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Pleasure, pain and sense perception

Lisa Shapiro

Contemporary philosophers, and indeed most cognitive scientists interested in sense perception, take for granted that our feelings of pleasure and pain are distinct from our sensory perceptions. That is, most of us take it that our visual perception of color, say, is not intrinsically pleasant or painful, though perceptions of some colors (a warm brick red) may cause us to feel, or perhaps simply be associated with, feelings of pleasure, while those of other colors (a bright lime green) cause or are associated with feelings of pain. Similarly, while we admit that some sounds (lapping waves at the beach) can be pleasant and others (nails on a chalkboard) painful, we conceive of the sound – the content of our sense perception – as distinct from the feeling of pleasure or pain. In this essay, I show that this way of thinking about the relation between sense perception and pain ought not to be taken for granted, and indeed was not in the eighteenth century. Key thinkers of the early eighteenth century take all sense perception to be species of pleasure and pain, and so they take pleasure and pain to be just as contentful as any sense perception. Interestingly, though, by the end of the eighteenth century it is clear that the foundation for our contemporary prejudice has been laid, at least in the English-language tradition. Jeremy Bentham, in the utilitarian framework he puts forward in *The Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, would seem to take pleasure and pain as primitives, which, though arising from an array of causes, do not contain any information about those causes. They are simple contentless motivational states. This essay is an effort to understand the philosophical forces driving that transformation. What conceptual issues arise in the eighteenth century that separate pleasure and pain from sense perception and leave us with an understanding of pleasure and pain as having no epistemic and only motivational value?

My discussion aims to sketch out the narrative of a conceptual change, marking key turns of the plot line, and as such my survey of figures and positions will not be comprehensive. Notably, I will not be able to engage with the German tradition (but see Gaukroger, Chapter 16, on “Sensibility”). I suspect, however, that consideration of Kant and the German Romantic response would add texture to the story.

It should not be surprising that sense perception and pleasure and pain should be folded together. We need only turn our attention to other sense modalities: it is much

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more difficult to separate a taste or a smell from a particular feeling of pleasure or pain. The bad smell, say, of formaldehyde, just is painful; it seems artificial to think of the smell as causing a pain. This point is perhaps made more vivid in thinking of the tastes of a good meal. The taste of butternut squash and mascarpone ravioli is a pleasure in itself, though additional pleasures might follow from it. If sensory content is not distinct from pleasure or pain in these senses, why should vision or hearing or touch be any different?

While the problem was not originally conceived of in these sorts of terms, we will see that it quickly began to be. Interestingly, the starting point ~~seems to be~~ a Cartesian account of sense perception, and so I begin there. ~~The~~ ^{empiricist} problem of pleasure and pain begins with Locke's account of simple ideas, and his own equivocation about how pleasure and pain fit into his empiricist account. We can read the eighteenth century discussion as beginning from efforts to preserve the Lockean model of sense perception while resolving the tensions around pleasure and pain inherent in his account. Berkeley and Hutcheson do this by affirming that pleasure or pain are integral to sensory experience, though at the same time they problematize the epistemic role these affective states play for Locke. However, there are different aspects of the epistemic role of pleasure and pain: one aspect ties these affective states to knowledge of existence, but another ties them to consciousness – the very perceptual experience through which ~~we have knowledge. A comparison between Condillac and Hume's conception of sensory experience, and in particular between their conceptions of consciousness,~~ ^{of} illuminates what I take to be a pivotal step towards our contemporary view: separating pleasure and pain from consciousness itself, the way in which we are aware of what we are aware. Hume's denial that pleasure and pain are integral to our awareness of our thoughts is aligned with a reorientation of pleasure and pain with self-interest and so to motivations to act. ^{of}

The seventeenth-century background: Descartes and Locke

At least one of the central tasks Descartes sets himself in *Meditations* is to ground the beliefs derived from our senses. The First Meditation's skeptical arguments serve to undermine those beliefs, but by the end of the Sixth Meditation, those "exaggerated doubts of the last few days should be dismissed as laughable" (Descartes 1641: AT VII, 89). It is certainly the case that the metaphysical picture developed in the body of that work – that the human mind is essentially a thinking thing; that God exists and is the cause of both the existence and essence of the mind; that the essence of body is extension; and that mind and body are really distinct things – is meant to ground our sensory beliefs. However, it is just as much the case that within that new metaphysics Descartes also aims to reconceive just what it is to have a sensation of the world. In doing so, Descartes ends up implicitly taking sensations to incorporate a dimension of pleasure and pain.

The skeptical arguments of the First Meditation hinge on understanding our sensory perceptions of the world as representing their objects in a way analogous to the way a painting represents its object. Just as a painting represents things in the world through resembling the parts and properties of objects in a different medium, so too

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does our mind, in having a sense perception, present a mental resemblance of the parts and properties of a thing in the world. Just as a painting can misrepresent or distort things – altering properties to the point of creating new things that only tenuously resemble their original source – so too can our sensory perceptions misrepresent and distort their objects. Insofar as we think of our ideas born of sense perception, “as it were the images of things” (Descartes 1641: AT VII, 27), we are, it seems unavoidably subject to the skeptic’s worry: We cannot be sure whether that image does resemble its object and so is veridical or distorts it and is false.¹ Notably, the conception of sense perception as imagistic tacitly assumes that our sensations do not essentially *feel* in any way; or rather, nothing in the way a sensation feels contributes to its representational content. For this reason, pleasure and pain cannot be intrinsic to sense perception on this model.

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In the Sixth Meditation, however, Descartes proposes an account of sense perception that does not depend on our ideas representing their objects through resemblance. To sketch out this account, Descartes, rather than highlighting our ideas of objects and their properties, focuses first on sensations of pleasure and pain. Only after drawing attention to these feelings of pleasure and pain, along with “inner” sensations of hunger, thirst, and the like, and our emotions, does Descartes note our outwardly directed sensory perceptions (Descartes 1641: AT VII, 74). This new story of sensory perception develops as the Sixth Meditation unfolds. Descartes puts forward an account of sensory representation that hinges on the ways in which things stand to benefit or harm us. While our sense perceptions do allow us to judge that bodies exist, and in a variety that parallels the variations in our sensations, they do not of themselves justify a belief that things have the properties we perceive them to have. Nonetheless, they do still provide trustworthy information about the world around us. For him, our sensations essentially and intrinsically inform us about how things benefit and harm us, and in general how they affect our well-being. Though he recognizes we can be mistaken about the benefits and harms things offer us – for instance, we can feel thirsty when we ought not to take in more fluids – for him, we still experience the sensations we do in accord with the system which “is most especially and most frequently conducive to the preservation of the healthy man” (Descartes 1641: AT VII, 88, 81, 83).²

Descartes does not think that our sensory perceptions inform us about the world, through the transmission of real qualities – benefit and harm – into the mind.³ Rather, for him, two aspects of our sensory experience serve to provide us with information. First, the *variation* in sensory input conveys information about real variation in the world. And second, Descartes suggests that *all* sensations are either agreeable or disagreeable, and through this aspect of our sensations we are steered towards what is beneficial and away from what is harmful to us. That is, for Descartes, sensations seem *intrinsically* to involve pleasure and pain, and moreover this affective dimension of sensation affects the *content* of our sensations. It is through this intrinsic affective dimension that, for Descartes, we begin to be able to have knowledge of the world. It is clear that Descartes himself thinks that this alternative model can meet the challenges of the skeptic. At the end of the *Meditations*, the meditator has not only dismissed any worries about a deceiving God and a defective faculty of reason, but he takes himself to have answered the skeptic’s challenge to distinguish waking from dreaming, the challenge which rests on the imagistic conception of sense perception.

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Locke, in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, seems to adopt Descartes' alternative model of sense perception in his epistemology. According to Locke, knowledge is essentially a matter of the relations of ideas: "the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas" (Locke 1689: 4.1.2). To have knowledge of some thing either intuitively or demonstrably is to be able to differentiate it from other things, to perceive its relations to those other things, and to articulate these relations. However, knowledge also involves what Locke calls real existence. For him, knowledge of real existence is sensitive knowledge. In *Essay* 4.2.14, in affirming that we can have sensitive knowledge – that our ideas do correspond to the "real existences" of things outside us, Locke appeals to our experience of pleasure and pain to rebut a dreaming skepticism that calls into question the existence of the world:

But yet if he be resolved to appear so skeptical, as to maintain, that what I call being actually in the Fire is nothing but a Dream, and that we cannot thereby certainly know, that any such thing as Fire actually exists without us: I answer, *That we certainly finding, that Pleasure or Pain follows upon the application of certain Objects to us, whose Existence we perceive, or dream that we perceive, by our Senses, this certainty is as great as our Happiness, or Misery, beyond which, we have concernment to know, or to be.*

(Locke 1689: 4.2.14; emphasis added)

Through those experiences of pleasure and pain we can establish a distinction between ideas that are genuinely caused by existing external objects and those that only appear to be so, and thus establish the relation between our ideas and real existence that gives us sensitive knowledge.

This role for pleasure and pain might well seem minimal, since Locke does not maintain that we can gain any information about the world other than its existence from these ideas. But in fact it is crucial if Locke is to avoid a radical idealism. Since, for Locke, all we perceive are ideas, we have no independent access to the causes of those ideas, and so from our sensory ideas *on their own*, it is not clear that he is entitled to claim that we *know* of the existence of those causes. Pleasure and pain, however, serve to establish the causal link between the world of objects and the mind. And with that link established, Locke can avail himself of the information contained in our ideas of primary qualities, and so establish that the objects of our ideas really possess those qualities. Moreover, later in Part 4 of the *Essay*, Locke seems to admit that pleasures and pains *do* give us substantive information about the world, and in particular about the ways things benefit and harm us, at least for the purposes of action (see Locke 1689: 4.11.8).

Locke's conundrum

So, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it seemed to be taken for granted that pleasure and pain had some epistemic value. At the very least, it was accepted that pleasure and pain afforded us knowledge that things exist outside of us. And some

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philosophers went further to maintain that pleasures and pains, and our affective states generally, provided us with knowledge of our relations to other things in the world, even if they did not give us knowledge of the natures of those things in themselves. What intellectual moves were made over the course of the eighteenth century to get us to the point at its end where pleasure and pain were denied to have any epistemic value? To answer this question we have to begin by looking once again at Locke.

While Locke would seem to preserve the epistemic role for pleasure and pain assigned by Descartes, he struggles with incorporating pleasure and pain into his theory of ideas. On Locke's account all of our knowledge derives from simple ideas, either of sensation or reflection, and there are two essential features of these simple ideas: they are conveyed into the mind independently of one another; and they are, as simple ideas, unanalyzable. Locke takes our ideas of pleasure and pain to be simple ideas "which convey themselves into the mind, by all the ways of sensation and reflection" (Locke 1689: 2.7.1), and so it certainly seems as if our ideas of pleasure and pain ought to be analyzable and distinct from our other simple ideas. Locke's discussion of pleasure and pain often does take this line. For instance, Locke notes that almost all of our ideas are joined to an idea of pleasure and pain (Locke 1689: 2.7.2), and in doing so he certainly suggests that each of the ideas that are joined together are distinct from one another.⁴ This clear distinction, however, becomes somewhat murky in the very next paragraph, where he denies that pleasures and pains are "wholly separated" from our sensations and reflections (see Locke 1689: 2.7.3). Further complicating matters, Locke's language relating pleasure and pain to other ideas is not stable. Sometimes he characterizes the ideas as "joined" or "annexed," suggesting that two independent ideas form a complex idea. Other times he maintains that pleasure and pain are "blended ... together in almost all that our thoughts and senses have to do with" (Locke 1689: 2.7.5), suggesting that simple ideas have an aspect of pleasure or pain, distinguishable only by reason.

Which model Locke adopts impacts other elements of his account. It is through pleasure and pain that our attention is directed to one idea or another, and this direction of our attention is important to him for explaining not only our move to action but also our efforts at understanding. For instance, attention plays a role in our forming ideas of particular substances from simple ideas. Pleasure and pain cannot direct attention if there is no explanation of how simple ideas are joined with ideas of pleasure and pain. It is for this reason that Locke seems to want to qualify the distinctness of *all* our simple ideas from one another and to deny that pleasure and pain are wholly separate.

Locke's equivocation shows how pleasure and pain become particularly problematic within the empiricist framework that considers each of our simple ideas as distinct from one another. On the one hand, insofar as pleasure and pain are distinguishable from other sensory ideas, they ought to be distinct simple ideas themselves. On the other hand, insofar as pleasure and pain allow us to infer the existence of objects of *other* sensory ideas and direct our attention from one idea to another, they do not seem to be distinct ideas, but rather "blended" with sensory ideas, and inseparable from them except by reason. What is there to do?

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Berkeley and Hutcheson

Both Berkeley and Hutcheson recognize ~~and resolve~~ the difficulties in Locke's account of pleasure and pain and resolve these difficulties by simply maintaining that what it is to sense is just to have a pleasure or pain. For them, there is no question of pleasures and pains being blended or annexed to other simple ideas. Sensations just are pleasures and pains. j

In his earlier work, *Towards a New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley maintains that at least one set of sensory ideas is intrinsically pleasant or painful: touch. Through our sense of touch we are able to sense immediately, through a bodily pleasure and pain, the various benefits and harms the world might afford us (see Berkeley 1709: §59; 192–93, for instance). However, he does not go so far here as to claim that the other sense modality he discusses, vision, has the same intrinsically affective quality. Rather, he claims from past correlations between visual sensations and tactile ones, we can use our sense of sight to anticipate things we come across benefiting or harming us.⁵

However, in the *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley shifts his position in a way that is significant for our concerns here. In reading the *Dialogues*, commentators have typically focused on Berkeley's criticisms in that work of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and on his strict adherence to the way of ideas – that what we immediately perceive are ideas – to show that from that principle the existence of the material world cannot be established. But the basic assumptions underlying that argument reveal that Berkeley holds that sensory experience is intrinsically pleasant or painful. For instance, in the First Dialogue, as Berkeley's alter ego, Philonous insists on treating our sensation of heat as a simple idea, and so concludes that any sensory content cannot be separable from the pleasure or pain of the heat. As Philonous prompts Hylas to recognize, ~~sensations of~~ ^u great heat or cold is “nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain” and a “sensible pain is nothing distinct from those sensations or ideas” (Berkeley 1713: 176–77). a
Insofar as heat is undeniably pleasant or painful, the heat itself must be a kind of pleasure or pain. Insofar as the sensory idea is a simple idea, it cannot be that any sensation is blended or annexed to another.

As the discussion continues it becomes clear that Berkeley applies the same line of reasoning to all our sensations: they are all species of pleasure and pain. Here Hylas tries to recoil from that conclusion, but to no avail. The argument this time is a bit different, and seems to turn on a somewhat surprising premise: that the character of immediate sensory experience is constituted by pleasure and pain. All sensible things are perceived immediately, and what we perceive immediately is just pleasure and pain. So all sensations just are pleasures and pains (Berkeley 1713: 180). While this claim is at least plausible for sounds, tastes, smells, textures, and even colors, it is interesting to note that Berkeley does seem to extend this point about sensory perception even to our ideas of extension, figure and motion. They are also pleasures and pains, though less vivid ones (Berkeley 1713: 191–92). Berkeley thus seems wholly committed to the view that our immediate perceptions are all pleasures and pains.

It is hard to determine the epistemic implications of this position for Berkeley. In the *New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley asserts that through touch, and the sensations of pleasure and pain it affords, we gain knowledge of the ways things benefit and harm

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us. Through the association of touch and vision, we come to see the size of things in proportion to these benefits and harms, and thereby direct ourselves in and around our environment (see, for instance, Berkeley 1709: 193ff.). In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley's position on the epistemic value of our perceptions of pleasure ~~of~~ pain is far less clear. There, Berkeley leverages the fact that our sensations just are pleasures and pains to deny the existence of the material world. Nonetheless, at the same time he adheres to this idealism, he also admits that our sensations of pain and pleasure inform us about benefits and harms. Both Descartes and Locke appeal to the benefit and harm of sensory states precisely to establish the existence of the world external to thought and our ability to know something about it. While Berkeley wants to preserve the view that sensations are information-bearing states, it is not clear just what information they end up providing us, given that he denies that the material world exists. Berkeley's argument for idealism thus problematizes the epistemic value of pleasure and pain.

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While Hutcheson does not have a well-developed theory of sense perception, for him too all sensations are pleasant or painful. He holds this commitment in several major works. In *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, he holds that we cannot but feel sensory pleasures and pains as our sense organs are affected by external objects. While the text is inconclusive as to whether these pleasures are separate from our simple ideas or integral to them, Hutcheson remarks that the differences in experience of pleasure and pain at an object likely reflects a difference in simple ideas, and notes that pleasure and pain are often proportionate to the "intensity" of the quality. These remarks suggest that he takes them to be integral to sensation (Hutcheson 1725: 1.7). This suggestion is carried forward in his *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, where Hutcheson defines a sense perception as: "every Determination of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain" (Hutcheson 1728: 1.1). Hutcheson skims quickly over our sensory perception of external objects and goes on to enumerate a provisional list of classes of other senses – an internal sense, a public sense, a moral sense, a sense of honor – each of which is a kind of pleasure, and that these senses are taken to be pleasures suggest that he thinks the external senses are as well. In *A Synopsis of Metaphysics Comprehending Ontology and Pneumatology*, in Part II, on the human mind, he clarifies to some extent what was left ambiguous in the earlier works. After defining sensible qualities to be colors, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold, in distinction from "states ... that accompany sensation" such as duration, number, extension, figure, motion and rest, Hutcheson goes on to assert that "some sensible qualities are pleasant, some painful, others neutral or indifferent" (Hutcheson 1744: 2.1.3.4). In the remainder of the paragraph, Hutcheson distinguishes four cases: pleasures and pains that represent nothing; pleasant sensations that do represent sensible qualities, and thereby indicate benefit; painful sensations that do represent sensible qualities, and thereby indicate harm; and indifferent sensations representing sensible qualities. The ambiguous status of pleasure and pain as mental states is thus resolved by simply admitting that neither representation nor an affective dimension are essential features of our sensory experience: some pleasures and pains are representational, others are not; some sensory representations are pleasant or painful, others are not. Hutcheson thus consistently

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maintains that some of our sensations, and arguably most of them, are representational states of pain or pleasure.

(and not the non-representational states of pleasure and pain)

Hutcheson does not leverage the representationality of some of our pleasures and pains to establish the existence of an extra-mental world. Indeed, the skeptical questions that drove such a move in both Descartes and Locke are of little interest to Hutcheson. Instead, Hutcheson draws on representational states of pleasure and pain to provide the model for his innovative accounts of our moral and aesthetic senses. ~~Hutcheson's accounts do draw on those sensations that are both pleasant and representational as a model for his moral and aesthetic theories (and not those non-representational states of pleasure and pain)~~ For Hutcheson, it is essential that feelings of pleasure and pain contain within them their representational content, for otherwise, there would remain a problem of linking those feelings with a distinct representation or idea. This problem of linking a motivating force with an idea is one of the challenges of the innatist accounts of morality to which Hutcheson aims to propose an alternative.

The utilitarian accounts being developed at the end of the eighteenth century do manage to offer a moral philosophy focused on non-representational pleasures and pains, but we can see them as answering a challenge that can only come once pleasure and pain are wholly severed from sensory representation: How can non-representational pleasures and pains serve to ground morality? In the remainder of this chapter I suggest that changing conceptions of consciousness, rather than an issue internal to moral philosophy, can help in understanding the reasons behind the ~~reconception~~ of *reconceptualization* representational sensory experience as not pleasant or painful.

Pleasure, pain and consciousness: Condillac and Rousseau

In this section and the next, I will compare Étienne Bonnot de Condillac⁶ and David Hume. This comparison highlights how the conception of consciousness is connected to the issue of the relation of sensory representation and pleasure and pain, and shows how situating pleasure and pain within an account of human nature was not simply a matter of assigning them the role of motivating action.

Both Condillac and Hume see themselves as following closely in Locke's footsteps, though they each aim to modify the details of the Lockean project to move it forward.⁷ While many similarities and differences between each of these two philosophers and Locke are well-noted, their relation to Locke's conundrum about pleasure and pain has gone unremarked. Condillac, on the one hand, brings to the fore the path taken by Berkeley and Hutcheson. For him, "[t]here are no indifferent sensations except by comparison: each one in itself is pleasant or unpleasant: to feel and not to feel good or bad are expressions that are completely contradictory" (Condillac 1754: "Précis"; 1982: 161).

All our sensations are either agreeable or disagreeable, that is, ~~that~~ pleasant or painful. Hume, on the other hand, pursues the other option in Locke's conundrum. He preserves the atomist conception of perceptions and holds that pleasures and pains are distinct impressions and ideas (see, for instance, Hume 1739-40: 1.1.2.1; SBN 8). Moreover, through his associationism he resolves the problem that option

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faced of explaining how pleasures and pains are “annexed” to other ideas. However, in doing so, he forgoes any claim that there is anything special to the way pleasures and pains are joined with other ideas. His account of the indirect passions makes this point particularly clearly. The pleasures and pains we feel are just like ~~other~~ ^{any} perception~~s~~, associated with other perceptions and associable with a range of perceptions. Thus, Condillac expressly preserves the place of pleasure and pain as integral to sensory experience, while Hume systematically treats pleasure and pain as independent mental states. A consideration of the context surrounding these distinct positions on pleasure and pain suggests that they are linked to differences in their conceptions of consciousness. To demonstrate this, I first consider Condillac in some detail, as his *Treatise on Sensations* explicitly articulates the role pleasure and pain play in the workings of the mind, and in particular with regard to the distinctive work of representing the world. Having Condillac’s account in view will help to highlight Hume’s distinctive account.

Condillac’s *Treatise of Sensations* consists of a thought experiment wherein an initially inert and lifeless statue is given one sense modality at a time, and at each stage allowed to form ideas. The experiment is meant to determine when, and so how, the statue comes to think as we humans do. The statue’s ideas (at least initially) are simply episodes of consciousness, and not in and of themselves intentional. That is, they not only do not refer to anything outside of experience, they don’t even purport to do so. From its experience, the statue develops capacities for operating on these ideas and ultimately the capacity for intentional thought, a capacity that Condillac takes to require an explanation and to develop through experience. The role of pleasure and pain in Condillac’s characterization of consciousness is of particular interest.

Condillac’s thought experiment begins with the statue’s being given but the sense of smell because “of all the senses it is the one which appears to contribute least to the cognitions of the human mind” (Condillac 1754: “Dessein de l’ouvrage”; 1982: 171). It seems clear that smell alone does not afford us any ideas of “extension, shape, or of anything outside itself, or outside its sensations” (Condillac 1754: 1.1.1; 1982: 175); it is not on its own intentional, and so affords insight into what fundamentally characterizes consciousness. Condillac writes: “If we give the statue a rose to smell, to us it will be a statue smelling a rose, to itself it will be the smell itself of this flower” (Condillac 1754: 1.1.2; 1982: 175).

This is a remarkable claim – that the statue is a smell – and in case there is any question, Condillac continues: when presented with other flowers, the statue “will be the smell of ... a carnation, a jasmine, or a violet, according to the objects that act on its sense organ” (ibid.). The smell experience ~~is simply smelling~~ ^{it is impliedly is} a consciousness that is in the first instance just *being* one’s experience. Condillac does not at this point take consciousness to be distinct from, or even, distinguishable from, an object of this awareness. For him, conscious experience is not irreducibly intentional.

Nonetheless, Condillac suggests that the statue, in virtue of experiencing, is in a certain sense self-aware; it has what we might call a first-personal perspective.⁸ As Condillac puts it, “to itself [*par rapport à elle*]” ^{the} statue is the sensed smell (Condillac 1754: 1.1.2; 1982: 175). The source of this first-personal perspective seems to be the intrinsic pleasantness or painfulness of sensory experience. That the sensation is experienced as pleasant or painful effects an ownership of that experience that constitutes the first-personal perspective distinctive of consciousness. While it is quite

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difficult to articulate just what the ownership of thoughts consists in – what makes a thought my thought rather than an impersonal thought or someone else’s – characterizing thoughts as intrinsically pleasant or painful helps to lend some content to the claim.

This distinctive pleasant or painful feeling of awareness is not the only source of ownership of our thoughts. Condillac also holds that pleasure and pain are motivating of action. In feeling pleasure, an experiencer wants to preserve that pleasant feeling; and in feeling pain, an experiencer wants to end that painful feeling. This motivational dimension of the pleasant or painful nature of awareness plays an important role in Condillac’s account of consciousness and the way our ownership of thought develops.

Condillac also makes a second assumption about sensory experience: that our sensations can be more or less vivid. From this and the first assumption that sensory experience is intrinsically pleasant or painful, he aims to explain how our mental faculties develop from sensory experience on its own. He summarizes his conclusions: with just the sense of smell the statue is capable of

attending, remembering, comparing, judging, ~~judging~~ and imagining; ... it has abstract notions, ideas of number and duration, ... knows general and particular truths; ... it forms desires, expresses passions, and loves, hates, and wills; ... it is capable of hope, fear, and surprise; and finally, ... it acquires habits ...

(Condillac 1754: 1.7.1; 1982: 202)

The starting point is the awareness itself: being smell-of-rose, say. This awareness initially comprises the statue’s entire “capacity of feeling,” and is what Condillac terms attention; attention inherently involves suffering or enjoyment – that is, pain or pleasure. Memory develops in the statue in so far as its awareness – its attention – strengthens or diminishes, or becomes more or less vivid (or feeble). The statue might start out being rose smell, say, but as the vividness of that smell diminishes and becomes feeble, and as a new and more vivid smell, say, of jasmine, affects the statue, the statue attends the new jasmine smell and thus becomes jasmine smell. For Condillac it is not as if these experiences are mutually exclusive of one another. Rather, “by passing as it were through these two states, the statue feels it is no longer what it was” (Condillac 1754: 1.2.10; 1982: 178–79). Insofar as it is able to experience two sensations at once, each with a different degree of vividness, the statue experiences variation in itself. With this experience of variation, the statue recognizes succession and so acquires memory. It was a rose a moment ago, but now it is less a rose and more jasmine. He goes on, noting that memory is not a cognitive ability the statue simply has; it requires repeated experience of variation to develop. The statue has to acquire a habit of distinguishing one experience from another, and just this distinction – that one experience is no longer and another experience has replaced it – is memory.

With this account of the origin of memory, Condillac begins to marshal pleasure and pain, and their varying vividness, to explain our various cognitive capacities. Once it has memory, the statue acquires a succession of abilities: to compare two states, to judge one state as different than the other, to form abstract ideas of the dimensions along which it compares, an idea of number and the capacity to enumerate its experiences. These abilities all derive from the variation in the degree of pleasure or

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pain the statue experiences: comparison derives from differences in the vividness of its pleasures, while judgment is a recognition of this difference, and the paradigm of an abstract idea is the idea of pleasantness. Even desires are not assumed to be intrinsic to the statue. Rather, it develops a capacity to desire from feeling pain and recollecting that it has not always been this pain. It desires its more pleasant experience, and brings itself to be that experience; it imagines an experience it recalls, but out of temporal sequence.

We have already seen that Condillac's assertion that pleasure and pain are intrinsic aspects of experience lends a degree of specificity to the idea that there is a special *feeling* proper to consciousness, a feeling he identifies with our ownership of our thoughts. However, the role of pleasure and pain in the development of the statue's cognitive capacities suggests something more. Condillac's central issue with Locke is that he took our sensory and cognitive capacities as given. For him, we need to *learn* to sense: our cognitive capacities develop. Condillac's story of the statue's cognitive development aims to show that consciousness itself develops. ~~For~~ The statue's acquired capacities then shape its *current* experience, that is, its attention – its awareness. Insofar as the stream of perceptions that constitutes its experiences will be unique to it, its consciousness will develop in a unique way and so come to provide a distinctive first-personal perspective, one that makes a more robust claim to the ownership of thought. But it also brings out the way in which consciousness, through the feeling proper to it, is constitutive of experience. The statue's consciousness, *as it develops*, unifies the statue's different experiences, insofar as its past experiences shape its current experiences, that is, insofar as its past pleasures and pains guide which pleasant or painful sensation is in its occurrent attention.

I have been highlighting the rich texture of Condillac's account of consciousness as developmental. However, it is also important to recognize just how limited the consciousness of the statue is at this point. While the statue does have basic cognitive abilities, it is only capable of employing them in a very limited range. Its memory does not stretch very far into the past, nor do its desires go very far into the future. It can hold but a few thoughts in memory, its habits are rudimentary, and it cannot count very high – Condillac suggests sometimes that three is the limit. It is not exactly capable of forming plans as it can only desire a thought that is more pleasant than the one it is currently having. There are further limits: It does not have a good sense of itself in time. That is, it cannot distinguish its memory – the actual order in which it had experiences – from imagination, its simply attending to a more pleasant experience. It does not have a good sense of what is in its power and what is not, though it can realize that simply wanting to have a more pleasant smell in mind does not always make the unpleasant smell go away. And most centrally, it has no conception of anything outside of its own experience. It has no sense that its experiences are caused, let alone from anything outside of it. That is, the statue does not have a sense of itself as an independently existing thing, distinct from other existing things. This point only serves to emphasize that Condillac's aim is to illuminate the complexity of the *consciousness* of our experience, and to bring home that what drives Condillac's explanation of consciousness is the pleasure or pain intrinsic to all sensation.

It is also important to note that the limitations of consciousness are not to be explained simply by the fact that the statue is limited to the sense of smell, for as the

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work proceeds the statue is given additional senses, but little changes in its cognitive capacities. Hearing adds little but a sensation of harmony – the ability to string notes together, and even the combination of hearing with smell little more is add than a layer of complexity to the statue's experience. Taste also adds some more sensory ideas, but not much else. Notably, sight does afford an idea of extension, and so gives the statue a sense of itself as extended, but it does not yet, for him, enable the statue to represent anything existing outside of experience. It is not until it acquires a sense of touch that the statue develops an ability to think representationally, that is to distinguish itself from other things, and so as existing independently. By moving its body, the statue comes first to situate itself in space. From there, through the sense of touch, it can differentiate itself from other bodies and so have thoughts which are intentional, or about something. This distinction too is founded in pleasure and pain, for it is founded in a felt difference between being the toucher and the touched. What distinguishes the experience of touching from that of being touched is simply that they are two distinct pleasant (or painful) sensations with distinct vividness. With practice, the statue comes to have thoughts that are not only conscious but also fully intentional: they are about something that is distinguished from its own experience. With this new ability, Condillac's story continues, the sense of touch instructs the other senses, and so our sense perceptions all come to be intentional. Intentionality is thus not something intrinsic to thought, but rather something that develops out of experience, and in particular is made possible by the pleasure and pain intrinsic to sensory experience.

Condillac's account of cognitive development clarifies what is meant in claiming that pleasure and pain are intrinsic to sensory experience. On Condillac's view, pleasure and pain no longer serve as an answer to the skeptic, informing us through the qualitative feel of experience that the world exists, nor do they inform us of the relational properties, the ways in which things benefit or harm us. Rather, he distills the role of pleasure and pain as that which is distinctive of conscious experience. Pleasure and pain constitute the distinctive feel of conscious experience, our attention. That feeling is far from merely qualitative. Rather the feeling that constitutes consciousness, pleasure or pain of a particular vividness, serves a constructive role, building up a cognitive structure through which our experience becomes more complex, and ultimately becomes representational.

In Part 4 of *Émile*, "Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar," Rousseau takes issue with Condillac's account of comparison and judgment, but at the same time he agrees that having a sensation involves an original and unanalyzable feeling (*senti-* *ment*), the same feeling through which we are *our own existence*. The most plausible reading identifies this feeling with the consciousness proper to thought. The account he goes on to offer of the human will and of human intellectual abilities rests on this feeling. But he also explains the development of a human moral sense on this feeling. While Rousseau does not follow Condillac in tracing the development of our cognitive faculties to this feeling, he does appropriate the model to explain moral development. For Rousseau, however, the feeling is not to be understood as pleasure, but rather as a form of love. Nonetheless, it is clearly important that this feeling is understood affectively, and it is the affective aspect that does the explanatory work.

— aware of

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Reconceiving consciousness without pleasure: Hume

Unlike Condillac, Hume does not hold that pleasure and pain are integral to our perceptions, as aspects of our ideas, but rather he consistently insists that they are simple ideas unto themselves. I have argued that Condillac distills the peculiar role pleasure and pain play in our cognitive economy: explaining consciousness and attention in thinking, and facilitating the development of our cognitive capacities. In so far as Hume situates pleasure and pain in the mind differently than Condillac, he owes an account about these central aspects of human cognition. Hume does make good on this debt, but recognizing that these are explanatory demands sheds new light on some well-known features of Hume's account of human understanding – the associationism and the force and vivacity of ideas – and the explanatory power of these features can help to account for the shift in views of pleasure and pain by the end of the century.

Hume says nothing about how our cognitive faculties come about. Much as does Locke, Hume assumes that we naturally possess some mental structures that serve to process our experiences, and he is not interested in offering an originary story of the sort that drives Condillac.⁹ Thus, Hume posits a mechanism through which our original impressions are copied to ideas which resemble and represent them; that those ideas can be operated on by other mechanisms of mind – memory and imagination – and further, that imagination is guided by the three associative mechanisms: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. While Hume offers us no explanation of the cause of these mechanisms, his account does recognize that the ways in which these mechanisms are deployed as a result of experience affect the ways in which we think. Patterns of association in experience shape our beliefs and our ascriptions of causal relations, and our beliefs and ascriptions of causal relations have an effect on our patterns of association. Hume's associationism thus affords an explanation of the development of cognitive capacities, given a set of resources.

However, Hume's associative mechanisms on their own do not explain how those associations settle on one or another of our perceptions, be they simple or complex. In good empiricist fashion, Hume holds that our perceptions are constantly in flux, a steady stream through the mind. However, given that Hume rejects the view that our ideas are intrinsically pleasant or painful, he cannot follow Condillac's account of attention. How does he then explain how we find ourselves focused on, or attending to, one or another of these perceptions? It seems clear that force and vivacity is introduced in part to do this work. There are two prefatory remarks to make in this regard. First, while Hume does characterize force and vivacity as a manner of perceiving, he in no way ties this aspect of ideas to pleasure or pain. Second, commentators have focused on the epistemic role of force and vivacity in explaining our believing what we do. However, as part of that account Hume also notes that we attend to those ideas with more force and vivacity; that is, we settle stably on those ideas, returning to them, rather than moving on through the stream of our perceptions.¹⁰ The epistemic role of force and vivacity in Hume's account thus is tied to an effort to answer a question facing any empiricist concerning a central aspect of consciousness – our attention to some ideas in our ever-changing experience.

Recognizing the role that pleasure and pain plays in empiricist accounts of mind contemporary with Hume's own can help us see new dimensions of the work that

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central aspects of Hume's account are designed to do. Hume introduces new resources – associative mechanisms and force and vivacity – to account for the development of our cognitive capacities and our attention to some experiences over than others. We can, however, also ask what Hume is willing to give up in denying that pleasure and pain are intrinsic to sensory experience.

Consider the matter of the ownership of ideas. Recall that for Condillac that our sensations are all species of pleasure and pain can account for the particular way in which our ideas are our own. While Hume does insist that we have an “intimate awareness” of our ideas and implies that this intimate awareness just is consciousness, the consciousness of “intimate awareness” is importantly different from that at the core of Condillac's account: it lacks the propriety of ownership. A reading of Hume's famous skepticism about the self in 1.4.6 of the *Treatise of Human Nature* brings this out.¹¹

Hume's associationist account of the source of our idea of self emerges out of a denial that consciousness involves a kind of ownership of ideas. Hume notes at the opening of that section on personal identity that

[t]here are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity.

(Hume 1739–40: 1.4.6.1; SBN 251)

It is easy to read Hume as targeting the conception of self aligned with a substance-mode ontology, as he does gesture to a conception of self-as-substance with talk of “perfect identity” and “simplicity.” However, as the preceding sections – 1.4.4 “Of the Modern Philosophy” and 1.4.5 “Of the Immateriality of the Soul” – have been devoted to criticisms of substance-mode ontology, a critique of its conception of self cannot be his central point. The vast majority of Hume's language invokes consciousness. The self of some philosophers is that of which “we are every moment intimately conscious,” we “feel its existence and its continuance in existence,” our “strongest sensation” and “most violent passion” fix in us this account of self. Insofar as we are aware of our thoughts as our own, the account seems to go, we cannot help but sense our *self* from those thoughts, and so derive an idea of self. And the stronger the sensation, the more violent our passions, the more it would seem that the thought is our own, and the more pointedly we sense our self and inevitably have an idea of self. As Hume characterizes his target view, it takes our consciousness to come along with *ownership* of our thoughts. Hume's target is thus, at least in part, that conception of consciousness.

Understanding Hume's target in this way squares well with his well-known argument denying that we have any idea of a single simple self persisting through our experiences, for what we are conscious of is pointedly *not* our self, but rather the perception itself:

When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or another, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.

(Hume 1739–40: 1.4.6.3; SBN 252)

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Hume here asserts that what we feel in being aware of a perception is just the perception itself, and not any thing which underpins the perception, or on which the perception depends. Thus, our perceptions do not give us any grounds for supposing that any thing – a self – exists independently of the perceptions. This line is meant to show that experience cannot give us an idea of self. However, it also implies that there is no basis for asserting that any of the perceptions are properly *mine*. I am aware of them, its true, but this awareness is accidental and not something that is constitutive of the content of the perception itself, for that awareness is not proper to an independently existing self which *has* or *owns* the perception.

Hume's account makes clear that he is willing to give up this ownership of our own thoughts. He goes on to offer an account of how out of this bundle of perceptions we nonetheless come to think of ourselves as each an unvarying, simple, independently existing self. The principles of association that guide the imagination from one idea to another, and in particular resemblance and causation, facilitate the mind's "easy transition" from one to another, and "gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union" (Hume 1739–40: 1.4.6.21; SBN 262) whereby we take those ideas to belong to one thing – a self. Hume's account aims to rehabilitate an idea of self that can satisfy the demands of the principle of individuation, but in the process something goes missing. Hume's associationist account of our idea of self takes it that we are aware of our ideas, but that consciousness does not mark them as belonging to one mind rather than another. Consciousness does not unify ideas; rather ideas are unified by the associative relations amongst them, associations that are simply a matter of the working of the mechanisms of mind. And though these mechanisms can effect a fiction of a self, these associations of ideas do not impact the awareness proper to them.

If part of the cost of insisting that pain and pleasure are separate ideas, and not intrinsic to perception, is denying that awareness involves ownership of thought, we might think that is an awfully high price to pay. Why should Hume be willing to pay that price, or even insistent about doing so? The answer to this question concerns the second epistemic function of pleasure and pain in early empiricist thinking. One motive for blending pleasure and pain with all ideas is to secure a knowledge of real existence. We are confident that our perceptions tell us about the world just because they are conducive to our continued existence, and it is the way those perceptions *feel*, the ways in which they are pleasant or painful, that validates our representations of the world, for those feelings secure our self-preservation. For an empiricist committed to mechanist principles of explanation – be it of the natural world or human understanding – the introduction of this teleological dimension is highly problematic. It threatens to undermine the very methodology of the science of man. Hume opts to give up the integral role of pleasure and pain, and with it a special ownership of ideas, in order to preserve a consistent scientific methodology.

The short path to utilitarianism

Hume, unlike empiricists who preceded him is unequivocal that pleasure and pain are simple ideas, just like any other sensation, and as such are distinct and separable from other simple ideas. Taking this line, however, brings with it a set of challenges.

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Starting with Descartes, pleasure and pain were taken to be intrinsic to sensory experience and as such served to explain phenomena including attention, cognitive development, and to answer skeptical challenges to our knowledge of the existence of the material world. Berkeley and Hutcheson preserve the view that all sensations are pleasant or painful, but divorce this feature of sensation from an epistemic role. Condillac shows how central preserving a conception of sensation as intrinsically pleasant or painful is to explaining attention and cognitive development. Hume, however, by positing associative mechanisms shows how to account for these phenomena while maintaining pleasure and pain as separable mental states.

It is well recognized that Hume's sentimental account of morality, and in particular the central role pleasure plays in his account of moral motivation, lays the foundation for utilitarian calculus developed by Jeremy Bentham (see James E. Crimmins's piece, in Chapter 20 of this volume). The utilitarian model involves a reconceptualization of pleasure and pain, a reconceptualization for which Hume's account of the human mind also lays the foundation. The utilitarian model centrally assumes that pleasure and pain are wholly distinct mental states, and moreover that they motivate actions without representing the world. Rather, pleasures and pains attach to our representations of things, thereby moving us to pursue those things that please us while avoiding those which cause us pain. Hume's associationist model of the mind provides the background against which this conception of pleasure makes sense.

It is also central to the utilitarian model that degrees of pleasure and pain can be measured. Pleasure and pain admit of varying degrees, and the wide variety of things, and states of affairs, in the world present us with a manifold of possible pleasures to pursue and pains to avoid. The utilitarian calculus affords us a way of calibrating and balancing these possible pleasures and pains, and then marshaling those measures into principles that determine decisions on practical matters. Of course, measuring degrees of pleasure and pain depends upon their separability from other ideas. However, there is another aspect of the utilitarian scheme that can be traced to Hume. The very idea of a measure of pleasure and pain presupposes that pleasures and pains ~~against each other~~ stand on a scale independent of any individual's experience. Pleasure and pain, while experienced by individuals, cannot be understood to be proper to them. That is, pleasure and pain cannot be that through which we assume special ownership of our thoughts. The utilitarian model thus assumes the same model of consciousness as simple awareness suggested by Hume.

Notes

- 1 There is a vast secondary literature on Descartes's account of sensory representation. On the painter analogy, see Carriero 1987. Wilson 1990/1999 lays out well a set of problems in understanding Descartes's account of sensory representation.
- 2 Simmons 1999 highlights this aspect of Descartes's account.
- 3 Some medieval thinkers seem to have espoused a model somewhat like this. According to Aquinas, for instance, all animals were able to register the way things in the world stood to affect their very existence through a separate sensory faculty, the *vis estimativa*. Famously, through this faculty, a sheep is able to perceive a wolf as dangerous – that is, as capable of causing that sheep harm. See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas *Summa theologiae* 1.78.4 (in Thomas Aquinas 1888).

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- 4 He also suggests that our ideas of pleasure and pain are *caused* by other ideas. While this second claim also presupposes that ideas of pleasure and pain are distinct ideas, it is puzzling with respect to ideas of sensation. Presumably, our sensory ideas of pleasure and pain derive directly from the workings of the world on our bodies, and not from the workings of our mind on itself.
- 5 See Atherton 1990 for a good discussion.
- 6 Citation is to part.chapter.paragraph in Condillac 1754, and to page in Condillac 1982.
- 7 Both offer a revisionist history of philosophy which situates Locke as pivotal, though for Condillac he is more centrally so. He maintains that “[i]mmediately after Aristotle came Locke, for we must not count the other philosophers who wrote on the same subject” (Condillac 1754: “Précis”; 1982: 156). He understands his project in the *Treatise on Sensations* as clarifying “some obscurity” that remained, and in particular what he sees as Locke’s assumption that our abilities to sense are innate rather than learned and developed through experience. Hume too, in the Introduction to the *Treatise of Human Nature*, makes an implicit jump through intellectual history from the era of Thales and Socrates to that of “my Lord Bacon and some late philosophers in England, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing” (Hume 1739–40: introd., 7; SBN xvii), among whom he includes Locke. Hume frames his project as continuing this “application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects” (Hume 1739–40: introd., 7; SBN xvi), and, like Condillac, he proposes to clean up Locke’s account of the workings of the human mind, distinguishing our perceptions into impressions and ideas. As he notes in a footnote, “perhaps I rather restore the word, *idea*, to its original sense from which Mr. Locke perverted it, in making it stand for all our perceptions” (Hume 1739–40: 1.1.1.1; SBN 2n). The intellectual common ground stops there. It is unlikely that Condillac had read either Berkeley or Hutcheson in any detail. Hume clearly read both: in the *Treatise on Human Nature* he adopts Berkeley’s account of abstract ideas, and his moral philosophy owes a great debt to Hutcheson. However, it is unclear what influence Berkeley’s and Hutcheson’s accounts of sensory experience had on Hume.
- 8 Condillac 1754: 1.1.6 is titled “Of the Self, or the Personality of a Man Limited to the Sense of Smell.” And there he admits that the statue, were it able to talk, “would not say ‘I’ at the first smell” (Condillac 1754: 1.1.6.2; 1982: 200). Condillac is clear, however, that in experiencing a change of state, the statue can come to reflect on itself and so refer to itself as “I.” In what follows, I am effectively offering an interpretation of this claim. I take it to be critical that Condillac only undertakes to discuss the self of the statue once he has outlined its cognitive development.
- 9 Indeed, Hume explicitly simply asserts some original mental abilities we humans have, and refuses to pursue any explanation of them, though, unlike for Locke, Hume’s assumptions are marked as empirically defeasible hypotheses. See Broughton 1992.
- 10 See Loeb 2002.
- 11 Ainslie (2013), in his “Hume’s Anti-cogito,” offers a reading of Hume in these first three paragraphs of 1.4.6 which also maintains that Hume’s target is Locke’s and Descartes’ conception of consciousness.

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