Emotions in Plato

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Contents

CHAPTER 3

Why Do Itches Itch? Bodily Pain in the Socratic Theory of Motivation

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Abstract

Imagine that Socrates gets a cavity treatment. The drilling is painful, but he also knows that it is best to get it done and so he stays. Callicles is not so smart. Once the dentist starts drilling, Callicles takes off. I argue that this scenario presents a puzzle that interpreters have missed, namely: why does Socrates have an aversion to pain? To us, this might not be puzzling at all. Socrates, however, believes that we have an aversion only to bad things and that pain is not in fact bad. If Socrates knows that pain is not bad, why does he still feel aversive pain from drilling? I argue that the *Protagoras* and *Hippias Major* suggest that pain immediately appears to be bad to us. So even though pain is not in fact bad, it appears and feels that way, and thus even Socrates has an aversion to it. Pain is a felt evaluation. My interpretation contributes to the debates in the literature in two ways. First, it fills an explanatory gap. Interpreters have acknowledged that a Socratic theory of motivation has room for pain aversions as "itches," but they leave unexplained why we have an aversion to pain, i.e., why those itches itch. Second, I offer an alternative account of Socratic motivation by proposing that pain aversions can motivate some of our actions.

Keywords

Socrates – motivation – pain – emotion – action

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According to the Socratic theory of motivation, we all have one general, overarching desire for the good, which is happiness, and we all have one general, overarching aversion to the bad, which is misery.[1] We all desire happiness; no

1 By 'Socratic theory of motivation I mean the theory we aim to reconstruct based on what Socrates says in the following dialogues: *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Charmides, Laches, Lysis,*

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one wants to be miserable.[2] In addition to our two general, overarching motivations – our desire for the good and our aversion to the bad – we also have desires for and aversions to specific things. For example, sometimes we desire to socialize with friends, finish an essay, or eat a sandwich. The question that is at the center of this paper is: how do desires for and aversions to specific things or actions come about in Socratic psychology?

Socrates believes that the objects of our particular desires are things or activities we take to be good: "all men want good things" (τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμεῖν), as he argues in the *Meno* (77c). The connection between particular things and our overarching desire for the good (happiness) seems to be that those particular things are good – i.e., that they promote our happiness. As Socrates explains to Meno:

> Is there anyone who wants to be miserable and evil-spirited (βούλεται ἄθλιος καὶ κακοδαίμων εἶναι)? – No, it doesn't seem to me, Socrates. – No one then wants bad things (βούλεται τὰ κακὰ), Meno, if he does not want to be such. For what else is being miserable but to desire bad things (ἐπιθυμεῖν τε τῶν κακῶν) and possess them? – You are probably right, Socrates, and no one wants bad things (οὐδεὶς βούλεσθαι τὰ κακά).[3] (*Men.* 78a4-b2)[4]

For Socrates, we are motivated by things that are of value to us.[5] Particular things become the object of our desire if we take them to be good. For my

Euthydemus, Meno, Protagoras, Ion, Hippias Minor and *Major,* and *Gorgias*. What unifies this group is that they are all pre-*Republic* dialogues, and that they have been taken to present the Socratic philosophy (see e.g., Penner (1992), 124; Reshotko (2006), 11–13; Brickhouse and Smith (2010), 18, 248–58; though some have argued that parts of the *Gorgias* and *Meno* are un-Socratic). For a helpful discussion of which dialogues we should count as 'Socratic' see Rowe (2002).

2 'Happiness' should be understood as 'objective well-being,' i.e., 'leading an objectively good life, living virtuously,' and not in the modern sense of 'subjective well-feeling' (*Cri.* 48b, *Grg.* 497a). Socrates does not explicitly identify the good with happiness (though Plato will in *Symp*. 205a.), but he strongly indicates it when he says that "we all want to be happy" (εὐδαίμονες μὲν εἶναι προθυμούμεθα πάντες, *Euthyd.* 282a) or "do well" (εὖ πράττειν, *Euthyd.* 278e), and that "the end of all action is the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), for the sake of which we do everything else" (*Grg.* 500a). Arguably, happiness is our final goal, the thing for which we do everything else. For other, later passages see *Resp*. 505e, *Phlb*. 20d, *Tht*. 175c-d.

3 All translations are mine, though I consulted those in Cooper (1997).

4 See also: "We become happy by getting good things" (*Euthyd*. 178e), and *Prt.* 358c-d, *Grg.* 468b-c.

5 I use 'motivation' to refer broadly to conative attitudes (such as desire, aversion, attraction, wanting). By 'aversion' I mean conative con-attitudes, and I use 'desire,' 'attraction,' and 'wanting' interchangeably to refer to conative pro-attitudes.

purposes, "taking to be good" can mean believing that something is good, but it also encompasses other mental states such as noticing or perceiving. I therefore propose the following *Socratic Principle of Motivation*: I want *x* because I take *x* to be good, i.e., happiness-promoting; I have an aversion to *y* because I take *y* to be bad, i.e., happiness-diminishing.[6]

How do things become of value to us? Why do we take some things to be good and others to be bad? Sometimes things become valuable to us because we reason that they will help us meet a particular end (i.e., they become valuable to us through means-end reasoning). I may deliberate, for example, about whether socializing with friends tonight would promote or diminish my happiness. If I conclude that it would promote my happiness, I label "socializing with friends" as "good," and then I desire it. If I conclude that it would diminish my happiness, I label it as "bad," and then I have an aversion to it. Consider also the example of wanting to take foul-tasting medicine. I want to take medicine because I have reasoned that taking it is good.[7] My reasoning process is likely to include comparing and measuring goods and bads (*Prt.* 358d): the medicine tastes bad, but it will make me feel better, and thereby it will promote my overall happiness rather than diminish it. Socrates would probably also acknowledge that many things have value to us because we remember them to be good.[8] Means-end reasoning, measuring, and remembering are three ways for things to become valuable to us.

Now consider the experience of current pain from drilling at the dentist. Most people have an immediate aversion to pain, i.e., they do not want to be in pain.[9] Given the *Socratic Principle of Motivation*, if we do not want to be in pain, pain must be of negative value to us. But how does pain become of negative value? How does pain receive the label "bad"? It is not, I believe, because we concluded that pain is bad after having reasoned about whether bodily pain promotes or diminishes our happiness. Reasoning – even the most simple and basic kind of reasoning – cannot account for our aversion to bodily pain because our aversion arises *immediately*. There is simply no time for reason to figure out whether bodily pain diminishes our happiness. Further, the immediacy of our pain aversion cannot be explained through memory. One may say

6 What I call *The Socratic Principle of Motivation* is known, in contemporary philosophy, as *The Guise of the Good* doctrine (see Orsi (2015), 714).

7 In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims that we do not want (βούλεται) means but only ends (467c-e). Accordingly, we would not want to take medicine but to be healthy. This claim is quite puzzling because there is surely *a* sense in which we want means. Kamtekar suggests that we understand 'want' here as 'prefer': "one prefers the end […]. [W]anting the end is the basis for a derivative desire, to do actions which are means to the end" (Kamtekar (2017), 85).

8 As Plato will say in *Phlb*. 35c-d.

9 Some people may not have an immediate aversion to pain. More about those people later.

that we concluded in the past that pain diminishes our happiness, and that is why we have an immediate aversion when we now experience painful drilling. But that explanation is implausible since our very first pain experiences were already aversive.

Interpreters of Socratic psychology acknowledge that we have an aversion to pain. They also acknowledge that pain aversions, along with emotions, appetites, and desires for pleasure, do not arise out of reason. Instead, interpreters classify these states as "hankerings, itches, or drives,"[10] "longings, drives, urges, and raw desires,"[11] or simply as "attractions and aversions."[12] They distinguish these kinds of "itches" from desires "to do some particular thing," i.e., from action-causing desires, and they reserve the term "motivation" for these action-causing desires. Action-causing desires, unlike pain aversions and other "itches," arise out of reasoning about what is best to do.[13] First, we reason about what is best to do; then we form a belief that a certain action is best, and this belief gives rise to a desire which motivates an action.

According to this account, when someone experiences painful drilling at the dentist and deliberates about what to do, she entertains all kinds of information such as that leaving the office would be easy because the door is right there and wide open; but also that the procedure is already paid for. While some interpreters explain that her pain-itch, her aversion to the painful drilling, is simply another piece of information she entertains when deliberating about what to do, others argue that her pain-itches may even cause some of her beliefs, though they do not motivate actions. All interpreters seem to agree that the agent's motivation for either staying at the dentist or taking off results from reasoning about what is best to do.[14]

I see two problems with these existing interpretations. First, they leave an explanatory gap. In the existing accounts, pain aversions are not full-fledged

10 Penner (1991), 201, n.45.

11 Reshotko (2006), 76–77, 84–88.

12 Singpurwalla (2006), 249, Brickhouse and Smith (2015), 14.

13 Penner (1991), 201, n. 45, (2011), 261–62; Rowe (2012), 305–07; Reshotko (2006), 33–34, 39–40, 86.

14 Penner, Rowe, and Reshotko on the one hand, and Brickhouse and Smith on the other are usually taken to argue for opposing interpretations. It is worth noting, though, that Brickhouse and Smith agree with Penner, Rowe, and Reshotko that attractions and aversions or "itches" are not action-causing motivations (see Brickhouse and Smith (2010), 52, n.6; (2012), 238). They disagree over how influential attractions and aversions are. Brickhouse and Smith argue that our attractions and aversions can *cause* beliefs (Brickhouse and Smith (2010), 71, 80, (2015), 11), while Penner (2011), 263-4 and Reshotko (2006), 85–86 deny that. Thanks to Nicholas Smith for many helpful discussions of these interpretative differences.

motivations. Yet, they have motivational flavor – after all, they are "itches," and what is an itch if it does not make us want to scratch it?[15] I believe that we should try to give a Socratic explanation for why pain has any motivational flavor, i.e., we should try to explain why pain is aversive or why pain-itches itch. Second, it seems implausible that pain is merely an itch, and that this itch contributes to the generation of our actions just as one piece of information among many. What is it about pain that renders it motivationally deficient? What justifies its classification as merely an itch? It seems to me that pain aversions can play a more motivationally robust role in the generation of actions. I argue that, sometimes and for certain agents, pain is not just an itch, but it is actually a motivation for action. Some people leave the dentist because they do not want to be in pain, and this immediate motivation precedes any further deliberation about what would be best to do.

Interpreters worry that if we classify pain as motivational and thus as more than just an itch, pain would then compete with those desires that arise out of reasoning. This competition between our reasoned desire and our pain aversion would be troublesome because it would violate the following four Socratic core beliefs:

1. We always desire the good (*Grg*. 468b) and the things we take to be good (*Prt*. 358d; *Men.* 77c-78b).[16]
2. We always do what we believe is best to do (*Prt*. 358d).
3. All wrongdoing is due to ignorance (*Prt*. 357c-e, 360c-e; *Lach.* 194d).
4. The knowledgeable person's soul is harmonious (*Prt*. 356e).

If pain were more than an itch, it seems that we would not always desire good things and have an aversion to bad things; instead, sometimes we would desire pleasure and have an aversion to pain, regardless of any consideration of the good. This violates the first Socratic core belief. Further, it would be possible that pain causes us to act against our beliefs about what is best to do (thus violating the second core belief). In that case, some wrongdoing may not be the result of ignorance, but instead of a strong aversion to pain (a violation of core

15 I borrow "motivational flavor" from Emily Fletcher (in her comments on an earlier version of this paper for the Central APA 2018).

16 Interpreters disagree on what exactly Socrates means when he says 'we all desire the good or good things.' Does Socrates mean that (i) we all desire what *seems* or what we *take* to be good, or (ii) we all desire the *real* good, or (iii) both? Option (i) is best supported in *Meno* 77–78, option (ii) in *Grg*. 466dff. I believe that a version of (iii) is right. My tentative interpretation is that our general, overarching desire is for the *real* good, but our particular desires are for what we *take* to be good, which may not be what is actually good. For a helpful discussion of the different interpretative options see Barney (2010), Callard (2017), Wolfsdorf (2008), 29ff.

belief three). Finally, a competition between reasoned desire and pain aversion could potentially render the knowledgeable person's soul disharmonious (a violation of belief number four).[17]

It may thus seem problematic to make room for pain aversions that are motivationally more robust while holding on to the four Socratic core beliefs. But I argue that this problem only arises if we give pain a motivational force that is independent of badness. There are two general strategies one could use to explain pain aversion: (1) we might say that pain is aversive because it has a relation to our general, overarching aversion to badness. Or (2) one might instead argue that we have an intrinsic aversion to pain which is independent of badness. This second explanation indeed violates the four core Socratic beliefs: if pain-itches itch because we have an intrinsic aversion to pain, then we do not only have one overarching, final aversion to badness; instead we have two aversions, one to pain and one to badness. This would also mean that we do not have one overarching, final desire for goodness, but two separate desires, for pleasure and for goodness. An intrinsic aversion to pain is thus inconsistent with Socratic thought. But I will argue that the first explanation offered above– that pain is aversive because it relates to our general, overarching aversion to badness – is in fact compatible with the four Socratic core beliefs. This argument allows us to understand how pain can have a motivational flavor and how pain can be more than just an "itch."

My interpretation has two parts, based on the two problems with existing interpretations that I have identified above. First, I will fill the explanatory gap. I will offer a Socratic explanation for why we have an immediate aversion when we experience bodily pain.[18] In other words, I will offer a Socratic explanation for why our pain-itches itch. I will argue that bodily pain is immediately aversive because it immediately appears to be bad; we are hard-wired to perceive pain as bad. I take this part to be compatible with many existing interpretations. Second, I aim to offer a more plausible Socratic account of motivation. I will argue that bodily pain can be more than an itch. Pain can play a more robust motivational role in the generation of intentional actions because it can

17 For some of these worries see Penner (1991), 201, n.45: "So long as (a) the ἐπιθυμία for pleasure in the *Charmides* is only a hankering, itch, or drive for pleasure, and (b) mere hankerings, itches, or drives cannot automatically result in action when put together with a belief, then it will remain true for Socrates that all desires to do some particular action will be the product of desire for good." See also Irwin (1977), 128; Carone (2004), 89; Singpurwalla (2006), 244.

18 I aim to give an account of *bodily* pain only, but I believe that we can apply parts of my account to *psychological* pain as well. I will outline some potential applications below.

be the final motivation of an action.[19] Here, I offer an alternative to existing interpretations.

1 Part One: Why Do Most People Not Want to Be in Pain?

It is an empirical fact that most people do not want to be in pain. But there are some exceptions, the so-called asymbolics. Asymbolics are people for whom pain is not aversive. When the asymbolic experiences drilling at the dentist, for example, she does not have an immediate aversion, and yet she refers to her experience as 'pain.' Contemporary philosophers have responded to the existence of pain asymbolia in two ways. Some have concluded that pain and motivation (aversion, disagreeableness, unpleasantness) can come apart. 'Pain' refers only to the perceptual, sensory information of bodily damage. Motivation is separable from pain. Others have concluded that asymbolics falsely refer to their motivationally neutral experience of bodily damage as 'pain.' 'Pain' implies a motivational component. Consequently, those who receive cavity treatment and do not have an aversion are not in pain.[20]

In this paper, I am not concerned with this *conceptual analysis* of 'pain,' i.e., I will not investigate whether the term 'pain' necessarily refers to a motivational state in the Socratic dialogues.[21] Instead, I will focus on the *empirical* fact that most people do not want to be in pain. Socrates, I take it, acknowledges the empirical connection between pain and motivation when he says that children avoid burning (cauterization) and cutting (surgery) because those treatments are painful (*Grg*. 479a9: ὅτι ἀλγεινόν) and bring about the most intense pains (*Prt*. 354b2: ὀδύνας τὰς ἐσχάτας καὶ ἀλγηδόνας), and that criminals avoid punishment because it is painful (*Grg*. 479a-c). It is an empirical fact that pain is aversive for most people and that our aversion to pain can influence our actions.[22]

19 My focus will be on intentional actions (e.g., going to the freezer to get some ice after having burned my hand) not reflexes (e.g., reflexively withdrawing my hand from the hot stove).

20 For a helpful discussion of the two accounts see Bain (2013).

21 The textual basis for a conceptual analysis of 'pain' (the Greek terms translated as 'pain' are λύπη, ἀνία, ἀλγηδὼν, ὀδύνη, ἀχθηδὼν) in the Platonic corpus is very slim. The etymological investigations in the *Cratylus* (419b ff.) give some insight, though not on whether 'pain' implies motivation: λύπη comes from the dissolution of the body (τῆς διαλύσεως τοῦ σώματος), ἀνία is the hindrance of motion (ἐμποδίζον τοῦ ἰέναι), ἀλγηδὼν comes from painful (ἀλγεινοῦ), ὀδύνη from the entry of pain (ἐνδύσεως τῆς λύπης), and ἀχθηδὼν from carrying a weight (τῷ τῆς φορᾶς βάρει).

22 See also *Chrm*. 156b, *Lach*. 191 d-e.

How could Socrates explain our aversion to pain? Earlier, I proposed an argument along the following lines: (i) we are motivated only by things that are of value to us; (ii) pain is aversive (has motivational flavor); (iii) therefore, pain is of value to us. Let me now point to some initial evidence for the idea that bodily pain has some relation to badness. It seems reasonable that pain is connected to badness because bodily pain indicates a physical disturbance or damage, and Socrates believes that physical health is good (ὑγίεια ἀγαθὸν, *Lys*. 219a4) and disease is bad (νόσος κακόν).[23] Health is a good or excellent state of the body (εὐεξίαι τῶν σωμάτων, *Prt*. 354b3-4; ἀρετὴ σώματος, *Grg*. 479b4).[24] If our body is in a terrible condition, our life is bad (*Grg*. 505a) and in some cases not even worth living (*Cri.* 47e). It seems, then, that bodily pain is connected to badness in virtue of diseases being bad. Correspondingly, bodily pleasure is connected to goodness in virtue of bodily health being good.

Our central question is: how does pain become of negative value to us? Which mental state establishes the relation between pain and badness? It cannot be reasoning, as I maintain, because pain is *immediately* aversive. When we experience drilling, we immediately feel aversive pain. There is no time for reason to figure out whether pain promotes or diminishes our happiness. What we need is a mental state that can account for pain's being *immediately* motivational. I propose the following two mental states as candidates for establishing the relation between pain and badness:

(a) *Immediately Evaluative Perceptual Appearances*: when I experience pain, pain immediately appears to be bad. I have the immediate appearance of it being bad, and that is why pain is aversive.[25]

(b) *Immediately Evaluative Beliefs*: when I experience pain, I immediately form the belief that pain is bad, and that is why pain is aversive.

I will argue that we have textual and philosophical support for option (a), which says that pain is motivational because it immediately appears to be bad to us. Option (a) is textually supported by the *Hippias Major* and the *Protagoras*; its philosophical support stems from its being more plausible, as I will show. My interpretation maintains the *Socratic Principle of Motivation*, that we

23 *Chrm*. 164a9-b1; *Grg*. 467e4-5.

24 See also *Grg*. 504c.

25 I call the kind of appearances I am interested in "perceptual appearances" to avoid confusion with what I call "higher order appearances." "Perceptual appearances" arise from perception; "higher order appearances" involve cognitive states higher than perception such as beliefs or memories. In the *Gorgias*, for example, confiscating the citizens' property appears to be good (ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτοῖς, 467a3, a5; 468d4) or best (αὐτοῖς δόξῃ βέλτιστον εἶναι, 466e2; 467b3-4) to the tyrant, probably because he believes that accumulating property is good.

only desire that which we take to be good. I will propose that there are different ways of 'taking something to be good'; reasoning is not the only way for things or actions to become of value to us. Some things are immediately evaluated because they appear good or bad when we perceive them.

1.1 *Immediately Evaluative Perceptual Appearances*

How does bodily pain become evaluative? I propose that the agent first has a disturbance of the natural state of her body. In the later dialogues, Plato will explicitly say that pain arises when we notice that the good state of our body is disrupted, and that pleasure arises when we notice that the good state is restored.[26] We can find traces of this view already in the Socratic dialogues when Socrates says that health is a good or excellent state of the body (*Prt*. 354b3-4; *Grg*. 479b4), and that we must like what belongs to us by nature (φύσει οἰκεῖον ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν φιλεῖν. *Lys*. 221e-222a). A Hippocratic might further describe the natural, good state of the body as the balance of bodily fluids.[27] We have good evidence that Plato was influenced by Hippocratic explanations, most notably in the *Timaeus*, where he explains that sexual intemperance is caused by a particular fluid that renders the body moist (*Ti*. 86d-e).[28] While Socrates does not explicitly support Hippocratic theories in the early dialogues, we know that Socrates was familiar with them – he mentions Hippocrates, for example, in *Prt.* 311b – and therefore we have some reason to believe that his account of pleasure and pain may have been influenced by physiological explanations à la Hippocrates.

After there has been a disturbance of the natural state of the body, this disturbance must be perceived in order to give rise to pain. Some disturbances of

26 *Phlb*. 31d, *Resp*. 585d.

27 We can find at least three different explanations of pain in the Hippocratic writings. Some believe that we are in pain when (a) breath (φύσας) pierces the flesh (*On Breaths*: 9.1–12); (b) others when one of our bodily fluids gets separated from the others (*Ancient Medicine*: 14.23–28); (c) and others again when we have an excess or deficiency of hot or cold (*Places in Man*: 42.1–10). According to all three explanations, pain is caused by certain physiological conditions. As Longrigg explains, this idea was progressive at Socrates' time. Before Hippocrates, diseases and pains were explained with reference to gods and divine intervention, and supernatural practices were thought to cure patients. Hippocrates revolutionized the history of medicine with his "entirely rational outlook towards disease" (Longrigg (1989), 3). I propose that we attribute such a "rational outlook" to Socrates.

28 I take Plato's explanation to be in the Hippocratic spirit because it provides a physiological cause for sexual overindulgence. However, I also believe that the Hippocratics may disagree with Plato on the details of his explanation since they believe that old (and presumably sexually less active) bodies are moist (*Regimen in Health* 2). For more passages in which Plato seems to echo Hippocrates see *Symp*. 185d-188e, *Phdr*. 270c, *Chrm*. 156b-e. For an interesting discussion of these passages see Demont (2008) and Candiotto (2015).

our body remain unnoticed, in which case we do not experience pain. Again, our best textual support for this comes from the later dialogues,[29] but we can find traces of that view already in earlier dialogues. In *Hippias Major* 298d-299a, Socrates and Hippias discuss sensory pleasures and things that are pleasant according to the senses (κατὰ αἰσθήσεις). They have just established that 'fine things' are fine because they are pleasant according to the senses of hearing and sight. Socrates imagines their opponent saying:

> What, Hippias and Socrates? Do you distinguish the sort of pleasant you call fine [καλὸν, i.e., pleasures from hearing, sight] from the pleasant, and do you say that what is pleasant *according to the other senses* [κατὰ αἰσθήσεις; the other senses being touch, taste, smell] is not fine – food and drink, what comes with making love, and all other such things? (*Hp. mai.* 298d6-298e2)

Fine pleasures arise from hearing and sight, while other pleasures arise from touch, taste, and smell. Whether fine or not, all pleasant things such as music, paintings, sex, food, and flowers are pleasant *according to the senses* (κατὰ αἰσθήσεις). If such things are pleasant according to the senses, then, their corresponding opposites are presumably painful according to the senses. For example, if food is pleasant according to the senses, then presumably the lack of food is painful according to the senses. The lack of food – a disturbance of the natural state of our body – must be perceived in order to give rise to pain; similarly, food and the restoration of our natural state must be perceived in order to give rise to pleasure.

Our perception is, however, not always accurate. In the *Protagoras*, we learn that perception represents things of the same size as being large when they are closer, and small when they are further away (*Prt.* 356c). For example, a tower appears to be small when seen from a distance but large when we are right in front of it. The same applies to pleasure and pain, Socrates explains (*Prt.*356a-c). Pain close in time appears to be more painful, just as objects close in space appear to be larger; pain anticipated far in the future appears to be less painful, just as objects further away appear to be smaller. From Socrates' explanation it follows that *present pain* appears to be very painful just as very close objects appear to be very large.

At this point, we know that sense perception is involved when we experience bodily pain and that our sense perception is not always accurate. In order to understand why pain is aversive we now need to understand how evaluations

29 *Phlb.* 43b, *Ti.* 65a.

enter the picture. Another passage in the *Protagoras* provides a crucial clue. There, Socrates believes that the present pain appears to be very painful to both the ignorant and the knowledgeable person. The ignorant person, however, is fooled by appearances, while the knowledgeable person is not:

> While the power of appearance (ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις) often makes us wander (ἐπλάνα) all over the place (ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω), often changing (μεταλαμβάνειν) [our minds about] the same things and regretting (μεταμέλειν) our actions and choices about things large and small, the art of measurement [ἡ μετρητικὴ, i.e., knowledge], would make this appearance (φάντασμα) powerless (ἄκυρον) by showing us the truth, and it would make our soul have harmony (ἡσυχίαν) standing by the truth (μένουσαν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀληθεῖ) and it would save our life. (*Prt*. 356d4-e2)

When the ignorant person receives cavity treatment, for example, the present pain appears to be so painful to her that she might jump off the chair and run home. Afterwards, she regrets having acted on this appearance. The knowledgeable person, by contrast, is not fooled by appearances. She knows that the present pain of cavity treatment is not as painful as the potential future pain that would arise if she left her cavities untreated. How exactly do appearances of pleasure and pain fool the ignorant person? How do they make the ignorant person "wander all over the place"?

Socrates seems to believe that appearances can play a role in the generation of actions similar to the role of knowledge. The ignorant person acts on appearances, the knowledgeable person acts on knowledge. What kind of knowledge and what kind of appearances can bring about an action? In the case of knowledge, Socrates specifies that it is the *knowledge of what is good and bad* that can bring about actions:

> If someone knew (γιγνώσκῃ) which things are good and bad, then he would not be forced by anything, so that he wouldn't do anything but what knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) orders to do. (*Prt*. 352c4-6).

Since Socrates believes that *knowledge of what is good and bad* brings about actions in the knowledgeable person, I infer that *appearances of what is good and bad* bring about actions in the ignorant person. Both knowledge and appearances can bring about actions in virtue of being evaluative. We can also give the following deductive argument for the same conclusion:

(i) The power of appearances moves us to do things we later regret (*Prt*. 356d4-7).

(ii) We are moved (attracted/averted) only by evaluations (*Socratic Principle of Motivation* established in the beginning).

(iii) Therefore, the power of appearances to move us lies in their being evaluative.

I propose that appearances fool the ignorant person and make her wander all over the place in confusion because they are evaluative. Pleasure appears to be good and pain appears to be bad, at least to most people. Our perceptual apparatus is simply built in this way. Similarly, our perceptual apparatus is built in such a way that the far-away sun appears to be small and the stick in the water appears to be bent. How bad something appears to be usually depends on how painful the experience is; how painful the experience is usually depends on how intensely our perceptual apparatus is affected; how intensely our perceptual apparatus is affected usually depends on how severely or abruptly the natural state of our body is disrupted. Therefore, if our natural state is disrupted severely or very abruptly and our perceptual apparatus is affected intensely, we usually have a very painful experience, and this pain appears to be very bad.[30]

If this is indeed why bodily pain is aversive, we are also in the position to explain why states we would call 'emotions,' such as fear and anger, are likewise aversive. When we are afraid, for instance, we expect that a future evil will happen to us.[31] This expectation disturbs our psychic harmony. Since we are hardwired to perceive *any* disturbance of our natural state – physiological and psychological – as bad, fear, shame (i.e., the fear of a bad reputation, *Euthphr.* 12b10-c1), anger etc. are all aversive.[32] Since they are immediately aversive, they allow us to evaluate things or actions in a non-deliberative way.[33] When we feel pain, fear, or shame we *perceive* value and *feel* that something is bad. Pleasure and pain as well as emotions are, then, what we can call "felt evaluations."[34] The gods, too, experience felt evaluations. When the gods see beauty and justice, they feel friendly (φιλοῦσιν), and then they feel that beauty and justice are

30 I benefited from Moss' work on evaluative appearances. While Moss and I both argue that pleasure appears to be good and pain appears to be bad, I further distinguish between *experiences* and *anticipations* of bodily pain and pleasure, and I explain why pain *experiences* are motivational. Moss seems to focus on *anticipations* of pleasure and pain (Moss (2006), 513).

31 *Prt.* 358d6-7, *Def.* 415e5, *Lach.* 198b8-9, *Leg.* 644c10-d1.

32 Thanks to Rachel Singpurwalla for discussing with me this extension of my account.

33 Plato subsumes pain, fear, and anger under the term παθήματα (*Ti.* 69d). Παθήματα are motions of the soul, or at least they cause motions of the soul (*Leg.* 896e8-897a2) that are strong and forceful (δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα, *Ti.* 69c8), that need to be fought (μάχεσθαι, *Lach.* 191e1), and that provide an occasion for virtues such as courage (*Lach.* 191e).

34 I borrow the term "felt evaluations" from Helm (2002).

good (*Euthphr*. 7e). But when they see injustice, they feel indignant (μισοῦσιν), and then they feel that injustice is bad.[35]

1.2 *Immediately Evaluative Beliefs*

I have argued that pain is aversive because it immediately appears to be bad. Immediately evaluative perceptual appearances establish the relation between pain and badness. Another possible explanation for pain's aversiveness is that we immediately *belief* that pain is bad. Let me now explain why the 'immediately evaluative beliefs' account is inferior to the 'immediately evaluative appearances' account. In both cases, we have an immediate, spontaneous, prereasoning evaluation of pain as being bad. However, the 'immediately evaluative beliefs' account leads to an unfortunate dilemma: either we can abandon immediately evaluative beliefs, in which case we could reason ourselves out of feeling aversive pain, or we cannot abandon immediately evaluative beliefs, in which case the knowledgeable person holds false beliefs.

To explain the first horn of the dilemma, imagine again that you are getting cavity treatment at the dentist. The dentist starts drilling, you perceive the disturbance of the natural state of your body, and you now experience aversive pain because you immediately *believe* that this pain is very bad. However, you were also convinced by Socrates' argument in the *Euthydemus* that only ignorance is bad in itself (281d). Pain, as you know, is not always bad. Pain is only bad if it prevents you from becoming knowledgeable, but that does not seem to be the case in our dentist scenario. In fact, if you endure the present painful drilling, you can philosophize more in the future, and that will get you closer to leading a knowledgeable, virtuous life. Since you believe that pain is neither in itself bad, nor, in this situation, bad for some external reason, you believe 'this pain is not bad.' According to a widely accepted understanding of 'belief,' beliefs are states that aim to fit the world, meaning that: a belief that *p* will tend to be eliminated by a belief that *not-p*.[36] It seems, then, that you should be able to override the belief 'this pain is very bad.' But since this evaluative belief is what made your pain aversive in the first place, the pain should stop being aversive as soon as you believe that it is not bad. In other words, you should be able to make yourself stop feeling *any aversion* to the present drilling.

35 Some felt evaluations may rely on beliefs or memory: I fear *x* (for instance corporal punishment or death) because I have experienced *x* as painful in the past or because I believe that *x* is bad. However, feeling value through pain does not necessarily involve beliefs or memory, as I argued above. These evaluations can be correct or incorrect, and some can be corrected (such as feeling that death is bad), while others cannot (such as feeling that pain is bad).

36 Anscombe [1957] (2000).

I believe that this 'evaluative belief account' is implausible and textually unsupported. It is implausible because it assumes that we can reason ourselves *entirely* out of feeling aversive pain. Once I conclude that 'this pain from drilling is not in fact bad,' I should stop feeling any aversive pain. Yet, it seems that, while reasoning about the benefits of the dental treatment can make the pain from drilling milder, it cannot entirely neutralize the pain. Here, I see a clear advantage of the 'immediately evaluative appearance' account: pain can continue to be aversive, due to its appearance of being bad, despite our belief that it is in fact indifferent.

A skeptic might respond, however, that we must distinguish between us ignorant people and the knowledgeable person. It may be implausible that *we* can reason ourselves out of feeling aversive pain, but it is quite plausible that the knowledgeable person can. On the skeptic's proposal, the knowledgeable person can reason herself out of feeling aversive pain. She is like someone with pain asymbolia, i.e., someone for whom pain is not aversive. But this portrait of the knowledgeable person is textually unsupported. In fact, some passages in the later dialogues suggest that even the knowledge person experiences aversive pain. Socrates himself, for example, experiences aversive pain (*Phaedo* 60b-c), though it is uncertain, of course, whether Socrates is in fact knowledgeable.[37] In the *Laws*, the Athenian claims that the wise man (σοφὸν) "has acquired pleasures and pains that are harmonious with and follow right reasons (λόγοις)" (696c8-10), though it is unclear whether that includes bodily pleasures and pain. Since we do not have any textual evidence for the rather implausible view that the knowledgeable person can reason herself entirely out of feeling aversive pain, I suggest that we reject it.

To avoid the first horn of the dilemma – that we *can* abandon our belief that pain is bad and then do not feel any aversion to pain – one may respond that we *cannot* abandon immediately evaluative beliefs. Not even the knowledgeable person can abandon the belief 'this pain is bad' when experiencing drilling. Therefore, she will continue to experience aversive pain. This response brings us to the second horn: if the knowledgeable person cannot abandon the evaluative belief that makes her feel aversive pain, she holds two incompatible beliefs at the same time, namely 'this pain is bad' and 'this pain is not bad.'[38]

37 For Socrates' repeated disavowal of knowledge see *Ap.* 20e, 21b, d. However, Socrates also claims to *know* that doing wrong, disobeying a superior (*Ap.* 29b), and a life without philosophy are bad (*Ap.* 37e-38a).

38 I argue that if pain is aversive because we immediately believe that pain is bad, then the knowledgeable person holds false beliefs. The belief 'this pain is bad' is false because, for Socrates, pain is neither in itself bad, nor, in the dentist scenario, bad for some external reason. But what if Socrates genuinely believes what he argues for in *Prt.* 351b ff., namely

One of those two beliefs must be false. The 'immediately evaluative beliefs' account, therefore, leads to the incongruous conclusion that the knowledgeable person holds false beliefs. The 'immediately evaluative perceptual appearances' account, by contrast, avoids such a contradiction; it is perfectly feasible for the knowledgeable person to have the appearance of the present pain being bad, while having the belief that pain is indifferent. Similarly, it is problematic to *believe* both that the sun is small and that it is big; but it is unproblematic to have the *appearance* of the sun being small, while believing that it is big.[39]

2 Part Two: the Ignorant and Knowledgeable at the Dentist

I will now move on to the second part of my interpretation and propose how bodily pain can play a more robust motivational role in the generation of actions. Let us imagine that the ignorant and the knowledgeable person both undergo cavity treatment at the dentist. When the dentist starts drilling, both immediately have the perceptual appearance of the present pain being very bad, and they both have an aversion to the present pain; but they differ in what happens next.

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that pleasure is the good and pain is the bad? Wouldn't then the belief 'this pain from drilling is bad' be true because (i) the bad is bad in itself, (ii) pain is the bad (Hedonism), (iii) so, pain from drilling is bad in itself? It seems to me that the belief 'this pain from drilling is bad in itself' is false because even hedonistic Socrates does not believe that bodily pains are bad in themselves (or that bodily pleasures are good in themselves). To see this, consider the following argument: (i) the scratcher and glutton in *Grg*. 493a-494d live pleasant lives. (ii) The pleasant life is the good life (Hedonism). (iii) So, the scratcher and glutton lead good lives. (iv) But Socrates denies (iii). (v) So, the pleasures of the scratcher/glutton, i.e., bodily pleasures, do not constitute a good life. (vi) So, the good life is constituted by other pleasures; presumably the pleasure of virtuous activity (here I agree with Rudebusch (1999) and Moss (2014)). If Socrates is a hedonist, not any kind of pleasure will do. Bodily pleasure is not the good, and the life of bodily pleasures is not a good life, therefore bodily pleasure is not good in itself. This way, Socrates could be a hedonist while maintaining that only virtue (knowledge of what is good and bad) is good in itself. Note also that, presumably, not all psychological pleasures are good in themselves either (consider Schadenfreude), nor will it be true that all psychological pains are bad (consider fear of ignorance).

39 The 'immediately evaluative perceptual appearance' account has another advantage over the 'immediately evaluative beliefs' accounts: it keeps the cognitive bar for experiencing bodily pleasure and pain low. The only mental state we need in order to experience aversive pain is an appearance, and this allows us to explain pain aversions in babies and animals. In the 'immediately evaluative beliefs' account, by contrast, one needs to be able to form beliefs to experience aversive pain.

In the case of the knowledgeable person, knowledge blocks the appearance of pain as bad from leading to the belief that pain is bad.[40] The knowledgeable person does not form the belief 'the present pain is bad,' but she may believe 'cavities are bad' because they keep her from doing philosophy in the long run. The belief 'cavities are bad' now triggers a reasoning process about what would be best to do. The goal of this reasoning process is to identify the best means to the end 'no cavities.' The result of this reasoning process may be that 'staying at the dentist and receiving the treatment is the best thing to do.' This belief brings about a desire to stay, and so the knowledgeable person stays. Note that we can identify three motivations at play: (i) aversion to pain; (ii) aversion to cavities, which functions as the *final motivation* of her action; (iii) desire to stay, which functions as an *instrumental desire*, i.e., a desire to achieve a further end, namely to get rid of her cavities.

In the case of the ignorant person, by contrast, nothing blocks the appearances from leading to a belief. The ignorant person not only has the appearance of the present pain being very bad, but she also believes that the present pain is very bad. This belief triggers a reasoning process about the best way to make the present pain stop. *What she wants is already set* (no pain!); all she has to do now is to come up with an *action plan*. She may conclude that fleeing the dentist is the best way to make the present pain stop. This belief brings about an instrumental desire to flee, and so she takes off. Note that we can identify two motivations: (i) aversion to pain (final motivation); (ii) desire to flee (instrumental desire). It follows that belief and reasoning may be required to bring about many or maybe even all of our instrumental desires, but they are definitely not required to bring about all final motivations. The chart below visualizes my proposal.

Knowledge does not erase the appearance that the present pain is bad, nor does it erase, for example, the appearance that the stick in the water is bent. But the knowledgeable person is not fooled by those appearances, meaning that she does not believe them to be true.[41] Since she does not believe that the present pain is very bad, she does not act on her appearance; she does not try to make the pain stop. Knowledge blocks the appearances from becoming the final motivation of her action, and I propose that this is precisely how knowledge makes appearances "powerless" (ἄκυρον, *Prt.* 356d8). Knowledge

40 I agree with Carone and Singpurwalla that a step like "assent" (Carone (2005)) or "endorsement" (Singpurwalla (2006)) is part of the Socratic generation of actions.

41 Others have also proposed that knowledge does not erase what I call 'perceptual appearances,' but that it prevents the knowledgeable man from being governed by them (see e.g., Boeri (2007), 62).

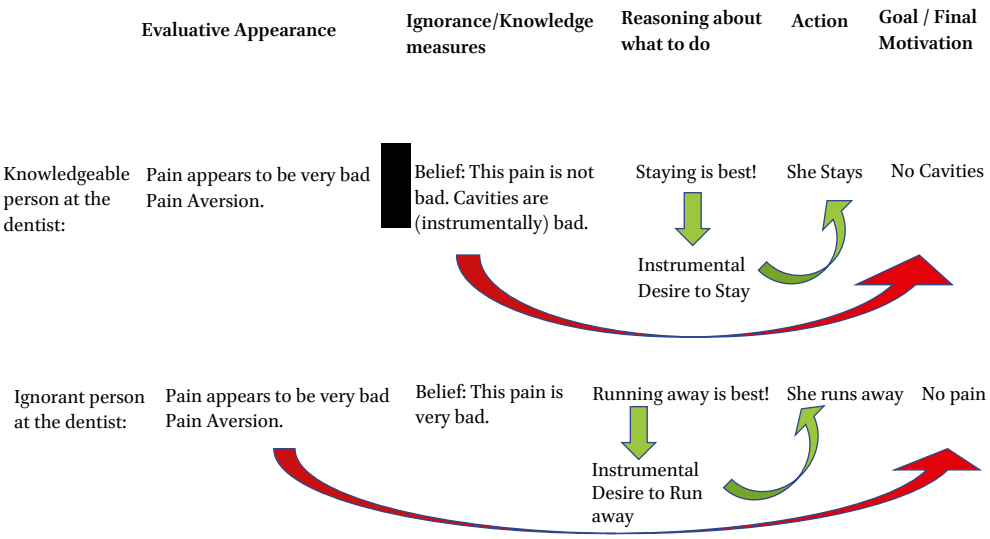

FIGURE 1 While the knowledgeable person blocks her pain aversion from becoming an action-causing motivation, the ignorant person acts on it

can make appearances powerless because it is stronger (κρεῖττον, *Prt.* 357c3) than them. Knowledge is stronger, I suggest, because it is more stable.[42]

My Socratic explanation of actions assigns a motivationally robust role to our aversion to bodily pain. The ignorant person flees because she does not want to be in pain. Her pain aversion serves as the *final motivation* of her action in this particular situation. It is not the overarching final motivation, since this is always a desire for the good (happiness) and an aversion to the bad (misery). But I argue that in a given, limited sequence, our pain aversions can function as the final motivation of particular actions. In this case, the ignorant person's reasoning process brings about an instrumental desire, a desire for something that she needs to do in order to get what she already wants (no pain!). What the ignorant person lacks when she experiences aversive pain is not a motivation, I argue, but an *action plan*. Her pain aversion is not *practically sufficient* to produce an action – she still needs to figure out how to make the pain stop.[43] But

42 The stability of knowledge brings about psychic harmony. For the connection between strength and stability or harmony, and weakness and instability or disharmony see *Men.* 97e-98a, *Resp.* 411b, 503c.

43 Note that, for example, knowing that an injustice has occurred is not practically sufficient for action either. The agent may know that an injustice occurred, and that injustice is bad. She therefore has an aversion to the present occurrence of injustice and she wants the injustice to stop. However, this aversion is not practically sufficient to produce an action. She also needs to figure out whether to stop the injustice is the best thing to do right now, and if so, how to best achieve her end (i.e., to stop the injustice).

in a sense her pain aversion is *motivationally sufficient*: her pain aversion can be the final motivation of an action, if endorsed and combined with an action plan.[44] In my interpretation, there is nothing motivationally deficient about pain aversions that would justify degrading them to the motivationally lower class of "itches."

3 Compatibility with the Socratic Core Beliefs

Let me now show that my interpretation is compatible with all four Socratic beliefs. In my interpretation, it remains true that (1) we always desire the good (happiness) and things we take to be good (happiness-promoting); we have an aversion to the bad (misery) and things we take to be bad (happiness-diminishing). Pain is aversive because it appears to be bad. (2) We always do what we believe is best. I argued that our aversion to pain is not practically sufficient to produce an action; we also need a plan for how to make the pain stop. This plan may arise out of careful deliberation, or it can arise immediately via association or memory. The belief that a certain action is best is our action plan. Therefore, it remains true that we always do what we believe is the best thing to do.[45] Next, it remains true that (3) all wrongdoing is due to ignorance. Knowledge is stronger than appearances, and in virtue of being stronger, it can block them from becoming final motivations. Only the ignorant person believes her appearances to be true, and then she acts on them.

Finally, let me explain how in my interpretation (4) the knowledgeable person's soul stays harmonious. Other interpreters have worried that if pain were more than an itch, the knowledgeable person would experience a psychological conflict between two competing motivations that would threaten her psychic harmony: her aversion to pain would compete with her reasoned desire. For example, when the knowledgeable person experiences painful drilling, she would experience a motivational conflict between her aversion to pain

44 Thanks to Tad Brennan for the useful distinction between 'practically sufficient' and 'motivationally sufficient,' and thanks to Rachana Kamtekar for pointing out to me that the label 'instrumental desire' captures well which role I take our reasoned desires (i.e., our desires that arise out of reasoning) to play in the dentist scenario.

45 I followed the common translation of οἴομαι as 'believe' in 'we always do what we believe is best to do,' but I take it to be an open question whether that is a good translation. If Schwab and Moss (2019) are right in that "at least up until his late dialogue the *Theaetetus* Plato shows no signs of using the concept of belief," Socratic actions do not require a 'belief' about what is best to do. In that case, every action requires an action plan, but not every action plan requires a belief.

and her desire to stay in the chair. I propose that her aversion to pain poses a threat to her psychic harmony, *only if* this aversion to pain is part of a second set of overarching final ends. If her present pain from drilling were aversive because she had a general, overarching aversion to pain (in addition to her general, overarching aversion to the bad), then she would indeed experience a harmony – threatening motivational conflict. This motivational conflict would be harmony – threatening because it is *unsolvable*; it is unsolvable because it is a competition between two different overarching final ends, namely badness and pain. In that scenario, when the knowledgeable person feels aversive pain at the dentist and reasons about what to do, she would compare apples to oranges – pain to badness.

In my interpretation, however, pain does not compete with badness, nor does pleasure compete with goodness. Pain is aversive in virtue of appearing bad. We only have one set of overarching final ends, namely a desire for the good and an aversion to the bad. Since pain is immediately converted into the currency of evaluation, the knowledgeable person can easily compare different goods and bads; she compares apples to apples – something of value (pain) to another thing of value (dental health). Therefore, my interpretation of pain aversions does not threaten the psychic harmony of the knowledgeable person.

At this point, let me summarize our interpretative options. Do we want to say that even the knowledgeable person has an immediate aversion to pain?

> *Option 1*: No! The knowledgeable person does not have an immediate aversion to pain. On this view, pain does not have any motivational flavor whatsoever. The knowledgeable person is like someone with pain asymbolia (pain is not aversive or "itchy" to her). The advantage of this view is that there is absolutely no risk of motivational conflict. The big disadvantage is that it is implausible and textually unsupported.
>
> *Option 2*: Yes! Even the knowledgeable person has an immediate aversion to pain. Those who take this option must explain why pain is aversive. I proposed that pain is aversive because pain immediately appears to be bad. The potential problem with this view is that it may seem to invite a harmony – threatening motivational conflict. A 'harmony – threatening motivational conflict' is an unsolvable conflict, and I propose that pain aversions do not bring about such a conflict.

I am not aware of anyone in the secondary literature taking the first option. We all seem to agree that pain is aversive in Socratic moral psychology. But then, we all have to explain *why* pain is aversive, and we have to provide an

explanation that renders the soul of the knowledgeable person harmonious. I here proposed one such explanation that is plausible and textually supported.

4 Conclusion

I have argued that our aversion to bodily pain poses a question for Socratic psychology that has been overlooked, namely: why is pain aversive? In the first part of my paper, I aimed to answer this question and thereby fill the explanatory gap in the secondary literature. I proposed that pain is aversive – that pain-itches itch – because pain immediately appears to be bad. We are hardwired to perceive pain as bad.[46] In the second part of my paper, I argued that we can assign a more robust motivational role to pain aversions. Pain aversions can be the final motivations of our actions if they are endorsed and combined with an action plan. In my interpretation, when the ignorant person flees the dentist, she was motivated by an aversion that preceded all reasoning: she acted on her aversion to pain.

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