

Valence, Bodily (Dis)Pleasures and Emotions¹

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ABSTRACT Bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions share the striking property of being valenced, i.e. they are positive or negative. What is valence? How do bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions relate to one another? This chapter assesses the prospects of two popular theses regarding the relation between bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions in light of what we can reasonably think about valence. According to the first thesis, the valence of bodily (dis)pleasures is explanatory prior vis-à-vis the valence of emotions. According to the second, emotions contain bodily (dis)pleasures. I argue that bodily (dis)pleasures are intentional states whose valence is to be understood in terms of evaluative experience, and bring to light the similarities and dissimilarities between their intentional structure and that of emotions. On this backdrop, I offer reasons to conclude that we should adopt neither of the two theses.

A fundamental property of bodily (dis)pleasures, emotions, moods and sentiments (love, hate, etc.) is their valence or polarity: they are readily described as being either positive or negative. Let us call all valenced states “affective”. This is not meant to be stipulative – we pre-theoretically think that these states form a family, and this is surely due to the fact that they are valenced.

Three presuppositions about valence underlie my discussion. First, that valence is *distinctive* of affective states and sets them apart from other psychological states such as beliefs, imaginative experiences and memories. We can surely describe particular beliefs, imaginative experiences and memories as positive or negative. The first presupposition is that we do so in virtue of their relations to affective states. As opposed to this, the valence of affective states is independent of the relations

¹ I am grateful to Michael Brady for his helpful comments on a previous version of this chapter.

they have to other psychological states.² The second presupposition is that valence is amongst the *phenomenal* or *experiential* properties of affective states. This is to take for granted that, when we pre-theoretically group together bodily (dis)pleasures, emotions, moods and sentiments, we do so on account of the way they manifest themselves in consciousness. The third and final presupposition is that affective states have their valence *essentially*: they could not be what they are if they had a different valence, or no valence at all. For instance, a bodily displeasure could not be the psychological state it is if it was pleasant or neutral. In a nutshell, I shall presuppose that affective states form a family of psychological states essentially characterized by the positive or negative way they occupy consciousness.³

The fact that psychological states are affective on account of their valence means that issues surrounding valence are key to the understanding of the affective domain. It is useful to divide these issues into two groups.⁴ On the one hand, we may wonder whether valence is a monadic or relational property, what (if relational) its relata are and whether they include evaluative properties.

² Some philosophers and psychologists mention surprise as a neutral or not valenced emotion. I tend to think that the phenomenon described as neutral surprise is not an affective state. There are surely positive and negative episodes of surprise, but surprise is – in the same way as beliefs, imaginative experiences and memories – valenced in virtue of its relations to affective states.

³ Some philosophers, most notably Solomon (2001), have emphasized that there are several reasons for which we may assess emotions positively or negatively. Nothing in what follows goes against this form of pluralism. I shall be interested in one important ground of these assessments, namely valence understood in view of the three presuppositions just presented.

⁴ Distinguishing these two groups of issues does not mean that there are no interesting relations between the two. For instance, some claims about the nature of valence have consequences for the structure of the affective domain. Some of these relations will emerge in what follows.

This first group of issues regards the *nature of valence*. On the other hand, we may wonder as to how affective states relate to one another, and more specifically whether some of them are more basic than others. This second group of issues regards the *structure of the affective domain*. Amongst these structural issues, I want to concentrate on two issues concerning the relations between bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions. First, is the valence of bodily (dis)pleasures explanatorily prior vis-à-vis the valence of emotions? Saying that it is is endorsing what I shall call the *explanatory priority thesis*. Second, do emotions contain bodily (dis)pleasures? Saying that they do is endorsing what I shall call the *containment thesis*.

My aim in this chapter is to assess the prospects of these two structural theses in light of what we can reasonably think about the nature of valence. The discussion proceeds as follows. In section 1, I introduce the popular core affect approach to affective experience and explain why it is committed to the explanatory priority and containment theses. Given that this approach gives pride of place to bodily (dis)pleasures, section 2 explores the nature of their valence. I argue that bodily (dis)pleasures are intentional states whose valence is to be understood in terms of evaluative experience, and identify similarities and dissimilarities between their intentional structure and that of emotions. On this backdrop, section 3 assesses the prospects of the explanatory priority and containment theses. I offer reasons to conclude that we should adopt neither of the two theses.

1. The core affect approach

To say that a psychological state is valenced is to characterize its phenomenal or experiential properties. A good starting point for our discussion is therefore to examine how valence falls within a more comprehensive characterization of affective experience.

A natural way of approaching affective experience is to emphasize two dimensions of it. First, and unsurprisingly, affective experience is more or less pleasant or unpleasant. Bodily pleasures, as well as episodes of happiness, amusement, admiration and pride are pleasant. Bodily displeasures, as well as episodes of anxiety, shame, despair and fear are unpleasant.⁵ Second, affective experience is bodily. In bodily (dis)pleasure, obviously, but also in moods and emotions, the body somehow intrudes into consciousness: affective states implicate a variety of bodily changes, and we feel some of these changes.⁶

Given how natural it is to capture affective experience in terms of (dis)pleasure and bodily feelings, it is not surprising that a popular approach is built around these two dimensions. According to the core affect approach championed by psychologists such as James Russell (2003) and Lisa Feldman Barrett (2006), each affective state occupies a specific area of a two-dimensional valence/arousal space (see also Russell and Barrett 1999). The term “core affect” denotes this two-dimensional nature of affective experience. The first dimension of core affect, valence, corresponds to how pleasant or unpleasant the experience is. The second dimension, arousal, constitutes a specific understanding of the bodily dimension of affective experience: the claim is that it is constituted by

⁵ None of this implies that there are no ambivalent affective states (nostalgia being a case in point). The presuppositions laid out in the introduction bear on the account of affective ambivalence, but they leave room for this phenomenon. For a discussion, see Massin (2018).

⁶ Many debates surround the place and role of bodily feelings in emotion. I shall presuppose here that the phenomenal properties of affective states are (at least partly) a function of how the body feels. For discussion, see Deonna and Teroni (2017, forthcoming).

how activated or sleepy the body feels.⁷ As I see it, the first advantage of the core affect approach is that it rests on these two salient dimensions of affective experience.

In order to appreciate fully how this approach pictures affective experience, we should bear in mind that core affect is supposed to have two important properties. The first property of core affect concerns its *qualitative nature*. One may worry that the approach under discussion pictures affective experience in an unconvincingly fragmented way. When we are anxious at the prospect of a medical exam, proud of a past deed or bored at a family reunion, we have a hard time factoring out how pleasantly or unpleasantly we feel from how excited or sleepy we feel. There is no cause for concern here. According to the advocates of the core affect approach, the distinction between valence and arousal should not encourage the idea that affective experience is an aggregate of one feeling corresponding to arousal and another feeling corresponding to valence. The idea is rather that any point on the two-dimensional space corresponds to a feeling that is “simple at the subjective level”, affective experience being a feeling state whose phenomenal properties are an “integral blend of hedonic (pleasure-displeasure) and arousal (sleepy-activated) values” (Russell 2003: 147). The core affect approach has it, then, that affective experience is a unitary experience blending amounts of arousal and valence.⁸ This attempt at unifying two salient dimensions of

⁷ While this bodily aspect of affective experience may not be distinctive of affective states as types, it may help differentiate emotional episodes of the same type. Compare e.g., the joy felt after a good discussion with a friend, which is rather low in excitation, with the joy felt after having won a prestigious prize, which is typically quite high in excitation.

⁸ An analogy may help. Auditory experience is unitary, yet it can be plotted on several axes (pitch, timbre, etc.). These axes correspond to dimensions along which auditory experience can change, which does not imply that it is fragmented into separable experiential chunks.

affective experience is another of its assets. The second property of core affect concerns whether it is *intentional or not*. Core affect is at any moment constituted by an experience that we can plot without remainder on the two-dimensional qualitative space. This has suggested to many that core affect is constituted by “raw feels”, i.e. purely qualitative, non-intentional states.

The core affect approach raises many worries with which I shall not be concerned here.⁹ Given my aim, I shall only focus on how it understands the relation between valence and bodily phenomenology. The reader may have noticed something odd in the idea just presented that valence and bodily arousal blend in a unitary *raw feel*. After all, one would expect a blend of valence and bodily arousal to result in *pleasant* or *unpleasant bodily feelings*. Bodily feelings may lack well-defined spatial boundaries and be more or less diffuse, yet they are about the body. There are three reasons that support the idea that this is the most charitable interpretation of core affect. The first, mainly exegetical reason is that advocates of the approach perceive themselves as heirs of James – and one would fail to see what is Jamesian in an account in which bodily feelings play no role.¹⁰ The second reason is that we readily understand “sleepy”, “activated” and “more or less energetic”, when they modify feelings, as referring to diffuse ways the body feels. This is further illustrated by many familiar descriptions: when we say that we feel light, heavy, tight, etc., we refer to characteristic bodily feelings. The third reason is that, if we do not understand arousal in terms of feelings that are about the body, then it is difficult to see which other object these feelings could have. As a result, we would saddle the core affect approach with the claim that there are non-intentional feelings. This claim is controversial, since the existence of non-intentional

⁹ For a discussion of some of these worries, see Deonna and Teroni (2017, forthcoming) and Teroni (2017).

¹⁰ That being said, the core affect approach may be in tension with James’ view, which does not recruit bodily *pleasures* and *displeasures* exclusively.

psychological states is a hotly debated issue. For these reasons, the most convincing understanding of core affect is that it corresponds to (un)pleasant bodily feelings that can be plotted on the sleepy-activated axis.¹¹

We are in a position to realize that the core affect approach, a natural and popular way of understanding affective experience, adopts the two structural theses introduced above. First, it claims that the (un)pleasant bodily feelings that constitute core affect explain the valence of all affective states, and of emotions in particular. This is to endorse the *explanatory priority thesis*. Now, emotions surely have properties besides those of core affect. For instance, they are about distal objects or events – one is afraid of an approaching lion or happy that a friend won a prize. Whatever additional properties affective states may possess, the key claim of the core affect approach is that what makes them affective are (un)pleasant bodily feelings.¹² Second, the core affect approach also endorses the *containment thesis*: emotions contain (un)pleasant bodily feelings – given that emotions are valenced on account of these (un)pleasant bodily feelings, emotions in fact contain these feelings essentially. These are the two theses that I want to discuss in what follows. As will emerge, they are difficult to reconcile with what we know about the nature of

¹¹ I advertised this interpretation as being the most charitable one. Doesn't it clash with the idea, repeatedly put forward by Russell, that core affect is "objectless"? In my opinion, it does not: in insisting that core affect is objectless, it seems to me that Russell only wants to deny that core affect is about distal objects.

¹² Given my purposes here, I shall leave aside the way advocates of the core affect approach try to capture these additional properties of emotions. The approach is often coupled with so-called dual component theories of emotions originating in the work of Schachter and Singer (1962), according to which emotions are constituted of core affect and interpretations of its distal causal origin. For discussion of dual component theories, see Deonna and Teroni (2017).

bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions. The purpose of the next section is to familiarize ourselves with the relevant ideas.

2. The intentional structure of bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions

We have ended the previous section by observing that the core affect approach endorses the *explanatory priority* and the *containment theses*: the valence of (un)pleasant bodily feelings explains the valence of emotions, since emotions are valenced in virtue of containing (un)pleasant bodily feelings. The next question is of course: what are (un)pleasant bodily feelings? The aim of this section is to look into these feelings and their (un)pleasantness. I present some considerations suggesting that (un)pleasant bodily feelings have a complex intentional structure, and that this structure is shared by emotions. On this backdrop, I will assess, in section 3, the prospects of the explanatory priority and the containment theses.

My starting point is the fact that bodily (dis)pleasures are more complex than we may pre-theoretically think. In particular, it is important to distinguish the *purely proprioceptive* from the *valenced*, i.e. (un)pleasant aspect of bodily (dis)pleasures. Whenever we are in a state of bodily pleasure or displeasure, we represent proprioceptively a more or less precise and extended area of our body. This spatial representation is of course insufficient to individuate most bodily sensations or feelings. In addition to spatial information, bodily feelings often carry qualitative information: an area of the body may feel swollen, cold, burning, wet, pulsating, etc. For our purposes, an important type of information concerns functional integrity – many philosophers (e.g., Tye 1995, Bain 2017) have defended the claim that pain feelings differ from other sensations in virtue of

representing a body part *as damaged*. Suppose that this is the case.¹³ Still, the representation of damage does not account for the unpleasantness of pain.

To explain why, let me press into service *pain asymbolia*, a dissociative condition that is well documented by clinical studies of pain (e.g., Grahek 2007). Asymbolic patients have the capacity to refer to and recognize their pains, yet the latter do not move them at all. When an experimenter pierces their skin with a needle, they tend to smile and say something along the lines of “That’s painful, but I don’t care”. In my opinion, we should understand pain asymbolia as follows: what asymbolic patients refer to are *distinctive* but *not valenced* (i.e. neutral) bodily feelings (Grahek 2007, Teroni 2018). Given that asymbolics describe their feelings as painful, one may initially think that this understanding of the condition is not compatible with the evidence. Doesn’t this mean that their feelings hurt – the archetypical valenced state? No. We have just introduced the idea that pain feelings differ from other bodily feelings in virtue of representing damage. This opens the possibility that asymbolic patients use “painful” to describe bodily feelings that represent damage.¹⁴ The peculiarity of their condition is that their pains (i.e. feelings that represent parts of their body as damaged) are not negatively valenced or unpleasant. To drive the

¹³ This raises two important issues I shall not discuss in what follows. First, one may wonder as to what it means exactly to represent damage in the way pain does. Second, one may harbour doubts about the intentionalist idea that often accompanies the claim that pain represents damage, i.e. the idea that the phenomenal properties of pain can be fully explained by damage representation (Tye 1995). The essays collected in Aydede (2005) are a good guide to the debates surrounding these issues.

¹⁴ The question regarding what unifies the category of pain feelings is debated. Is it – as the intentionalist maintains – damage representation, or rather a feeling tone or a family of feelings tones (e.g. Crisp 2006)? And is it a merely contingent linguistic fact that there is no parallel subcategory of positive sensations? For an interesting discussion, see Trigg (1970).

point home, consider the following analogy: one may represent one's property (one's car, say) as being damaged without this feeling unpleasant. One may have had a wonderful day or be too exhausted for this to happen. What is disconcerting about asymbolic patients is that their proprioceptive representations of bodily damage (i.e. their pains) always "leave them cold" in the way representation of damage to our property sometimes leaves us cold. Of course, this is not to suggest that the representation of a body part as damaged is immaterial to an account of pain. The suggestion is rather that the role of this representation is not to explain valence. Its role is to distinguish pain from many other types of sensations that are unpleasant but not pain(ful). Ticks and itches may be unpleasant, but they are not painful for this reason. Amongst bodily feelings, pain(ful) feelings are those that contain or are constituted by the representation of a body part as damaged. These feelings are typically unpleasant – but if we understand pain asymbolia in the way suggested here, this is not the case for anyone at any time.

This means that we still need an explanation of the chief aspect of (un)pleasant bodily feelings, i.e. their valence. The explanation has to choose between two main options: we may try to capture the (un)pleasantness of these feelings by appealing either to *motivation* or to *evaluative representation*. Adopting the first option, we end up claiming that what makes a feeling (un)pleasant is the subject's desire to have it continue (cease) (e.g., Sidgwick 1874, Heathwood 2007). This is not very appealing, since it goes against the intuitively compelling thought that we desire some feelings to continue and others to cease *on account of* their (un)pleasantness.¹⁵ It is thus preferable to adopt

¹⁵ This is to cut a long story very short. For a detailed criticism of several variants of the motivational view of pain's unpleasantness, see Bain (2017). In Teroni (2018), I offer some reasons to reject two variants of this view of emotional valence. Brady (2018) puts forward a motivational view of unpleasantness that may avoid this worry. According to this view, an unpleasant experience is a compound constituted by a sensation and the subject's desire that this sensation

the second option, whose distinctive claim is that feelings are (un)pleasant when they combine with evaluative representations (Nelkin 1994, Bain 2017, Carruthers 2018).¹⁶ A feeling becomes (un)pleasant when the bodily condition it represents is evaluated positively or negatively.¹⁷ The idea is intuitively appealing, since we readily refer to evaluation when we describe the relevant psychological states, for instance when we say that an area around our wrist feels good or bad. In addition, appealing to evaluation leaves room for explanatory relations between (un)pleasant feelings and desires: we typically desire a feeling to continue or to cease because of its (un)pleasantness, i.e. because of the positive or negative evaluation of our bodily condition with which the feeling combines.

How should we understand these evaluations? It would of course be ill-advised to understand them as intellectually demanding deployments of evaluative concepts (e.g., Nelkin 1994) – what makes a sensation (un)pleasant is surely not the fact that we deploy a concept to carve out distinctions within the sensational domain. The idea is rather that the relevant evaluations take place automatically and mostly at the subpersonal level in such a way that, at the personal level, the

does not occur. This is obviously not the place to discuss Brady's view in any detail. Still, let me observe that a potential liability of the view is that the desire that the sensation does not occur – which is a proper part of the unpleasant experience – cannot be rationalized at the first-person level in terms of a desire that an unpleasant sensation ceases. One central aim of the evaluative view is precisely to preserve these kinds of explanations.

¹⁶ One may think that in representing damage, pain feelings are already evaluative. According to the approaches under discussion, this is not the case: damage is a functional property that may be evaluated positively, negatively, or not at all. This is the lesson of the analogy with damage to one's property that we have just discussed.

¹⁷ A consequence of the evaluative view, which is shared by the motivational view, is that the valence of proprioceptive sensations is not essential to them.

subject is simply struck by how pleasant or unpleasant the sensation is.¹⁸ The phenomenology of (un)pleasant bodily feelings is a matter of this (un)pleasantness somehow imposing itself on us. Having said that, how exactly should we understand this phenomenology of (un)pleasantness?

One natural idea is to use the model of perception. Perceptual experience – be it visual, auditory, etc. – possesses three features that make it an attractive model of valence. First, perceptual experience is intentional. The visual experience of a violet Chrysanthemum is about this flower, its colour and shape; the auditory experience of a B flat is about a sound of this tonality. Second, there are good reasons to think that the intentionality of perceptual experience does not depend on the deployment of concepts. One can see a violet Chrysanthemum without possessing the concepts of violet or Chrysanthemum, as one can hear a B flat without possessing the concepts of this pitch and tonality (e.g., Crane 1992). Third and relatedly, the intentionality of perceptual experience is hardly detachable from its phenomenology: to have a visual experience that is about a violet Chrysanthemum is closely related to the way this experience fills one's stream of consciousness.¹⁹

The hope is to apply the model of perception to valence, i.e. to claim that what makes (un)pleasant bodily feelings (un)pleasant imposes itself on us in the cognitively undemanding and phenomenologically salient way an object's colour or a sound's pitch imposes itself on us when we see or hear it. Of course, this requires that we be explicit about the property that is perceived in (un)pleasant bodily feelings. We know that this property is evaluative and that it is exemplified by

¹⁸ An influential model of these evaluations and how they unfold is to be found in appraisal theory. For variants of this theory, see Lazarus (1991) and Scherer (2001).

¹⁹ The much-discussed property of transparency (e.g., Martin 2002) is closely related to this last observation.

the body.²⁰ At this juncture, I suggest we borrow a key idea from David Bain's account of pain's unpleasantness (Bain 2017). According to Bain, pain feelings are proprioceptive representations of bodily damage. A pain feeling is unpleasant (i.e. negatively valenced) when the bodily damage is the object of a perceptual experience that represents it *as bad for us*. Suppose a pain of yours represents a damage in an area around your wrist. On Bain's account, your pain is unpleasant if you seem to perceive this damage as bad for you.²¹

Two aspects of this account are worth emphasizing. The first is that what explains unpleasantness is the *perceptual experience of a specific evaluative property*: a final, personal and negative value. The perceptual experience of an instrumental, impersonal or positive value would not explain the unpleasantness of pain. This is intuitively convincing, since we think of pain as disvaluable for its own sake (final value), given that it diminishes the quality of the subject's life for her (personal value). The second aspect of the account is that it is built around *two evaluative properties*. First, there is the final, personal and negative value we have just met. Given that veridical perceptual experiences attribute this value to bodily damages, its bearers need not be, and in the case at hand are not, psychological states. Second, there is unpleasantness – a value that we can also describe as being final, personal and negative. According to the perceptual account of pain's unpleasantness

²⁰ This is at least so in the veridical cases – and a perceptual approach typically leaves room for illusions, i.e. cases where the relevant object does not have the property it perceptually seems to have.

²¹ In adopting Bain's account of unpleasantness in terms of perceptual experience of disvalue and, as we shall see later, a similar account of valence in general, I leave aside my misgivings about the very idea of a perceptual experience of value and its application to emotions (Deonna and Teroni 2012, Teroni 2018). I leave these misgivings aside, as the issues I am interested in remain basically the same however one understands the nature of evaluative experience – provided, that is, that one applies the same account to the valence of (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions.

under discussion, this second value is closely related to the first: it consists in the perceptual experience of a bodily damage as being of final, personal and negative value.²² Given that unpleasantness is constituted by such an experience, its bearer must be a psychological state – and, I take it, more specifically a conscious psychological state.²³

Let me now draw attention to the *intentional structure* that is, on this account, characteristic of unpleasant pain. Call “cognitive base” the proprioceptive experience that allows the subject to access the relevant part of the body and its being damaged. This cognitive base may exist alone, although it is typically accompanied by a perceptual experience of disvalue that makes the episode unpleasant. The cognitive base grounds this evaluative experience, which elaborates on it. In unpleasant pain, the evaluative experience represents the final, personal and negative value of a bodily damage. This presupposes a representation of damage in the guise of a proprioceptive experience. The proprioceptive experience grounds the evaluative experience, which gives access

²² In claiming that unpleasantness is constituted by a perceptual experience of value, the account aims at identifying a type of representation that accounts for the phenomenology of unpleasantness. The claim is that perceptual representation – as opposed, say, to conceptual representation in the guise of a value judgement – explains this phenomenology. One of the aims of the perceptual account of unpleasantness is to avoid the famous “messenger-shooting objection” (Jacobson 2013 and, for discussion, Bain 2017). In a nutshell, the idea is that perceptual representation generates a phenomenology which can explain and rationalize distinctive types of attitudes towards our experiences, attitudes that cannot be rationalized by other types of representation.

²³ The perceptual account of pain’s unpleasantness explains valence in terms of value representation. Does it imply that valence is a relation, whose relata are a psychological state and a value? This depends on one’s account of perceptual experience. As I observed in a previous footnote, most advocates of the account agree that pain feelings remain unpleasant even if the perceptual experience is illusory, i.e. even if there is nothing of final, personal and negative value at the relevant place in the body. If so, then valence is at best a pseudo relation.

to an additional, evaluative property of the bodily damage.

This intentional structure is hardly exclusive to unpleasant pain, and one would expect this account to apply to other bodily feelings as well.²⁴ Bodily feelings are (spatial-cum-qualitative) proprioceptive experiences that may exist alone. However, some of them typically function as the cognitive bases of evaluative experiences, which elaborate on them. Proprioceptive experiences become unpleasant when they combine with a perceptual experience of the final, personal badness of what happens in the body. Remember that we have adopted the idea that damage representation is distinctive of pain feelings. Other bodily feelings may represent other properties at various places in the body. We all know that a wide range of bodily feelings may constitute the cognitive bases of displeasure. But what makes all of them unpleasant is something they have in common: the fact that they ground an evaluative experience giving access to the final, personal badness of a bodily condition. Correspondingly, what turns proprioceptive experiences into pleasant feelings is the fact that they function as the cognitive bases of evaluative experiences giving access to the final, personal goodness of the relevant bodily condition.

The fact that the perceptual account of valence applies smoothly to the (un)pleasantness of other bodily feelings is reassuring. We should strive for a unified (or at least not too fragmented) account of valence, and the fact that it offers such a unified account is a point in favour of the core affect approach. It would be disquieting to conclude that the valence of pain feelings is a completely different property from the valence of other bodily feelings. It would be equally disquieting if the perceptual account could not be extended to other affective states, and to emotions in particular.

²⁴ I am not sure whether Bain, whose account of pain's unpleasantness I borrow, would be happy to generalize in this way.

Fortunately, it turns out that the intentional structure of (un)pleasant bodily feelings that we have just disclosed is shared by emotions. Suppose that you are afraid of a lion coming towards you, or that you admire Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin*. In order to fear the lion or admire the painting, you must access these objects and some of their properties. For instance, you must see the lion as approaching you, or see the specific way colours are distributed on the panel. Given that these visual experiences play the same role in these emotions as proprioceptive experiences play in (un)pleasant bodily feelings, let us extend the courtesy and describe them as the cognitive bases of these emotions. There is of course a key difference between (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions: the cognitive bases of emotions typically are not proprioceptive experiences.²⁵ This is true, but irrelevant given our interest in the intentional structure that is shared by (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions.

Cognitive bases no more account for the valence of emotions than for the valence of (un)pleasant bodily feelings. In the same way as bodily feelings may leave us cold, we may remain emotionally unaffected by the visual experience of an approaching lion or of Titian's painting. We still need an explanation of emotional valence, and we face a similar choice between an account in terms of *motivation* or in terms of *evaluative representation*. Again, and for parallel reasons, the best move is to understand valence in terms of evaluative representation (Teroni 2018). The similarities between (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions are in fact numerous. In particular, the phenomenology of emotions is also a matter of something of positive or negative import imposing itself on us – no more than in the case of (un)pleasant bodily feelings can we understand valence

²⁵ Any kind of psychological states or combination thereof can function as the cognitive base of an emotion – we may regret a deed we remember, hope that an event we foresee will occur, be sad that a theory we are thinking about is wrong, etc. On the nature and roles of the cognitive bases of emotions, see Deonna and Teroni (2012).

in terms of the deployment of evaluative concepts. We should again insist that the evaluation takes place automatically and mostly at the subpersonal level – what happens at the personal level is that the subject is simply struck by the positive or negative import of what is presented to her by the cognitive base. According to an influential approach, more or less automatic and non-conceptual appraisal processes underscore emotions, which make themselves manifest at the personal level as specific evaluative takes on the environment.²⁶ In the same way as for (un)pleasant bodily feelings, perceptual experience of value accounts for emotional valence.²⁷

Perceptual experience of which value? The answer is a function of the emotion we consider. A recurring theme in emotion research is that different *thick values*²⁸ are the formal objects of different emotion types.²⁹ We can understand the idea as follows. Thick values are divided into two main groups: there are negative (fearsome, disgusting, shameful, ugly, etc.) and positive (admirable, beautiful, funny, lovely, virtuous, etc.) thick values. An emotion has negative valence because it contains a perceptual experience of a negative thick value. Fear of the lion has negative valence because it contains a perceptual experience of the lion's fearsomeness. Other emotions get their negative valence because they represent different negative thick values (the disgusting, the shameful, the appalling, etc.). On the bright side of things, an emotion has positive valence because

²⁶ The appraisal theories of Lazarus (1991) and Scherer (2001), which I mentioned in a previous footnote, have been primarily applied to emotions.

²⁷ Variants of the perceptual approach to emotions are defended in Prinz (2004), Roberts (2003) and Tappolet (2016).

²⁸ Williams (1985) introduced the distinction between thin and thick values in the contemporary literature. Thick values are specific ways of being good or bad – being sublime is a way of being (aesthetically) good, being unjust a way of being (morally) bad. Recent discussions of thick values and of how they relate to thin values can be found in Kirchin (2013, 2017). We shall have the opportunity to come back to the relation between thick and thin values in section 3.

²⁹ On the idea that thick values are the formal objects of emotions, see Kenny (1963) and Teroni (2007).

it contains a perceptual experience of a positive thick value. Admiration of Titian's painting has positive valence because it contains a perceptual experience of the painting's admirable character, while other positive emotions get their valence in virtue of representing different positive thick values (the successful, the funny, etc.). It is difficult to tell whether the thick values that account for emotional valence belong to a specific formal family. Are they all personal values? If they are, they need not be personal values for the subject undergoing the emotion – one can be afraid for someone, for instance.³⁰ And the thick values at stake in admiration or guilt may not be personal.³¹

You may remember that I have emphasized two aspects of the perceptual account of unpleasant pain. It is important to realize that these two aspects carry over to the generalized account of valence under discussion. First, we have seen that the unpleasantness of pain is explained by the *perceptual experience of a final, personal and negative value*. According to the generalized account, the (un)pleasantness or valence of emotions is explained by the perceptual experience of the relevant thick value. Second, we have observed that the account of pain's unpleasantness is built around *two evaluative properties*. The same is true of the generalized account. The first evaluative property is the thick value that the perceptual experience represents – the lion's fearsomeness or the painting's admirable character. The bearer of this first evaluative property sometimes is a

³⁰ An interesting issue is whether there are parallel cases related to unpleasant pain. One candidate is the sort of empathic response we may have when we see someone injured.

³¹ To say that Mary admires what is admirable *to her* is to say that she admires what is, according to her, admirable. This does not mean that what is admirable is personally as opposed to impersonally valuable, i.e. good in virtue of contributing to the quality of the subject's life for her (on this and, more generally, on the relations between emotions and the self, see Teroni 2016). *Admiration* may have personal value – this is a different issue to which we will soon turn. A further issue is whether some emotions represent instrumental as opposed to final values. I briefly come back to this issue in section 3.

psychological state (one may be afraid of a recurring dream, say); this is comparatively rare and the bearer often is a distal object or event. The second evaluative property is the emotion's valence or (un)pleasantness. According to the generalized account, this valence consists in the perceptual experience of the object's thick value. As in unpleasant pain, the fact that (un)pleasantness is constituted by such an experience means that its bearer must be a conscious psychological state.

According to the generalized account of valence, negative valence or unpleasantness is a matter of perceptual experience of disvalue. How does unpleasantness relate to *suffering*? This is a complex issue, and I shall rest content with some preliminary thoughts. Is unpleasantness necessary for suffering? It seems to me that it is: absent unpleasantness (i.e., negative affect), one cannot suffer. Is unpleasantness sufficient for suffering? It seems to me that it is not: there is suffering only when unpleasantness reaches a certain threshold and/or consumes attention. Mild disappointment at a missed opportunity is not a way of suffering. Deep shame at a misdeed is. Intense unpleasant affects are ways of suffering.³²

The upshot of this section is this: (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions have the same intentional structure. In both cases, a cognitive base grants access to an object. The object is then assessed in a cognitively undemanding way. This assessment makes itself consciously manifest as the experience of a value, which accounts for the valence of the psychological state. The fact that (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions have the same intentional structure leaves room for significant differences. The cognitive bases of emotions are not, as opposed to those of (un)pleasant bodily feelings, exclusively proprioceptive. And the thick values at stake in emotions are specific

³² Brady (2018) argues that boredom creates a problem for this approach: isn't boredom a way of suffering that is precisely characterized by flat rather than intense affect? I do not think that boredom is a way of suffering – one can suffer from being bored, but this is a matter of one's boredom eliciting negative affect.

to them – understanding the relation between these values and those at stake in (un)pleasant bodily feelings will turn out to be a key issue in the next section.

3. Assessing the explanatory and the containment theses

Our next task is to bring together the results of sections 1 and 2 and see how they relate to each other. Are the two structural theses about the affective domain – the *explanatory priority thesis* (the valence of (un)pleasant bodily feelings explains the valence of emotions) and the *containment thesis* (emotions contain (un)pleasant bodily feelings) – that emerged as key commitments of the core affect approach supported by, or even compatible with the perceptual account of valence that we have adopted? According to this account, the valence of bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions is a matter of experiencing a value of the object represented by a cognitive base.

To assess how the perceptual account of valence links with the explanatory priority and containment theses, we have to address the following question: what is the relation between the valence of (un)pleasant bodily feelings and the valence of emotions? In light of the account, this turns out to be a question about the relation between the values that we experience in (un)pleasant bodily feelings – final, personal values – and the thick values that we experience in emotions. To address this question, I proceed as follows. First, I examine whether we can make sense of this relation in a way that is compatible with the explanatory priority thesis. I argue that this is not possible. Second, I examine whether we should accept the containment thesis even though bodily (dis)pleasure do not explain emotional valence. I give some reasons to think that we should not.

The first issue is whether we can understand the relation between the values that we experience in (un)pleasant bodily feelings and the values that we experience in emotions in a way that is compatible with the explanatory priority thesis. Let me summarize the little that has surfaced so far

regarding this relation. When I presented the perceptual account of pain's unpleasantness, I followed Bain in characterizing the value experienced simply as being final, personal and negative. This suggests that the value at stake in unpleasant pain (and, probably, in other (un)pleasant bodily feelings as well) is a *thin* value – the damage is experienced as being finally and personally bad *tout court*.³³ As opposed to this, the values experienced in negative (the fearsome, the disgusting, the shameful, etc.) and positive (the admirable, the successful, the funny, etc.) emotions are *thick* values, i.e. more determinate and descriptively richer ways of being bad and good.

Let us suppose then that the (un)pleasantness of bodily feelings is a matter of representing a positive or negative thin value. How do these thin values relate to the thick values represented in emotions? The most natural way of understanding this relation is as that of two *determinable* properties (thin goodness and thin badness) to their respective *determinates* (the fearsome, the admirable, etc.). What does this mean? One nice illustration of the determinable/determinate relation is the relation between being coloured and, say, a determinate shade of vermilion. It is often claimed that being colored is a determinable with different determinates in order to draw attention to two aspects of their relation (Johnson 1921). First, that an object is always colored in virtue of exemplifying a determinate color, such as a determinate shade of vermilion. Second, that we cannot define the determinate property in terms of the determinable together with a determinate property: the nuance of vermilion cannot be defined in terms of the determinable of being colored together with a determinate property (the only suitable determinate property is the nuance itself, and this does not constitute a definition). For present purposes, we can concentrate on the first aspect. If (un)pleasant bodily feelings are (un)pleasant in virtue of containing the experience of a positive or negative thin value, it is tempting to understand the relation of these thin values to the thick values experienced

³³ We shall see below that there are reasons to resist this claim.

in emotions as being that of two determinables to their determinates. There is a lot to be said in favor of the idea that something cannot be of final, personal value *tout court* – it is always so in virtue of being of a determinate final, personal value (being disgusting, shameful, successful, etc.). Understanding the relation between the values at stake in (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions as that of two determinables to their determinates is not very convincing, however. First, this seats uneasily with the explanatory priority thesis. According to this thesis, the valence of (un)pleasant bodily feelings explains the valence of emotions. We are exploring the possibility of understanding the (un)pleasantness of bodily feelings in terms of the experience of thin values, and the (un)pleasantness of emotions in terms of the experience of thick values. But if something is the bearer of a thin value only in virtue of exemplifying a thick value, one would expect this ontological priority to generate a representational priority as well. To represent something as having a thin value would seem to be a derivative of thick value representation. As the case may be, it would come down to represent it either as having a given thick value (to represent the lion as bad is to represent it as fearsome, say), or as having one does not know which thick value (to represent the lion as bad is to represent it as either fearsome or disgusting or sad, etc.). We end up with an order of explanation that is the reverse of that advanced by the explanatory priority thesis.³⁴ I am not fully convinced by these considerations, however. A second, more potent reason to refuse to understand the relation at issue on the determinable-determinate model emerges once we remind

³⁴ Let me observe in passing that this reverse order of explanation hardly makes sense at the psychological level. Acknowledging this reverse order of explanation, the perceptual account would have to claim that bodily feelings are (un)pleasant in virtue of the experience of a thick value, where this experience takes the shape of an emotion. Bodily feelings surely elicit emotions, as when one is afraid of a sudden change in heartbeat. Yet, (un)pleasant bodily feelings are not primarily unpleasant because they elicit such emotions.

ourselves that we are interested in a specific kind of representation, i.e. perceptual experience. The considerations just advanced indeed apply especially well to perceptual experience: seeing, hearing or touching a determinable property always comes down to experiencing a determinate property. We always see determinate colours and shapes, for instance. This is why “Anna sees the sofa’s colour” only makes sense in a distributive way: to see an object’s colour is to see either this or that determinate colour it has.³⁵ Not only does this go against the explanatory priority thesis, it demonstrates that advocates of the perceptual account of valence cannot understand the relation between the values experienced in (un)pleasant bodily feelings and emotions as that of a determinable to its determinates.

The perceptual account of valence turns out to require that the values represented in (un)pleasant bodily feelings are *as thick* as the values represented in emotions. We should say that the idea that these feelings represent thin values is an unwanted side effect of our purely formal characterization of the relevant values as final and personal. What we actually experience when we undergo (un)pleasant bodily feelings are thick values exemplified by the body. Thick values, we have seen, are determinate and descriptively rich ways of being good or bad. Now, it may prove difficult to be informative as to the particular way of being finally and personally (dis)valuable which is distinctive of the thick values experienced in (un)pleasant bodily feelings. This shouldn’t cause too much trouble: it is difficult to characterize most values informatively, and there may be primitive

³⁵ These observations relate to the fine-grainedness of perception, which is often adduced as a reason to claim that the content of perception is non-conceptual (e.g., Crane 1992). It would be ironic if, after having insisted that affective experience cannot be explained in terms of conceptual representation, one did not pay sufficient attention to the nature of perceptual representation. If I am on the right track, the fine-grainedness of perception is precisely what creates difficulties for the explanatory priority thesis coupled with a perceptual account of valence.

thick values.³⁶

Let us thus agree that the values we experience in (un)pleasant bodily feelings are thick values. Where does that leave us regarding the explanatory priority thesis? We are exploring an alternative account of the relation between the values at stake in (un)pleasant bodily feelings and in emotions: it is not anymore the relation of a determinable to its determinates, but the relation of one family of thick values to another. Is this relation compatible with the explanatory priority thesis? Here are some considerations for concluding that it is not.

The basic insight of the perceptual account of valence is that value experience has the potential to explain the (un)pleasantness of psychological states. On the face of it, this potential accrues to the experience of any thick value: perception of a thick value accounts for the unpleasantness of pain, perception of fearsomeness accounts for the unpleasantness of fear, perception of funniness accounts for the pleasantness of amusement, etc. There is a lot to be said for this understanding of (un)pleasantness in terms of the experience of different thick values. For instance, it offers an attractive explanation of both the similarities and the dissimilarities in the (un)pleasantness

³⁶ Why not say that the values perceived in (un)pleasant bodily feelings are *hedonic* values, so as to distinguish them from *aesthetic* or *moral* values? The reason is that this turns out to be less informative than one may think. The values at issue are those that we perceive in the body. As I have emphasized, we should not confuse these perceived values with the unpleasantness that consists in perceiving them. This means that we cannot take “hedonic” to be informative in the way we would most naturally take it to be, i.e. as specifying goodness in terms of a way of occupying consciousness. More generally, a good strategy for characterizing thick values is in terms of the restrictions they put on their potential bearers (e.g., Kenny 1963). For instance, a remark can be offensive because a speech act may manifest the intention to demean. This is not the case of a pebble or a logical rule. Yet, it is not clear which sort of illuminating restriction is connected to the body, i.e. to the only serious candidate for being the exclusive bearer of the thick values we are after.

characteristic of different affective states. While the similarities stem from the fact that all affective states represent values, the dissimilarities stem from the fact that different affective states represent different thick values.

That being said, the prospects of the explanatory priority thesis now turn on whether a feature of the thick values we experience in (un)pleasant bodily feelings supports a claim to explanatory priority. It is hard to figure out what this feature could be. We obviously cannot set our sights on thickness as such. Nor can we appeal to the fact that the values experienced in bodily (dis)pleasures are personal values – the values experienced in many emotions are also personal, and these emotions would therefore come out as explanatorily on a par with bodily (dis)pleasure. For the same reason, we cannot refer to the fact that the values experienced in bodily (dis)pleasures are final values. There may be a case for the claim that fearsomeness is an instrumental value, but this looks like an exception rather than the rule. Acknowledging that the values experienced in bodily (dis)pleasures and in emotions are different thick values leaves one without the resources to maintain the explanatory priority thesis.³⁷

This puts an end to my examination of the first issue. We have explored two plausible ways of making sense of the relation between the values experienced in bodily (dis)pleasure and in emotions – as a determinable/determinate relation or as a relation between different thick values. None of the two is compatible with the explanatory priority thesis, which we should therefore abandon.

³⁷ As we have seen in a previous footnote, claiming that the values we experience in bodily (dis)pleasures are hedonic values is not a viable option. The same is true of the idea, which we have abandoned along the way, that pain is unpleasant in virtue of representing damage. If damage is a thick value, it is a value that can hardly claim explanatory priority over fearsomeness, disgustingness and the other thick values accounting for emotional valence.

The second and final issue is whether this leaves us in a position to accept the containment thesis, i.e. to claim that emotions contain (un)pleasant bodily feelings. Now that we have rejected the explanatory priority thesis, we have to see if there are reasons other than the attempt to account for emotional valence to claim that emotions contain (un)pleasant bodily feelings. We should acknowledge without hesitation that some emotions contain bodily (dis)pleasures. Unpleasant bodily feelings accompany some episodes of fear or shame, and pleasant bodily feelings accompany some episodes of joy or amusement. That being said, our discussion puts us in a position to appreciate two things. First, that emotions contain (un)pleasant bodily feelings *contingently* and, second, that when emotions contain such feelings, *a subtle balance should be maintained for both to exist*. Let me conclude by giving some substance to these thoughts.

In light of the perceptual account of valence, the relation between emotions and bodily (dis)pleasures comes out as contingent. On this account, valence is constituted by value experience: the sense there is to say that an emotion is (un)pleasant is exhausted by the experience of the relevant value(s). To determine the modal status of the relation between emotions and bodily (dis)pleasures, we should thus wonder as to what is (un)pleasant when we undergo an emotion. We know that the answer must refer to the experience of a thick value – what is pleasant in an episode of amusement is the experience of the joke’s funniness, what is unpleasant in an episode of fear is the experience of the lion’s fearsomeness, etc. Are these answers complete, or should we always add “and the body feels good or bad”? When we undergo emotions, there often seems to be nothing good or bad in the way the body feels – there is nothing pleasant in how the body feels in many episodes of amusement, for instance, nor is there anything unpleasant in how the body feels in many episodes of fear. More controversially, one may contend that some emotional episodes – in particular, intense ones – contain bodily feelings whose valence is the opposite of the emotion’s.

Two examples come to mind: the bodily feelings in intense fear, which many find (intrinsically?) pleasant when they know that there is nothing to fear, and those in intense amusement, which may be rather unpleasant. This may constitute an additional reason to claim that the relation between emotions and bodily (dis)pleasures is contingent – why think that intense fear and amusement could not be what they are if they did not contain these “conflicting” bodily feelings?

Emotional intensity also helps put some flesh on the idea that, when emotions contain (un)pleasant bodily feelings, a subtle balance has to be maintained for both to exist. We have seen that the intentional structure of emotions and bodily (dis)pleasures is a matter of value experience. In order to realize that their relation is not only contingent but also fragile, we should ask how value experience relates to attention. Many scholars insist that affective states have an essential relation to attention: they tend to focus our attention to the object whose value we experience.³⁸ Our attention is drawn to the fearsome lion, the admirable painting or the painful wrist. Paying no attention at all to the object of an occurrent affective state seems to be impossible. We can of course resist this attentional pull, but this takes effort and the effort it takes is a function of emotional intensity: the more intense the emotion, the more irresistible the attentional pull. If this is along the right track, an immediate implication is that the relation between emotions and bodily (dis)pleasures is fragile. The more intense an emotion, the more it focuses the subject’s attention to its (typically distal) object – this makes it more and more incompatible with bodily (dis)pleasure. Conversely, the more intense a bodily (dis)pleasure, the more it focuses the subject’s attention to her body – this makes it more and more incompatible with emotional consciousness. This is

³⁸ I do not have the space to dwell on the nature of attention – and it seems to me that the observations in the text are sufficiently basic to constrain any account of attention. I shall also remain silent on the function of attention in emotion. For two different approaches, see Brady (2013) and De Sousa (1987).

something we all know: intense bodily (dis)pleasures interfere with emotions by focusing attention inwards, intense emotions interfere with bodily (dis)pleasures by focussing attention outwards. This is another truth that the advocates of the core affect approach ignore at their own risk.

Conclusion

Our discussion has focused on the relations between bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions. I have argued that the core affect approach to affective experience is committed to two theses regarding the structure of the affective domain. According to this approach, the valence of bodily (dis)pleasures is explanatory prior vis-à-vis the valence of emotions and emotions are valenced because they contain bodily (dis)pleasures. These two theses are in my opinion irreconcilable with what we can reasonably claim to know about valence. The valence of bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions is a matter of value experience. I have argued that the nature of value experience as well as the values that we experience in bodily (dis)pleasures and emotions should lead us to reject these theses.

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