). For example, it is possible to have (1) a sensation, and (2a) the phenomenology that (by hypothesis) you necessarily feel when you have an intrinsic desire, without also having (2b) a disposition to behave so as to maintain (1). In that situation, you would experience all the phenomenal aspects of a sensory pleasure, including feeling as if you intrinsically want to be feeling the sensation you’re feeling. And yet you would have no pleasure at all, because a necessary, non-phenomenological aspect of pleasure was missing. In other words, you would be having an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you, but without pleasure.

The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for hybrid theories of pain. Consider a hybrid version of the Heathwood-style theory of sensory pain mentioned earlier. On that view, each instance of pain would consist of (1) a sensation at t, (2a) the phenomenology that comes with having an intrinsic desire not to be feeling (1), and (2b) the non-phenomenal aspect of an intrinsic desire not be feeling (1) at t - let’s say that’s a disposition to act so as to stop feeling (1). Once again, it is logically possible to have (1) and (2a) in the absence of (2b). In that situation, you would experience all the phenomenal aspects of a sensory pain, including feeling as if you intrinsically want not to be feeling the sensation you’re feeling. And yet you would be in no pain at all, because a necessary, non-phenomenological aspect of pain was missing. In other words, you would be having an experience that feels exactly like pain to you, but without pain.

So, the innovation of the hybrid approach to hedonic states - defining attitudes partly in terms of phenomenology - does not stop them from implying that it is possible for you to have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you but isn’t pleasure, or to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you but isn’t pain. And indeed, for much the same reason, the hybrid approach also implies that you can change your hedonic state - go from pleasure to no pleasure, or from pain to no pain, or from pleasure to pain or *vice versa* - without any change in phenomenology.

Remember, one of the virtues that Lin claims for the hybrid approach to pleasure is that it avoids this implication. Unlike its non-hybrid attitude-based forebears, it is supposed to vindicate the idea that “that there cannot be changes in someone’s pleasures without changes in her phenomenology”. But it does not do this.

Consider a scenario in which a person has everything the hybrid approach requires for sensory pleasure: (1) a sensation and (2) a favorable attitude toward that sensation, with the latter consisting of (2a) a certain phenomenology and (2b) some non-phenomenal element - again, let’s say it’s a behavioral disposition. Now suppose this person loses (2b), but not (2a). For whatever reason, she is no longer disposed to act so as to maintain (1). She still feels both (1) and (2a) - she still feels the sensation, and she still feels as if she has a favorable attitude toward that sensation - so her phenomenology hasn’t changed. But she’s now missing (2b), and (2b) is a necessary condition on having a favorable attitude toward (1), which is a necessary condition for sensory pleasure. So her pleasure has changed: she has gone from a state of pleasure to a state of non-pleasure. But her phenomenology - consisting of (1) and (2a) - hasn’t.

Therefore the hybrid approach to pleasure does imply that there can be changes in someone’s pleasure without any change in what she feels. It is not, after all, “compatible with the claim that facts about pleasure supervene on facts about phenomenology”. Nor, for that matter, would an equivalent approach to pain be compatible with the claim that facts about pain supervene on facts about phenomenology.[[7]](#footnote-7)

I conclude that all attitude-based theories of hedonic states imply that it is possible for you to have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you but isn’t pleasure, or that it is possible for you to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you but isn’t pain. If this does not immediately strike you as a problem, there is probably nothing I can do to convince you. But I’ll try now anyway, by way of two hypothetical scenarios. Here is the first:

Attitudinal Analgesia

You go into the hospital for a major surgery. When you arrive, you are told that rather than receiving the sort of anesthesia that renders you completely unconscious, you will instead be given a newly developed treatment called “attitudinal analgesia”. This treatment will keep you awake and sensible, but for the duration of the operation, you will be immobile, unable to form new memories (so you will remember nothing of the procedure), and entirely without attitudes. Any attitudes you had prior to the operation will be temporarily nullified, to be fully restored later; and while the medication lasts, you will be unable to form new ones.

Under attitudinal analgesia, you will feel everything that you would feel in the absence of anesthesia or a standard analgesic (such as morphine). For example, you will feel the surgeon’s scalpel cutting into your body; you will feel as if your body is recoiling from the blade (though you will in fact be completely motionless); and you will feel as if you are panicked and desperate for relief.

But not to worry, the doctor assures you: you will not remember any part of this, so there will be no painful memories afterward. And, more importantly, because you will have no negative attitudes during the procedure itself, the experience will be painless.

If any attitudinal theory of pain is right, then this is a logically possible scenario. When the doctor says that the procedure will be painless, he could be telling the truth. This does not mean that “attitudinal analgesia” is just as good as the standard kind, such that you have no self-interested reason to refuse it. It may be that having an experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from the agony of invasive surgery without any medication to relieve or prevent pain is bad for you in some way, even if it is not painful, you have no disfavorable attitude toward the experience as it happens, and you remember nothing of it afterward. But if you accept an attitude-based theory of pain, then you must agree that whatever is wrong with undergoing major surgery with attitudinal analgesia, it is not that the experience involves pain - because, on your view, there cannot be anything painful about the experience whatsoever.

On the other hand, if you accept pure phenomenalism, then you are committed to what I think is a more intuitive claim: that the operation would be exactly as painful with “attitudinal analgesia” as it would be with no medication to prevent or relieve pain at all.

Before moving on, I should acknowledge that on some well-known accounts, standard analgesics actually do provide something that sounds a lot like “attitudinal analgesia”. As Dennett (1978, p. 431) puts it:

All other analgesics [other than aspirin] (e.g., the morphine group and nitrous oxide in sub-anesthetic doses) have a common 'phenomenology.' After receiving the analgesic subjects commonly report not that the pain has disappeared or diminished (as with aspirin) but that the pain is as intense as ever though they no longer mind it.

We could interpret these reports as indicating that analgesics remove these patients’ ability (or at least their propensity) to form negative attitudes toward their feelings, while leaving the phenomenology of the feelings untouched. If this is right, then morphine and nitrous oxide function, for at least some patients, as a sort of attitudinal analgesia. Yet we don’t think of morphine or nitrous oxide as failing to provide pain relief. So you might conclude from this that attitudinal analgesia can, after all, prevent or relieve pain.

This would be a mistake. Attitudinal analgesia, in the sense relevant to my example, leaves subjective experience unchanged. But the subjects in these studies report that they still feel pain but no longer mind it, which may indicate that analgesics have indeed altered their subjective experience in some way. They say that they were bothered by their physical pain before, and they are no longer bothered by it afterward; this could be due to a difference in overall feeling, which the subjects just don’t describe as reduction in their physical pain. Attitudinal analgesia (in my sense) would not produce such a difference. For studies like these to justify believing that morphine, nitrous oxide, or any other drug functions as a true attitudinal analgesic, it would not be sufficient for patients to report that their pain is just as intense as before, but they no longer mind it. They would have to say things like “my pain is just as intense as before, and I still feel exactly as if I mind it very much, but I no longer mind it.” In the absence of reports like these, the situation is ambiguous.

On to my second scenario. This one is about pleasure:

Anhedonic Execution

In pursuit of a more humane form of capital punishment, scientists develop a new chemical for lethal injection. Preliminary trials (including non-lethal trials on human subjects) indicate that not only does the chemical, with sufficient dosage, cause death painlessly; it also causes the subject’s final moments to be full of euphoric emotional pleasure.

Outwardly, as the brain shuts down and the heart stops beating, the subject appears to be drifting off to a peaceful sleep. Inwardly, it is as if he is having an intensely wonderful dream. He has feelings of total peace and profound joy, as well as a deep sense of wanting, liking, and approving of what he is feeling.

Victims’ rights groups regard this new form of lethal injection not as a breakthrough in humane punishment for murderers, but as unjust and insulting to those murderers’ victims. They protest that while execution should not be painful, it should not be pleasurable either.

In response, scientists develop a second version of the chemical that first eliminates all of the subject’s attitudes, and shuts down the ability to form new ones. The course of the chemical is otherwise unchanged; it still causes death painlessly, and it still induces an experience that feels exactly like euphoric emotional pleasure. The experience even retains the subjects’ sense of wanting, liking, and approving of what they are feeling. But they do not have any actual favorable attitudes toward what they feel.

The victims’ rights groups are told that they have gotten exactly what they wanted: a hedonically neutral form of capital punishment. Yes, the subjective experience for the recipient is the same as before. But because the new version removes the subject’s ability to have attitudes, there is now no pleasure in it at all.

If any attitudinal theory of pleasure is right, then this is a logically possible scenario. When the victims’ rights groups are told that the new execution method involves no pleasure, they could be hearing the truth. This does not mean that they would have no reason to object. It may be that what they really oppose to is the idea of an execution method that somehow benefits the executee, and that having an experience that is subjectively indistinguishable from euphoric emotional pleasure is beneficial to you in some way even if it is not actually pleasurable, you have no favorable attitude toward the experience as it happens, and you die immediately afterward. But if you accept an attitudinal theory of pleasure, then you must agree that this new form of lethal injection cannot be criticized (or praised) on the grounds that it is pleasurable for its recipient - because, on your view, there cannot be any pleasure in the experience whatsoever.

On the other hand, if you accept pure phenomenalism, then you are committed to what I think is a more intuitive claim: that the first and second versions of the chemical provide equally, highly pleasurable experiences to their recipients, and thus that the victims’ rights groups - whatever the merits of their position - can legitimately say that the second version does not in any way address their objection to the first.

This concludes my effort to convince you that the problem that I have identified for attitude-based theories is a serious one. I will now show that the problem applies not only to attitude-based views, but to all theories of pleasure and pain that deviate from pure phenomenalism.

**4. Against All Dissenting Views**

The reasoning of the previous section can be extended to all theories of pleasure and pain that dissent from pure phenomenalism (“dissenting views” for short). Any dissenting account of felt pleasure or pain will consist of two main parts:

1. A phenomenal state
2. A non-phenomenal or not entirely phenomenal state

For example, with attitude-based theories, (2) is always some attitude. In the case of pure attitudinal views, (2) is entirely non-phenomenal, in that phenomenology is not held to be a necessary part of having the relevant attitude. In the case of hybrid views, (2) is itself taken to have both phenomenological and non-phenomenological parts.

But regardless of what exactly (1) and (2) are taken to be, it will be logically possible to have (1) in the absence of (2). And if (2) is supposed to have some necessary phenomenal element - call it (2a) - alongside some non-phenomenal element - call it (2b) - then it will be logically possible to have (1) and (2a) in the absence of (2b). This means that it is possible to have all the phenomenal elements of a hedonic state without actually being in that hedonic state. So, if the theory is a theory of pleasure, it will imply that it is logically possible for you to be in a state that feels exactly like pleasure to you while having no pleasure at all, and *mutatis mutandis* for pain. The only way to block this implication is to close the logical gap between phenomenology and hedonic state. But this just turns the theory into a version of pure phenomenalism.

By the same token, no dissenting view can accommodate the claim that facts about pleasure (or pain) supervene on facts about phenomenology. For it will always be logically possible for (1) and (2) to be present one moment, and for (2) to fall away the next, marking a change in hedonic state without any change in what the subject feels. If you find this supervenience claim compelling, then pure phenomenalism is the only game in town.

As a final illustration, consider the idea of a theory of hedonic states based on counterfactual attitudes - not a person’s actual attitudes toward a feeling, but rather the attitudes he would have toward that feeling under some counterfactual circumstances. On this approach, each felt hedonic states would consist of:

1. A phenomenal state.
2. The combination of the following:
   1. An “attitudinal base”, i.e. facts about the subject that determine what attitude he would have toward (1) under various circumstances.
   2. Certain counterfactual circumstances under which, given (2a), the subject would have an intrinsically positive or negative attitude toward (1).

This sort of view dissents from pure phenomenalism. And yet it allows us to say, among other things, that the subject in the attitudinal analgesia example can still be in pain despite having no occurrent attitude toward what he is feeling. What matters now are not the patient’s actual attitudes, but what attitudes he would have under the circumstances specified in (2b), given his attitudinal base (2a). For example, we could say that the relevant counterfactual circumstances in (2b) are those in which the patient’s attitudes are not altered or suppressed by medical intervention. Virtually all of us have an attitudinal base such that under those conditions - normal conditions - we would have a negative attitude toward the feeling of being sliced into by a scalpel without anything to numb our nerves.

But here again, (1) and (2) are logically separable. You can have absolutely any feeling without it being the case that you would intrinsically like or dislike that feeling under the circumstances specified in (2b). This is because it is logically possible for your attitudinal base (2a) to change, without this change announcing itself phenomenologically.

So suppose that the attitudinal base consists of a set of neural patterns (whatever that means) encoding dispositions (whatever that means) to have intrinsic attitudes toward certain feelings. Strange as it sounds, the following is possible: At time t1, you are in agonizing pain. At time t2, the neural patterns constituting your attitudinal base spontaneously reshape themselves, so that you are no longer disposed under normal circumstances to have an intrinsically disfavorable attitude toward what you are feeling. And yet your phenomenology remains exactly as it was at t1: you feel as if you are in pain just as before. If the counterfactual approach to pain is right, then you are in pain at t1, but not at t2. In other words, on this view, it is possible for you to have an experience that feels exactly like pain to you, but isn’t pain. And *mutatis mutandis* for pleasure.

There is a way out of this for the counterfactual approach. We could say that the facts specified in (2a) are fixed sometime in the past, and that the relevant counterfactual circumstances (2b) are ones in which the facts in (2a) still hold, even if they do not actually hold now. For example, we could say that the relevant facts for (2a) are facts about your neural structure at birth. Then we could say that what makes some feeling a pain for you now is the fact that you would have an intrinsically disfavorable attitude toward it if certain things about your neural structure were the same as they had been when you were born. This would rule out the possibility of your attitudinal base changing between t1 and t2, because the past cannot change.

I don’t know if anyone has ever proposed a theory of hedonic states like this, and it strikes me as unlikely on its face. But I will leave it as an open challenge to dissenters from pure phenomenalism to work out the details in a way that makes this sort of view plausible.

**5. Implications for Value Theory**

Before concluding, I will explore some implications of my argument for value theory. I will focus on implications for the “subjective” approach in the philosophy of welfare, as defined by Heathwood (2014: p. 205):

[A] theory is subjective just in case it implies the following: that something is intrinsically good for someone just in case either (i) she has a certain pro‑attitude toward it, or (ii) it itself involves a certain pro-attitude of hers toward something.

Subjectivism, so defined, and pure phenomenalism together imply that pleasure cannot be intrinsically good for you by itself. Perhaps some individual episodes of pleasure can be, if the subject has the right sort of pro-attitude toward them. But since hedonic states are just types of feelings, it is logically possible for you to have pleasure without any attitude at all. This makes it possible for you to experience pleasure without any change in your quality of life.

Indeed, on this combination of views, it is possible for you to have a pleasure that feels as euphorically wonderful as any pleasure can feel, and yet have your life be no better for it, not even *pro tanto.* The pleasure can be intense and long-lasting, without being in any way excessive. It can be morally unobjectionable. You can even experience the pleasure as intrinsically liked, wanted, or otherwise approved of, in the sense that the experience is subjectively indistinguishable from a pleasure toward which you have such attitudes. And yet it can still fail to be intrinsically good for you at all. Moreover, if we suppose that benefitting someone is a matter of increasing their welfare, it follows that someone can give you this kind of pleasure without benefiting you.

When it comes to negative welfare value, subjectivists, as understood here, would presumably say this:

Something is intrinsically bad for someone just in case either (i) she has a certain disfavorable attitude toward it, or (ii) it itself involves a certain disfavorable attitude of hers toward something.

Together with pure phenomenalism, this implies that pain cannot be intrinsically bad for you by itself. Perhaps some individual episodes of pain can be, if the subject has the right sort of disfavorable attitude toward them. But, on this combination of views, it is possible to have pain without any change in your quality of life. Indeed, it is possible to have a pain that feels as agonizingly awful as any pain can feel, and yet have your life be no worse for it, not even *pro tanto*. The pain can be intense, long-lasting, and morally undeserved*.* And you can experience the pain as intrinsically disliked, unwanted, or otherwise disapproved of. Still, it can fail to be intrinsically bad for you. And if we suppose that harming someone is a matter of reducing their welfare, it follows that someone can inflict this kind of pain on you without harming you.

If you find these conclusions unacceptable, then you should reject subjectivism about welfare, at least as defined above. There are two clear alternatives. You could reject the attitude-dependence of intrinsic welfare value altogether, and move to an “objective” view, on which something can have intrinsic welfare value for you regardless of your attitude toward it. Or, if you think that attitudes must still be part of the picture, you can instead adopt some version of what we might call “counterfactual subjectivism”.

This latter sort of view says that for something to have intrinsic welfare value for you, it must be the case that you would have a certain kind of attitude toward it under some counterfactual circumstances. For example, a counterfactual subjectivist might say that for something to have positive intrinsic welfare value for you, it must be the case that you would intrinsically desire it if you were ideally informed and rational (see Railton 1986, pp. 176-184). This kind of subjectivist could say that at least some pleasures and pains - including the intense, long-lasting sort described above - are the sorts of things toward which virtually anyone would have the relevant attitudes under the relevant circumstances.

Returning to the attitudinal analgesia example: A counterfactual subjectivist could say that what matters here are not your actual attitudes during the procedure, but rather the attitudes you would have if your attitude-forming capacities were functioning optimally, or at least normally. So, what makes your pain during surgery with attitudinal analgesia intrinsically bad for you is not the way it feels, but rather the fact that you would have an intrinsically disfavorable attitude toward it if not for the medication.

This is very much like the counterfactual approach to hedonic states discussed above, and it has a similar sort of problem. Again, call the facts about you that determine what attitude you would have toward your pain under the relevant counterfactual circumstances your “attitudinal base”. And again, note that it is logically possible for your attitudinal base to change spontaneously. This means that, if counterfactual subjectivism is right, a pleasure can be intrinsically good for you one moment and neutral or even bad for you the next, and a pain can be intrinsically bad for you one moment and neutral or even good for you the next, without any change in the phenomenology of the hedonic states themselves. In other words, if counterfactual subjectivism is right, then it is possible for you to feel euphoric pleasure or agonizing pain without the quality of your life changing at all, not even *pro tanto*. Unless, that is, the theory specifies that your attitudinal base is anchored to some facts that cannot change, such as facts about traits you had in the past.

In summary, if you accept:

1. Pure phenomenalism about pleasure and pain

And you also accept either of the following:

1. Pleasures that are intense, long-lasting, morally innocent, and experienced as intrinsically liked, wanted, or otherwise approved of are intrinsically good for you
2. Pains that are intense, long-lasting, morally undeserved, and experienced as intrinsically disliked, unwanted, or otherwise disapproved of are intrinsically bad for you

Then you should reject:

1. Subjectivism about welfare (as defined above)
2. Counterfactual subjectivism about welfare (at least those versions on which your attitudinal base can change).

In light of my argument for (a) in this paper, those who accept (d) or (e) should be prepared to explain what is wrong with (b) and (c).

**6. Conclusion**

A theory of hedonic states should not imply that you can have an experience that feels exactly like pleasure to you but isn’t pleasure, or an experience that feels exactly like pain to you but isn’t pain. And there is only one way for a theory to avoid this implication, at least while it allows that hedonic states exist and can be felt: it must say that what makes any given mental state a pleasure or a pain (or neither) is just the way that it feels. In other words, it must embrace pure phenomenalism.

This does not mean that there is no significant relationship between pleasure and pain and other kinds of mental states. In particular, I suspect that, in the mind of a normal sentient being, the link between hedonic states and attitudes is indeed very close. And though I think the hybrid approach that Lin proposes is mistaken, it may nonetheless contain a significant insight: that an essential part of being in a hedonic state is feeling as if you have a favorable or disfavorable attitude toward some aspect of your present experience. It may be that pleasure can be intrinsically unwanted, but cannot feel intrinsically unwanted; or that pain can be intrinsically liked, but cannot feel intrinsically liked. But in any case, we should think of pleasures and pains themselves as feelings, and nothing more. Any other view on the matter leads to the problems I have pointed out here.

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1. Philosophers who accept my assumption that hedonic states can be grouped into two broad categories, but reject my second, terminological assumption include Crisp (2006: p. 102), who uses “enjoyment” rather than “pleasure” and “suffering” rather than “pain”; Schroeder (2004: p. 72), who uses “displeasure” rather than “pain”; Mayerfeld (1992: pp. 23-27), who uses “happiness” rather than “pleasure” and “suffering” rather than “pain”; and Rachels (2004: pp. 247-248), who prefers “unpleasure” as the antonym of “pleasure”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pure phenomenalists who are (arguably) monists about pleasure and/or pain include Bentham (1988), Brink (1989: p. 221), Mill (2001), Crisp (2006), and Moen (2013) about both pleasure and pain; and Goldstein (1985) and Bramble (2013) about pleasure. Mill and Crisp posit distinctions of quality among hedonic states (alongside distinctions of quantity, i.e. intensity and duration), but I take it that they still think all pleasures feel fundamentally alike in some single defining respect. Labukt (2012: pp. 187-193) proposes a pluralistic version of pure phenomenalism. Goldstein attributes this kind of view to Edwards (1979), but I am not sure if this is right or if Edwards’s view is of a piece with those of Mill and Crisp. By contrast, virtually all hedonic attitudinalists are pluralists about hedonic phenomenology, citing the alleged phenomenal heterogeneity of pleasures and/or pains as motivation for adopting an attitude-based view. See fn. 5 for examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bramble (2013) argues for the view that pleasure can be felt on its own, separate from other qualia. Labukt (2012: p. 176) finds this plausible for both pleasure and pain. By contrast, some such philosophers propose that pleasure and pain occur when experiences take on a distinctive “hedonic tone” (Broad 1930: pp. 229-230, Duncker 1941: p. 400). Others suggest that pleasure and/or pain are dimensions along which experiences vary, analogous to the dimensions of loudness or heat (Kagan 1992: pp. 172-175; Moen 2013). Confusingly, the term “hedonic tone” is also sometimes used to refer to phenomenalist views of hedonic states in general, regardless of where they fall on the distinction I am drawing here (see Labukt 2012: pp. 175-176). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hedonic attitudinalists include Sidgwick (1981: p. 127) about both pleasure and pain; Alston (1967) about pleasure; Brandt (1979: pp. 38-41) about pleasure; Parfit (1984: p. 493) about pain; Hall (1989, p. 649) about pain; Korsgaard (1992: pp. 147-148) about pain; Feldman (1997: pp. 82-105; 2004: pp. 55-66) about both pleasure and pain; and Heathwood (2007) about pleasure. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Heathwood’s full definition of sensory pleasure is this:

   A sensation S, occurring at time t, is a sensory pleasure at t iff the subject of S desires, intrinsically and *de re*, at t, of S, that it be occurring at t.

   In the main text, I have simplified this definition by omitting the stipulation that the subject’s desire for S be *de re*. This is just for ease of exposition, so that I don’t have to keep stipulating that the desires I’m talking about are both intrinsic and *de re*. Readers should feel free to mentally insert the phrase *de re* where appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The view that desire can be understood in terms of behavioral dispositions is well-known, but controversial. See Ashwell (2014) for discussion. Here it just serves as a placeholder; (2b) can be anything as long as it is entirely non-phenomenal. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bramble (2016, p. 92) makes a mistake similar to Lin’s on this point. In a discussion of attitude-based theories of pleasure, he writes:

   A different response [to an earlier objection] on behalf of attitude-based theorists is that intrinsically desiring some particular bit of phenomenology to be going on is a state that itself possesses a certain kind of phenomenology. If this is true, then changes in whether or the extent to which one wants some bit of one’s phenomenology to be going on does necessarily involve some change in one’s phenomenology.

   But even if an intrinsic desire for a particular bit of occurrent phenomenology does itself possess a certain kind of phenomenology, it does not follow that every change in whether or to what extent you have that kind of intrinsic desire involves a change in what you feel. You could have the phenomenology of the desire without the desire itself, because some necessary non-phenomenal component of it is missing. And then that non-phenomenal element could kick in a moment later, producing a shift from non-desire to desire without any change in phenomenology. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)