

# *The evolutionary explanation: The limits of desire theories of unpleasantness*

## *La explicación evolutiva: los límites de las teorías del deseo acerca de lo desagradable*

ABRAHAM SAPIÉN  
*Universidad Pedagógica Nacional*

Recibido: 04-12-2018

Aceptado: 16-12-2018

### ABSTRACT

Several theorists have defended that unpleasantness can be explained by appealing to (intrinsic, simultaneous, *de re*) desires for certain experiences not to be occurring. In a nutshell, experiences are unpleasant because we do not want them, and not vice versa. A common criticism for this approach takes the form of a Euthyphro dilemma. Even if there is a solution for this criticism, I argue that this type of approach is limited in two important ways. It cannot provide an explanation for: i) the motivation, from a psychological conscious point of view, nor ii) a non-instrumental justification, for having the relevant desires. The lack of these explanations is relevant since these are precisely the type clarifications that we would expect from a theory about unpleasantness.

### KEYWORDS

DESIRE, UNPLEASANTNESS, EUTHYPHRO,  
MOTIVATION, INSTRUMENTAL, JUSTIFICATION

## RESUMEN

Varios teóricos han defendido que lo desagradable se puede explicar apelando a los deseos (intrínsecos, simultáneos, de re) acerca de que ciertas experiencias no ocurran. En pocas palabras, las experiencias son desagradables porque no las queremos, y no al revés. Una crítica común para este enfoque toma la forma de un dilema de Eutifrón. Incluso si hay una solución para esta crítica, sostengo que este tipo de enfoque está limitado de dos maneras importantes. No puede proporcionar una explicación para: i) la motivación, desde el punto de vista psicológico del que se es consciente, ni ii) una justificación no instrumental, para tener los deseos relevantes. La falta de estas explicaciones es relevante ya que estas son precisamente el tipo de aclaraciones que esperaríamos de una teoría sobre lo desagradable.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

DESEO, DESAGRADO, EUTIFRÓN, MOTIVACIÓN,  
INSTRUMENTAL, JUSTIFICACIÓN.

## I. INTRODUCTION

SOMETHING IS UNPLEASANT because we don't want it, and not vice versa. Some theorists have defended this idea. Such an account relies crucially on *desires* in order to explain what constitutes the unpleasantness of pain and of other unpleasant experiences. The general idea is to argue that a sensory experience, such as a pain, is unpleasant in virtue of that sensation being desired not to occur (Armstrong, 1962; Brady, 2017; Pitcher, 1970). It is because we desire a pain sensation not to occur that it qualifies as unpleasant. In order to explain how the desire theories account for pain's unpleasantness, and critique such approach, I will proceed as follows.

First, it is important to clarify what desire theories take desires to be. Second, I will explain how these theories use the notion of desire to account for the unpleasantness of pain and of other unpleasant experiences. I will focus on Heathwood's (2006, 2007, 2011) proposal, which I take to be a well-developed and detailed version of desire theories. I will focus on what I take to be the main problems for this type of approach.

A fundamental objection is often put as a Euthyphro dilemma: do we desire not to be in pain because pain is unpleasant, or is pain unpleasant because we desire not to be in pain? Desire theories have to take the second horn of the dilemma. I will argue that these theories have an answer to the dilemma, but such an answer is still problematic. The second horn of the dilemma is, intuitively, implausible. Roughly, desire theories defenders fail to account for why we desire not to have pain sensations, if, according to their own theory, there is nothing bad about pain sensations in themselves.

Desire theories can still provide an answer for this critique, by explaining that we have these desires as the result of a process of natural selection. This is

what I will refer as the *evolutionary explanation*. However, the explanation that desire theories can offer is also problematic. There are two main issues with this response. First, even if it offers an clarification for us having these desires, and a good *instrumental reason* to have these desires in order to survive, this explanation still cannot provide two things that a theory of unpleasantness should arguably provide: i) the kind of psychological reason, a conscious reason that a subject would have for desiring not to have a sensory experience, such as a pain, and ii) a non-instrumental reason for having such desire. Finally, there is a much simpler and more intuitive take on unpleasantness: to take the other horn of the Euthyphro dilemma and so defend a theory that takes the unpleasantness as a phenomenal property that is bad in itself.

## II. PAIN'S UNPLEASANTNESS IN TERMS OF DESIRE

### II.1. *SID-DESIRES*

Desires are a fundamental type of mental state.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, a desire cannot be reduced to something more basic in terms of mental states. Desires are, in this way, one of the building blocks of the mental building, as it were. A good way of understanding what desires are is to contrast them with beliefs since these are another type of fundamental mental states. One important similarity between desires and beliefs is that they are both typically intentional. To put it simply: they are *about* something. You might believe that you have a red apple or a desire to have a red apple. Both mental states are similar insofar as they are about having a red apple, but there is a very important difference. The difference between these two types of mental states is often explained in terms of *direction-of-fit*.

The direction-of-fit distinction is attributed to Anscombe (1957, §32). She asks us to imagine a man who goes to the supermarket with a shopping list that he follows to pick up the items he has on this list. In this scenario, there is also a detective who carefully writes down on another list everything the man picks up from the shelves. As Searle puts Anscombe's point:

[T]he function of the two lists will be quite different. In the case of the shopper's list, the purpose of the list is, so to speak, to get the world to match the words; the man is supposed to make his action fit the list. In the case of the detective, the purpose of the list is to make the words match the world; the man is supposed to make the list fit the actions of the shopper . . . I propose to call this difference a difference in *direction of fit*. The detective's list has the *word-to-world* direction of fit (as do statements, descriptions, assertions, and explanations); the shopper's

1 For more on the nature of desire see Schroeder (2017, 2004),

list has a *world-to-word* direction of fit (as do requests, commands, vows, promises). (Searle, 1979, p. 3–4)

The two lists are about the same items, but there is a very important difference regarding what these lists are meant to capture. Similarly, beliefs and desires have a very different nature: whereas beliefs are more like the detective's list with a *word-to-world* direction of fit, desires on the other hand are more like the shopper's list and have a *world-to-word* direction of fit. In other words, a desire is doing what it is supposed to do when it is *satisfied*, when the world is in such a way that it matches with the content of the desire. In contrast, beliefs and other representational states can be *accurate*, when their content matches with the world. Another way of making sense of this is in terms of what ought to change when there is a mismatch between the content of the mental state and the world. When there is a mismatch between the content of the desire and the world, it is the world that ought to change for the desire to be satisfied. In contrast, when there is a mismatch between the content of the belief and the world, it is the belief that ought to change in order to be accurate. A desire is a fundamental mental state that has the function of being satisfied.

Desire theories offer a reductive account of unpleasantness. Unpleasant experiences are so in virtue of being *constituted* by two *more basic* mental states: i) a hedonically neutral sensory experience, i.e., a sensation that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant in itself, and ii) a particular kind of desire not to have this sensory experience (Heathwood, 2007). An unpleasant pain, for instance, is composed of: i) an *inherently* hedonically neutral pain sensation (i.e. it might be unpleasant but it isn't in itself) and ii) a desire to not have this pain sensation. Even if Heathwood's theory and examples are mainly focused on the reduction of sensory *pleasure* to desire, Heathwood's view is also meant to capture unpleasant experiences including the nature of unpleasant pains.

Heathwood takes pain to be a sensory experience. However, he unfortunately does not explain what exactly a sensory experience is. That said, he does suggest that smell and taste experiences may count as sensory pleasures. But, for the moment, we only need to focus on pain. If pain counts as a sensory experience, I understand that this means that pain sensations have a certain phenomenology, that there is something it is like for someone to have a pain sensation; pain is a qualitative state in the sense that there is a pain *quale*, and when you have a pain sensation you are aware of it, at least typically and under normal circumstances. Further, it is crucial to underline that, according to Heathwood, sensory experiences are hedonically neutral, they are not pleasant or unpleasant in themselves — this is an important feature of the theory and I will show that it is also highly problematic.

The second element of an unpleasant pain is the particular kind of desire that is directed at the pain sensation. The desire, according to Heathwood, must be i) simultaneous, ii) intrinsic, and iii) *de re* about the hedonically neutral pain sensation. I will refer to this as a *sid-desire*. It is because of such *sid-desire* for a pain sensation not to occur, that the unpleasant pain is unpleasant. The desire is about the pain sensation not to occur *qua* a qualitative phenomenal experience, that is, the desire is for a pain sensation *quale* not to occur. More precisely, it is a *sid-desire* about a state of affairs, that is, a state in which one is experiencing a pain sensation that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. For example, think about a smell like the one produced by coffee. The idea is that this smell is in itself neutral, it is not pleasant or unpleasant. Similarly, when one experiences pain, there is a sensory component that is in itself neutral, but this neutral feeling is desired not to occur and it is in virtue of such desire that the whole experience is unpleasant. I will now explain each of the features of a *sid-desire* in order to make this clearer.

The desire that constitutes an unpleasant pain has to be *simultaneous* with the pain sensation that the desire is about; both elements have to occur at the same time. Why is this time constraint important? This constraint helps to deal with various possible counterexamples for desire theories. For example, suppose you have a desire in the morning to have the taste experience of a strong black coffee, but it is not until the afternoon when you finally get your strong black coffee experience, yet the taste experience is disgusting, it is very unpleasant. Should it not be pleasant since you wanted it? Not according to desire theories, because the relevant desire in virtue of which the coffee experience is pleasant or unpleasant has to be *co-occurring*. Instead, the desire that we are considering occurred many hours before. What is really happening in this scenario is that in the morning you wanted the taste, but then, when you actually had it, you didn't want it. The constituting desire that explains that the taste is unpleasant is the one that is directed at the taste sensation at the same time that the sensation is taking place.

Something very similar can be said for pain. In the morning you had the desire to go the gym, at that moment when you stepped out of bed you wanted to feel the burning pain of exercising through weightlifting. Then when you actually go in the afternoon and do weightlifting, the experience of burning pain felt in your biceps is unpleasant. Shouldn't the pain be pleasant according to desire theories since you wanted it? Not really, we could explain that even if you wanted to experience that burning pain sensation *in the morning*, the concurrent desire *in the afternoon* is actually for that pain sensation not to occur. The relevant desire that constitutes unpleasantness must be simultaneous with the sensory experience. This does not mean that all simultaneous desires are relevant in accounting for an experience being hedonic, but it does imply that

the desires that are constitutive of a hedonic experience must be simultaneous to the sensory experience.

The desire must also be *intrinsic*. A typical way of understanding intrinsic desire is to put it in terms of desiring something ‘for its own sake’, as opposed to desiring that something for something else, that is, to have an extrinsic desire. For example, suppose that your mother is very sick and you desire that she gets better. You have a desire about your mother’s health improving. If you desire this for its own sake, it means that you desire her health to improve *tout court*, you do not desire this for the sake of something else that you desire. In contrast, if you desire her health to improve in virtue of something else, whatever that might be, then your desire about your mother’s health would not be intrinsic. If you desire it because in this way she will be able to come to your wedding, because in this way she will be able to go on vacation, or anything else, then your desire about her health is *extrinsic*. However, I think we need to be more detailed about what it means to desire something ‘for its own sake’. I propose that when *X* is desired intrinsically this means the following:

*S* desires *X* intrinsically if and only if *S* desires *X* without having this desire in virtue of a relation that *S* represents *X* having with some *Y* that *S* also desires.

In contrast, desiring *X* extrinsically means that:

*S* desires *X* extrinsically if and only if *S* desires *X* in virtue of a relation that *S* represents *X* as having with some *Y* that *S* also desires.

This, I think, gives a finer grained explanation of what we mean by desiring something for its own sake. When you desire your mother’s health to improve intrinsically, this means that you do have this desire without representing the content of your desire as having any type of relation with something else. In this case, you desire your mother to get better without representing her getting better as being connected with something else. In contrast, when you desire that same thing extrinsically, this means that you desire your mother’s health to improve in terms of a relation that you take to exist between her health improving and something else that you desire.

When we account for the unpleasantness of pain and one desires a pain sensation not to occur, this is in virtue of the pain sensation in itself and not in virtue of any relation that the pain sensation is taken to have with something else. Suppose that you desire to experience a pain sensation as a means for forgiveness. You want me, say, to punch you in the face, and thus cause you pain, as you think that this will renew our friendship since you did something bad to me (you lied to me about something important, you stole something valuable from me, etc.). I agree and I punch you in the face and cause you pain.

As you experience the pain, you also desire to have that pain since by feeling this pain you hope to be forgiven. Shouldn't the experience be pleasant since you wanted it simultaneously?

Desire theories can explain that even if you did want the pain simultaneously, the desire was not intrinsic; it was an instrumental desire.<sup>2</sup> What really happened is that you had a *simultaneous extrinsic* desire for the pain to occur, you had an instrumental desire for the pain to occur; however, you also had a *simultaneous intrinsic* desire for that pain not to occur, your desire for such pain not to occur was not held in virtue of any relation that you thought the pain had with something else, including possible causal relations. This is meant to show that the kind of desire that constitutes the unpleasantness of the experiences is not only simultaneous, but also intrinsic. Being simultaneous and intrinsic are necessary features of the desire in virtue of which we account for the experiences being hedonic.

The third and last feature that desires must have in order to constitute unpleasantness is that they have to be *de re*. A good way of understanding what this means is to refer to the distinction between types and tokens. Whereas to desire *X de dicto* means to desire it understood *as a type*, desiring *X de re* is to desire it *as a token*. Take the sentence 'I desire a red apple'. This can be understood *de dicto*, which means that the desire would be satisfied by any object that follows under the type *being a red apple*; the desire is about a type of object, not about an object in particular. Now, if we understood the sentence *de re*, this means that the desire can only be satisfied by a specific red apple, the desire would only be satisfied by one specific token of the type being a red apple.<sup>3</sup> The relevant desire that is supposed to constitute unpleasantness has to be *de re*, because one may desire some sensory experience *de dicto* to occur, and yet the whole experience be unpleasant, or, vice versa, desire the sensory experience not to occur *de dicto*, yet the whole experience be pleasant.

2 Given that the desire has to be intrinsic, this implies that the relevant desire is also non-instrumental. Instrumentality is a type of relation, and desiring something instrumentally means that we desire that something in virtue of the represented *causal relation* between what we desire and something else. Broadly, *X* is instrumental if there is some *Y* such that *X* causally brings about *Y*. An instrumental desire for *X* is a desire for *X* in virtue of *X* being represented as having a causal relation with some desired *Y*. Intrinsic desires cannot be instrumental because they are not held on the basis of a represented relation.

3 This is not the only way of understanding what *de re* means. Another way of understanding *de re* is in terms of an indexical and *de dicto* as not being indexical. I will not go into details about the various ways of understanding the distinction *de dicto* vs. *de re* since I do not think it makes an important difference for understanding desire theories' proposal.

Suppose that you desire to have the experience of flagellation. In this scenario you desire this experience intrinsically, which implies this is not in virtue of any represented relation between the experience of flagellation and something else—including instrumental relations such as the flagellation causing something else. I insist that this desire to experience flagellation is not seen as a means for something else, such as redemption of your sins; you just want the experience for its own sake. Then, as you have the experience of flagellation, you continue to desire it to occur. This might be psychologically odd, but I do not see why it would be impossible to have such a desire. Once you finally have the experience, it is unpleasant. Shouldn't it be pleasant since you intrinsically and simultaneously desire it to occur? According to desire theories, what is really happening is that even if you do desire the experience *de dicto* to occur, you also desire it *de re* not to occur. In other words, even if you do desire this flagellation pain to occur as a type, you also desire it not to occur as a token. With all this in mind, we can give a precise formulation of what desire theories propose for an unpleasant pain.

Desire theories proposal:

An unpleasant pain experience is unpleasant if and only if it is constituted of two components: i) a pain sensation that is inherently hedonically neutral, and ii) a simultaneous, intrinsic, *de re* desire (a *sid*-desire) of that pain sensation that it not to be occurring.

All in all, according to desire theories, an unpleasant pain experience qualifies as such in virtue of it being constituted by these two elements. These are necessary and sufficient for having an unpleasant pain. What it means to have an unpleasant pain experience is to have a sensory pain that is, in itself, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, and to have a *sid*-desire that is about that specific pain sensation. It is important to point out that it is the compound experience that has the property of being unpleasant and not its individual constituents. The pain sensation is not unpleasant in itself and neither is the *sid*-desire. Instead, an unpleasant pain is constituted by such a sensation and a *sid*-desire.

## II.2. THE HETEROGENEITY PROBLEM

If we are trying to find the best possible account for the unpleasantness of pain and other experiences, a strong reason to opt for desire theories is that they can provide an answer to the heterogeneity problem. The general idea is that, on the one hand, all unpleasant experiences feel unpleasant; however, on the other hand, there seems to be no *unitary feeling* that all and only unpleasant experiences share and by dint of which they qualify as unpleasant. This idea also applies to pleasant experiences and, in fact, most of the literature on the

heterogeneity of experience is about pleasant experiences. The idea is similar, that is, there is no qualitative aspect that all and only pleasant experiences share and in virtue of which they are pleasant. Feldman (2004) provides a good example of this intuition: ‘sensory pleasures are all «feelings», but they do not «feel alike» . . . After many years of careful research on this question, I have come to the conclusion that they have just about nothing in common phenomenologically.’ (Feldman, 2004, p. 79)

Feldman’s intuition is that there seems to be no unitary feeling in virtue of which all pleasant experiences qualify as pleasant. This intuition is also held for unpleasant experiences. If you think of many of the unpleasant experiences that you might have, such as feeling pain, feeling dizzy, experiencing itching, hunger, thirst, etc., there is nothing phenomenal, no conscious unitary feeling, in virtue of which all and only these experiences can be grouped as all belonging to the same type of experience. Korsgaard (1996) writes along these lines: ‘What do nausea, migraine, menstrual cramps, pinpricks and pinches have in common that makes us call them all pains?’ (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 148)

What this suggests is that being unpleasant is not a shared qualitative feature among all and only unpleasant experiences; being unpleasant cannot be explained in virtue of a shared unitary feeling that all and only unpleasant experiences have. There is nothing that feels alike among all and only unpleasant experiences.

The heterogeneity problem:

We have a very strong intuition that i) all and only unpleasant experiences *feel* unpleasant; it is in virtue of feeling unpleasant that they qualify as such. However, after careful introspection, there is also the strong intuition that ii) there is nothing qualitative, nothing phenomenal, *no unitary feeling*, that all and only unpleasant experiences share and in virtue of which they all count as unpleasant.

So how do desire theories confront the heterogeneity problem? I think that the simplest and most elegant way for desire theories to confront it is to say that unpleasantness is not qualitative, it is not something phenomenal, there is no single unitary aspect that all and only unpleasant experiences share: unpleasantness is not a feeling. Instead, desire theories can explain that what unifies all unpleasant experiences, or at least all unpleasant sensory experiences, is that they are partially constituted by a *sid-desire*. What really unifies all and only unpleasant sensory experiences is that they are constituted by the same type of desire, and it is in virtue of this that they all have the property of being unpleasant. More precisely, what unifies all and only unpleasant sensory experiences is that they are partially constituted by a *sid-desire* for a hedonically neutral sensory experience not to occur. This is not a denial that there is something phenomenal about unpleasant sensory experiences, including unpleasant pains,

since these unpleasant experiences are partially constituted by sensory experiences. However, it is a denial that being unpleasant is phenomenal in any way.

So, how can we explain that many unpleasant experiences are felt in different ways, if unpleasantness is not a feeling? Let us focus on the case of unpleasant pains to make this simpler: how can different unpleasant pains feel different and still count as unpleasant if unpleasantness is not a feeling? Desire theories' answer for this must be to account for the phenomenological difference by appealing to the differences in how different sensory pains feel. Take for example the difference between the feeling of being cut or burnt. An unpleasant cut feeling and an unpleasant burn feeling are different experiences insofar as they are constituted by distinct sensory components. These diverse sensory aspects, desire theories should explain, are what account for their different phenomenology. Feelings might be unpleasant, but unpleasantness is not a feeling.

The downside of this view is that we have to sacrifice the strong intuition that unpleasantness is indeed something felt, that unpleasantness is a feeling. The upside of the account is that we can explain in a straightforward way what unifies all and only unpleasant pains and unpleasant sensory experiences. There are several other aspects of unpleasantness that can be illuminated with this understanding of desire theories. Let us start with motivation. If we consider that a mental state is motivational if we can render behaviour intelligible in virtue of such a mental state (Smith, 1995, p. 94), then we could explain how unpleasant pains are motivational. For this, we will rely importantly on the fact that unpleasant pains are constituted by a desire, that is, when we are in unpleasant pain this implies that we have a *sid*-desire because we desire a pain sensation not to occur while the sensation is occurring.

Some body directed behaviour could be explained in virtue of our *sid*-desires. Given that we desire not to have a pain sensation, we might act in order to satisfy this *sid*-desire by withdrawing from a source of bodily damage, such as moving away from a burning object. By acting in this way, we do something in order to stop having the pain sensation caused by being burned. Our action is aimed at satisfying the content of our *sid*-desire for that pain sensation not to be occurring. This action is made intelligible in virtue of that *sid*-desire. We can thus explain what makes unpleasant pains motivational.

Let's now consider unpleasant pain's normative force: the fact that having an unpleasant pain also justifies certain actions, that unpleasant pains provide justification for action, a good reason to act. Whereas motivating reasons play an explanatory role in accounting for an action, «normative reasons . . . seem to be *truths* of the form 'It is required or desirable that I  $\Phi$ '» (Smith, 1995, p. 96). In order to explain this, it is important to accept that having frustrated desires is bad in itself and satisfying our desires is good in itself *all else being*

*equal*. That is, you may desire to jump off a high cliff, and it may be a terrible idea to act in order to satisfy this desire *all things considered*, given the bad consequences of this action. However, everything else being equal, it would be good to satisfy even this desire, since desires are mental states that are ultimately meant to be satisfied. Since it is good to satisfy our desires, it follows that it is required or desirable that we act in order to satisfy them, all else being equal.

Desire satisfaction is good in itself because, all else being equal, it is better to have satisfied desires than frustrated ones. Desire frustration is bad in itself, because, all else being equal, it is worse to have a frustrated desire than not having it. If we accept this, we can then show how desire theories can explain why unpleasant pains also provide us with good reasons to act. That is, given that it is bad in itself to have frustrated desires, and that unpleasant pains are constituted by frustrated *sid-desires*, then it is bad in itself to have unpleasant pains. We are, therefore, justified to act in order to not have frustrated *sid-desires*. The bare fact of having an unpleasant pain implies having a frustrated desire, and this in itself provides us with a good reason to act in order to stop having a frustrated desire.

This understanding of desire theories is, I think, quite straightforward, and, even if it goes against the strong intuition that unpleasantness is something felt, this approach offers a simple answer to the heterogeneity problem. Moreover, even if desire theories do not appeal to any unpleasant feeling, they can still accommodate the motivational force and some of the normativity of unpleasant pains. However, even if this is a promising theory of the unpleasantness of pain, I will now show that it is also problematic.

### III. PROBLEMS FOR DESIRE THEORIES

#### *III.1. THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA*

This problem for desire theories takes the form of a version of the Euthyphro dilemma: is pain unpleasant because we desire not to have it, or do we desire not to have pain because it is unpleasant? Broadly, whereas desire theorists endorse the former horn of the dilemma, the latter seems to be much more intuitive yet unavailable for them. This is why this is a dilemma; there are two options, but one is problematic and the other unavailable. It is more intuitive that we desire not to have a pain in virtue of pain being unpleasant, than thinking that pain qualifies as unpleasant merely in virtue of our desire for the pain not to occur. Desire theories can offer an initial solution to the dilemma. I will show, however, that this first solution will turn out to be problematic.

Do we desire pleasant sensations because they are pleasant, or are pleasant sensations pleasant because we desire them? The reductor of sensory pleasure to desire responds, «Yes and Yes.» Yes, we desire pleasant sensations because they

are pleasant (in other words, we desire them in advance because we know we will be desiring them when we get them). And Yes, pleasant sensation [*sic*] qualify as pleasant in virtue of the fact that they are intrinsically desired. (Heathwood, 2007, p. 39)

Heathwood acknowledges the dilemma for his account and offers a solution. His ‘Yes and Yes’ solution is meant to apply to pleasant sensory experiences but it can easily be adapted for unpleasant pain. Yes, we desire not to have pain in advance because we know that we will desire not to have it when we get it, and yes, pain qualifies as unpleasant in virtue of the *sid*-desires that we get when we have the pain sensation. In order to understand Heathwood’s answer, we first need to point out that he takes sensory experiences to be the bearers of the property of being pleasant and, similarly, in his view it is the pain sensation that is unpleasant. This is different from what I take to be the desire theories’ proposal. The way I understand desire theories’ view will in fact be helpful to deal with the Euthyphro dilemma. There is an important similarity and difference between what I take to be the desire theories’ view and Heathwood’s. The similarity is that in both views we explain the unpleasantness of pain in virtue of *sid*-desires, i.e., simultaneous, intrinsic, and *de re* desires for the hedonically neutral pain sensation for it not to be occurring.

However, the difference is that whereas Heathwood takes the pain sensation to be the bearer of the property of being unpleasant, I think that it is better to take the compound, constituted by the *sid*-desire and the pain sensation, as the bearer of the property of being unpleasant. This is what I take to be desire theories’ proposal. This nuance is borrowed from Brady (2017). He proposes that it is better to understand the whole compound as the bearer of unpleasantness, instead of the pain being the bearer of the property. I will explain the benefits of this view after discussing how it is problematic to understand that the pain sensation is the bearer of the property of being unpleasant *à la* Heathwood.

Let’s make sense of Heathwood’s response to the Euthyphro dilemma. Heathwood argues that, yes, we desire not to have an unpleasant pain sensation in virtue of its unpleasantness. Heathwood is providing a reason for having a desire not to have unpleasant pain experiences. More precisely, the reason why we desire not to have an unpleasant pain is because they are unpleasant. This is a justification for the desire to not have an unpleasant pain. The pain being unpleasant is a normative reason to desire not to have such pain. It is desirable to have such desire about an unpleasant pain because of the unpleasantness of the pain. That is, Heathwood is showing that we have a good reason to desire not to have unpleasant pains, in the same way as the first horn of the dilemma points out, i.e., we desire not to have unpleasant pains because they are un-

pleasant. However, it is not this desire — the desire regarding the unpleasant pain — that the Euthyphro dilemma is aimed at.

I think that we can better understand Heathwood's answer to the Euthyphro dilemma in terms of two different desires: a desire  $D_1$  *in virtue of which* the unpleasant pain sensation is unpleasant, and a desire  $D_2$  that is directed at that same pain sensation *because* the sensation is unpleasant. Heathwood can provide a justification of our  $D_2$  desires; we can explain why it is desirable to have these. We have a good reason to have a  $D_2$  desire because this desire will stop us from having an unpleasant pain. It is bad to have an unpleasant pain, we can explain, because it implies having a frustrated  $D_1$  desire. Since desire frustration is bad in itself, this provides a good reason to have a  $D_2$  desire. Desire frustration is intrinsically bad, since the nature and function of a desire is to be satisfied. Put in another way, all else being equal, we are always better off with a desire being satisfied rather than unsatisfied, and always worse off with a desire being unsatisfied rather than satisfied. If we accept this, then we are justified in  $D_2$  desiring not to have an unpleasant pain sensation, because in this way we won't have a frustrated  $D_1$  desire.

However, Heathwood still has a problem. He has not provided any account for the  $D_1$  desire regarding the hedonically neutral pain sensation. That is, when we ask through the dilemma if the pain sensation is unpleasant in virtue of our desire not to have it, we are still missing an account for this  $D_1$  desire that is meant to account for the unpleasantness of the experience. In short, Heathwood has not explained why one would take the second horn of the dilemma. He says that, yes, unpleasant sensations qualify as unpleasant in virtue of the fact that they are intrinsically desired not to occur, but we have not given yet any normative or motivating reason not to desire a pain sensation that is not unpleasant in itself. Heathwood has not provided a reason for the  $D_1$  desire. That is to say, so far there seems to be no reason why someone would desire not to have a hedonically neutral pain sensation.

The Euthyphro dilemma remains problematic. We can rephrase it more precisely: do we have a  $D_2$  desire not to have a pain sensation because the sensation is unpleasant in itself, or is the pain sensation unpleasant in virtue of us having a  $D_1$  desire for the sensation not to be occurring? The first horn of the dilemma seems quite sensible; there is a good reason, a justification, for having this  $D_2$  desire. Heathwood could explain that this  $D_2$  desire is justified by appealing to the avoidance of  $D_1$  desire frustration. Heathwood wants to answer 'yes' to both horns of the dilemma, but he has not really been able to say 'yes' to both of them.

He would say that, indeed, a pain sensation is unpleasant in virtue of a  $D_1$  desire for the sensation not to be occurring, but there is no reason that accounts for one having a  $D_1$  desire. Why would you have  $D_1$  desires about completely

hedonically neutral pain sensations? As an analogy, if an experience such as seeing something red is not unpleasant in itself, there seems to be no particular reason for wanting an experience of seeing something red not to be occurring. Heathwood's 'Yes and Yes' answer is unsatisfactory because, yes, he can account for *prospective*  $D_2$  anti-unpleasant pain desires, but, no, he cannot account for the *simultaneous*  $D_1$  anti-hedonically neutral pain desires. He has not explained the grounds upon which one would have a  $D_1$  desire about something that has nothing experientially bad for oneself.

There is another strategy available to try to deal with the Euthyphro dilemma. I think this one is successful, as it does not consist in giving an answer to the dilemma but in showing that the dilemma does not apply to desire theories. That is, the strategy is to argue that it is not the pain sensation that bears the property of being unpleasant, but rather the *whole compound* of the hedonically neutral pain sensation plus the sid-desire about that pain sensation (Brady, 2017). This solution offers an explanation of what *constitutes* an unpleasant pain, without claiming that something that was not unpleasant in itself becomes unpleasant in virtue of standing in relation to our desires. What I explained as the desire theories' proposal is precisely this. It is a version that accounts for the unpleasantness of pain in terms of sid-desires, as Heathwood proposes, but from a perspective by which we understand the property of being unpleasant as Brady does. That is, we have a  $D_1$  sid-desire directed at a hedonically neutral pain sensation, and this desire together with the pain sensation bear the property of being an unpleasant pain. Additionally, we also have a  $D_2$  desire directed at the compound. If we accept this constitutive explanation, there is simply no dilemma to be raised.

Nevertheless, there is still an unsolved problem. Desire theories' proposal has still not been able to account for the  $D_1$  desire that constitutes an unpleasant pain. That is, even if there is no dilemma for desire theories, the dilemma allows us to notice that there is a weakness in the theory. We can offer a sensible justification for  $D_2$  desires directed at the unpleasant pain experience, but the  $D_1$  desire remains unexplained in the theory. Unpleasantness seems to have a very tight connection with normativity and justification, yet don't we have any reason at all for having the sid-desire that constitutes an unpleasant pain? If we accept this version of desire theories, *à la Brady*, we can justify the proscriptive  $D_2$  desire to not have an unpleasant pain in terms of avoiding  $D_1$  desire frustration, since an unpleasant pain is still constituted by a frustrated  $D_1$  sid-desire. However Brady's solution has the same problem as Heathwood's when it comes to accounting for the simultaneous  $D_1$  sid-desire that constitutes an unpleasant pain. That is, there is no clear reason for having desires about the hedonically neutral pain sensation.

### III.2. THE EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATION

Desire theories can try to offer a solution for this. This is a teleological and evolutionary explanation. This solution is independent if we take desire theories as Brady or as Heathwood understand the unpleasantness of pain, that is, regardless of whether we think that what is unpleasant is the pain sensation or the compound of the sensation plus a desire. The solution is, in any case, to offer an *instrumental normative reason* why we have sid-desires for a pain sensation not to be occurring, even if such pain sensations are not unpleasant in themselves. According to this solution, our sid-desires have a purpose and such function is to help us to stay healthy and alive, i.e., these sid-desires are evolutionarily advantageous for us to have. However, it is crucial to notice that this solution does not provide a *motivating reason* or a *non-instrumental normative reason* why an individual would have such sid-desire.

In an evolutionary story of our development, we can argue that what explains why we have sid-desires for pain sensations not to be occurring is that our ancestors were more likely to survive by having such mental states and they passed this on to us. We are hardwired in such a way that we have sid-desires not to have hedonically neutral pain sensations. Given that these pain sensations are often the result of, or linked to, bodily damage, by sid-desiring not to have these hedonically neutral sensations we are better off; having these sid-desires helps us to avoid and stop bodily damage: it helps us to survive.

The evolutionary explanation:

Having sid-desires not to have hedonically neutral pain sensations is part of a process of natural selection. It is useful for creatures like us to be hardwired to sid-desire not to have hedonically neutral pain sensations. In this way we avoid bodily damage and thus are more likely to survive and stay healthy. There is a good instrumental reason to have these desires: having them helped us evolve to survive. It is desirable to have these sid-desires in order to guarantee our survival.

Hall (1989) has a similar idea. He thinks that there is nothing intrinsically bad or awful about pain experiences, but creatures like us have developed to inherently dislike them; «evolution has done its work very well and almost every living creature in the animal kingdom finds the sensations accompanying almost every kind of nociception unpleasant. So goes the evolutionary story.» (Hall, 1989, p. 648) However, even if this evolutionary explanation provides an instrumental justification of why we might have sid-desires not to have hedonically neutral pain sensations, this accounting for sid-desires is lacking something: i) we have not yet explained the *motivating reason* for which we have these sid-desires, and ii) we have not given a *non-instrumental reason* for having these sid-desires. Even if the evolutionary explanation provides a sensible

explanation of why we have this kind of desire, it is not proving something else that I think we also need: an explanation of why an individual would form a sid-desire, at a personal conscious level, about a hedonically neutral pain sensation. We still lack a complete understanding of why we have such sid-desires, an understanding of the reasons that a sentient being has behind such sid-desires.

When we ask someone ‘why do you want to marry me?’ there could be many explanations for this desire. We could provide motivating reasons for desiring to marry someone, reasons that render having such desire intelligible. Our desire to marry someone could be explained by our belief that this person is intelligent, sexy, reliable, etc., i.e., by our belief that this person is somehow good. The belief about that person being good is a motivating reason to have the desire to marry him or her; having this belief explains why we have the desire to marry that person. These kinds of reasons are available to that person at a conscious level. One could introspect and rationalize one’s behaviour and desires by appealing to such mental states, as well as explaining the basis for having such states. We can answer to the question and say ‘I want to marry you because (I believe) you are a good person’ or ‘I want to be with you because (I think) you’re good for me’. This are the kind of motivating reason that we can consciously have concerning our actions and about our having certain desires.

In contrast, this does not seem available when it comes to sid-desires regarding hedonically neutral sensory experiences. There seems to be no reason for a person to form sid-desire about something that has nothing good or bad about it in itself, and it is hard to make sense of why someone would consciously generate the desire about such type of neutral experiences. If the pain sensations are in themselves not hedonic, they do not feel unpleasant in themselves, it is hard to make sense of why someone would consciously desire not have one of these sensations. It seems odd for an individual to start having this sid-desire, since there seems to be no particular reason for intrinsically desiring not to have something that has nothing good or bad in itself. The kind of rationalizations that we can provide for the motivation of having desires does not appear as available for desire theories. We are aware of the hedonically neutral pain sensation, but there is no particular reason for sid-desiring this experience not to be occurring in virtue of how it feels.

Moreover, we could provide normative reasons to desire to marry someone, a good reason to have the desire to want to marry such a person, why it is desirable or required to do so. There might be good instrumental reasons for having the desire to marry someone. If by marrying this person we will be happier, believing that this person is good is a good instrumental reason for us to have the desire to marry that individual. By having this desire we will be motivated to marry the person, and thus we will be happier. This last type of explanation is the one that the evolutionary explanation provides. It is good to

sid-desire a pain sensation not to be occurring *because* in this way we will be better off in terms of survival. However, the type of justification that we take to have regarding pain seems to be also non-instrumental.

We, as individuals, as conscious beings, do not have these sid-desires because we think in this way our species will survive, nor because of the way pain sensations feel — since they are hedonically neutral in this view. At the end, pain sensations in this account are not unpleasant or experientially bad for the individuals. However, there is a strong intuition that desires concerning pain are non-instrumentally justified and motivated, pain is a motivating reason and a good non-instrumental reason for desiring not to have pain. The evolutionary explanation behind sid-desires only offers an instrumental justification of such desires. It is good to have these sid-desires *in order to* survive.

Let's try to make this clearer. Something similar could be said about other sensory experiences, e.g., we could explain why it is evolutionarily advantageous for us to be good at perceiving red objects. However, even if we can give an evolutionary explanation of why creatures that were good at perceiving red objects were more likely to survive, this does not mean that we have provided a motivating reason for these sentient creatures to look at red objects, or a non-instrumental justification of it. Even if it is good for us to have perceptual systems to detect red objects with less difficulty than objects of other colours, this is not a motivating reason for us, as conscious beings, to look at red objects nor does it mean that we have a good non-instrumental reason to do so. When we offer an evolutionary explanation in these cases, we give an explanation of the phenomenon, and we can even provide an explanation of why it is desirable for us to have evolved in such a way. However, we have not yet given an explanation of why individuals act in the way they do, i.e., we have not provided an explanation for individuals' behaviour from their own point of view. We have not given any reason from the sentient being's perspective, from the inside, as it were. But when we feel pain these type of explanation appear neatly: we desire pain not to be occurring because it hurts!

We can explain why a volcano explodes, why glucose is needed for certain biological processes, why our visual system evolved for being particularly good at perceiving red objects, and why, according to the evolutionary explanation, having certain sid-desires is advantageous for our survival. However, this does not mean that there is a motivating reason or a non-instrumental justification for the volcano to explode, for glucose being needed for certain biological processes, for being good at perceiving red objects, or for having sid-desires not to have hedonically neutral pain sensations. Desire theories are unable to rationalise the constitutive sid-desires of an unpleasant pain in terms of motivating reasons and in terms of non-instrumental reasons. This is problematic

when we consider that there is a strong intuition that this is precisely the type of reason that pain offers in relation to desire.

Furthermore, such teleological evolutionary explanation for our sid-desires can be problematic in multiple other ways. First, it is not clear that we really need sid-desires about pain sensations for survival, or that it is the best possible explanation of how we prevent bodily damage. For instance, *anti-damage* desires might also play an important role in our survival and might even be more efficacious for protecting our bodies under certain circumstances. If we accept the evolutionary explanation as correct it is because, I take it, it is a good account of how we survived. Being a good description of our survival process would make such an explanation at least more appealing, despite its inability to offer a rationalisation for the motivating reason or for the non-instrumental justification of our sid-desires for a pain sensation not to occur.

However, there are other competing explanations of what we needed to survive. Anti-damage desires might have also played an important role. That is, we could explain that we are equipped with desires to avoid damage and that these desires might be even more effective than sid-desires directed at pain sensations, since anti-damage desires address the main issue directly. It is probably more efficacious for avoiding bodily injury to desire not to have bodily injury than desiring not to have a hedonically neutral pain sensation that is highly associated with such type of wounds. I won't go into the detail of this, but I do want to point out that even if desire theories can provide an explanation for why we have sid-desires for pain sensations not to be occurring by appealing to an evolutionary tale, the evolutionary explanation is not the only possible account of how desires might have played a role in our survival, which diminishes the appeal of such evolutionary story.

Second, desire theories' view of unpleasantness might be too demanding in terms of what is actually needed in order to account for how we protect our bodies. This is because one might argue that the actions to protect our bodies via our pain sensations require beliefs about the connection between the damage and the pain sensations, together with more beliefs about how to deal with such bodily damage in order to stop the pain sensation. This kind of cognitive requirement may appear as too demanding for the kind of creatures that we might want to ascribe unpleasant pains to, together with self-preserving bodily behaviour. These might include, for example, very young infants and other mammals to which this kind of belief is not often attributed. That is to say, desire theories' explanation requires a sophisticated apparatus of knowledge of the connection between pain sensation and bodily damage, yet it seems unlikely that many animals that do have unpleasant pains, and act in order to protect their bodies guided by such experiences, have such type of knowledge.

If this is correct, desire theories are not actually offering a good explanation of how sid-desire played an evolutionary role.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Desires theories offer an interesting and compelling explanation of hedonic experience, in general, and of the unpleasantness of sensory experiences and unpleasant pains, in particular. One of its main virtues is that it can present an elegant solution to the phenomenal heterogeneity among unpleasant experiences. The element that unifies all these unpleasant experiences is that they are sid-desired not to be occurring. Moreover, the nature of desires allows us to shed light on some of the motivation and justifications of our behaviour regarding unpleasant pain. That said, this theory is not able to give a full account of other motivations and justifications from the point of view of who is having pain experiences. This, I claim, are some of the limits of the proposal that are relevant to have in mind if we want an account of unpleasantness that covers all aspects of the experience.

On top of the difficulties just mentioned, there is one more reason to reject desire theories. The other horn of the Euthyphro dilemma is still available. Even if the dilemma cannot be applied to desire theories if we take unpleasantness to be a property of the whole compound experience, the dilemma gives us the possibility to account in a simple way for the relation between unpleasant pains and desires. We can forget about the sid-desire that constitutes the unpleasantness of pain since we can explain such unpleasantness in different terms. We can simply take the first horn that the Euthyphro dilemma offered. Why do we desire unpleasant pains not to be occurring? Because unpleasant pains *feel* unpleasant and feeling unpleasant is bad in itself. Pain feels unpleasant and this is why we desire not to have it.

The fact that unpleasant pains feels bad gives us a motivating reason and a non-instrumental justification to desire these pain experiences not to occur from the perspective of a sentient being. The felt badness on an unpleasant pain is a motivating reason for us to desire that pain not to be occurring. It is also a non-instrumental justification: the felt badness of an unpleasant pain makes it desirable that we want such experience not to be occurring. Moreover, this is also consistent with the evolutionary explanation. It is good for us to desire not to have unpleasant pains, because this is also a good way to avoid bodily damage. This approach, of course, has its own virtues and vices, but, for now, this other possibility should be clarified in another occasion.

## REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

- ANSCOMBE, G. E. M. (1957). *Intention*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- ARMSTRONG, D. M. (1962). *Bodily sensations*. Routledge.
- BRADY, M. (2017). Painfulness, desire, and the Euthyphro dilemma. *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Retrieved from <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/135993/>
- FELDMAN, F. (2004). *Pleasure and the good life: Concerning the nature, varieties, and plausibility of hedonism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- HALL, R. J. (1989). Are pains necessarily unpleasant? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 49(June), 643–59.
- HEATHWOOD, C. (2006). Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism. *Philosophical Studies*, 128(3), 539–563.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (2007). The reduction of sensory pleasure to desire. *Philosophical Studies*, 133(1), 23–44.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (2011). Desire-based theories of reasons, pleasure, and welfare. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 6, 79–106.
- KORSGAARD, C. M. (1996). The origin of value and the scope of obligation. In O. O'Neill (Ed.), *The sources of normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- PITCHER, G. (1970). The awfulness of pain. *Journal of Philosophy*, 67(July), 481–491.
- SCHROEDER, TIMOTHY. (2017). Desire. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/desire/>
- \_\_\_\_\_, (2004). *Three faces of desire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SEARLE, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SMITH, M. (1995). *The moral problem*. Malden, Mass. ; Oxford: Blackwell.

ABRAHAM SAPIÉN obtuvo un doctorado por la Universidad de Glasgow y por la Sorbona de París (París-IV) en 2018. Actualmente es profesor Titular-C en la Universidad Nacional Pedagógica, en la Ciudad de México.

*Líneas de investigación*

Se centra en el sufrimiento en sus variadas facetas, tanto el dolor físico y somático, así como el dolor, o sufrimiento, emocional.

*Publicaciones recientes:*

CÓRDOBA BASULTO, D.I., ARIAS GARCÍA, A. y SAPIÉN CÓRDOBA, A., «Deseo sexual en hombres con y sin vasectomía: experiencias y significados» *Revista Electrónica de Psicología Iztacala* Vol. 16, No 3 (2013).

SAPIÉN CÓRDOBA, A. «The unpleasantnesses of pain» (FORTHCOMING).

*Email:*

abrahamsapienc@gmail.com