

# The structure of unpleasantness

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## 1. Introduction

What makes unpleasant experiences unpleasant? Behind this apparently naïve question lies something rather relevant about the nature of suffering. A fair amount of the philosophical discussion about pain and unpleasantness has focused on providing a *constitutive account* of unpleasantness. These theories provide a more fundamental description of what unpleasantness is by appealing to other well-established notions in the architecture of the mind. In contrast, I address the nature of unpleasantness from a *structural account*. I will argue for how we should understand the structure of unpleasantness, how unpleasantness is built, rather than what unpleasantness is made of, as it were.

We can divide the question of what constitutes unpleasantness between *internalist* and *externalist* conceptions. Most authors discussing about the nature of pain think of it as a composite experience, a sort of portmanteau phenomenon. A typical unpleasant pain is constituted by: 1) a sensory aspect, the pain sensation in itself, which is not unpleasant and does not imply a form of suffering, and 2) a hedonic aspect, the unpleasantness itself, the aspect of the experience in virtue of which it hurts and one suffers from it. I will be focusing merely on the second aspect and on the different theories that try to account for it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These two aspects of the experience may not only be separable in theory. Pain asymbolia is a medical case, which suggests they can actually come apart. I consider this condition in section 4. 2. 3. The purpose of this

In one corner, we find the internalist team, what I call the *content theories*. According to a standard version of internalism, unpleasantness is: 1) a phenomenal property, it is a felt aspect of experience, and 2) it is an intrinsic property of mental states. This intrinsic felt aspect of experience is, in one way or another, constituted by some form of intentional mental content, either: 1) *evaluative* (Bain, 2012, 2013; Cutter & Tye, 2014; Helm, 2002; Tye, 1995, 2006), or 2) *imperative* (Barlassina & Hayward, forthcoming; Hall, 2008; Klein, 2007, 2012; Klein & Martínez, forthcoming; Martínez, 2011, 2015; Martínez & Klein, 2016).

In the other corner we find the externalist approach. I refer to these as the *desire theories*. In a standard version of this, unpleasantness: 1) *is not something felt*, it isn't a phenomenal aspect of experience, and 2) it is explained *extrinsically*, unpleasantness is accounted by appealing to an attitude. People who endorse this kind of approach argue that unpleasantness can be explained by referring to the very specific type of attitudes, often understood in terms of desires, that are directed at other mental states, such as pain (Armstrong, 1962; Brady, 2017; Clark, 2005; Heathwood, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2018; Pitcher, 1970; Schroeder, 2004, 2017).

I will focus on the *heterogeneity* of experience, which has been a somewhat neglected issue in the literature about unpleasantness. The general idea is that: 1) unpleasant experiences are phenomenologically *very diverse*; 2) that all and only unpleasant experiences are *unified* in virtue of *feeling* unpleasant; however, 3) after careful introspection, there seems to be nothing phenomenal that all and only unpleasant experiences share. By attending to this issue, and focusing in the case of unpleasant pains, we'll be able to shed light on the nature and structure of the property of unpleasantness. This will be useful for the constitutive theories of unpleasantness, both internalists as well as externalists.

In order to address the heterogeneity of unpleasant experiences and show how to best account for its structure, I proceed as follows.

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paper is to focus on the unpleasantness of pain, and not on the sensory pain experience in itself. I thank an anonymous referee for helping me to underlie this.

I start by explaining what the heterogeneity problem is and continue by offering some important attempts to deal with it. The first theory is the *distinctive feeling theory*. This approach denies that the heterogeneity problem even exists. However, this view lacks strong enough arguments in order to prove it so, thus this theory should be rejected.

I continue by explaining other theories that account for the diversity of unpleasant experiences by appealing to the notion of dimension: the *intensity theory* and the *determinable theory*. I will argue that only the latter is capable to successfully manage the heterogeneity problem. However, this approach entails a fundamental difficulty: whereas it is possible to experience pains that are not unpleasant, this approach entails that pains are necessarily so.

I finish by proposing my own theory in order to address the heterogeneity of unpleasant experiences: *the unpleasantnesses theory*. In a nutshell, I propose that the structure of the rich phenomenology of unpleasantness should be understood as a *determinable* property constituted by *multiple* essential dimensions. I will defend this account against a reasonable critique by showing how it provides a useful guide to be employed, and eventually developed, by constitutive theories of unpleasantness.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The heterogeneity problem

Unpleasant experiences *feel* unpleasant. This is quite a strong intuition. By this, not only do I mean that unpleasant experiences feel *somehow*. This is a more precise claim: unpleasantness itself feels somehow. It seems that there is an unpleasant phenomenal aspect about unpleasant experiences, unpleasantness seems to be *right there* in the bad taste of

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<sup>2</sup> There are two important aspects about the nature of unpleasantness that I will not address, given that they go beyond the main purpose of this paper: 1) the *motivational* and 2) the *normative* nature of unpleasantness. Broadly, there is a strong intuition that unpleasant experiences, insofar as they are unpleasant: 1) are motivational states, we can render actions intelligible by appealing to these mental states, and 2) that these states are normative, having an unpleasant experience makes true sentences of the form ‘it is *desirable* or it is *required* that I  $\phi$ ’. For more on motivation and justification see Smith (1995: 94–96).

something rotten, in the annoying feeling of being pinched, in a handicapping sharp headache, etc. It is, however, quite hard to delineate or pin down what this feeling is.

In order to start, we could ask ourselves: is hedonic tone *really* something felt? At the end, I think there are good enough reasons to take unpleasantness as something felt as well as phenomenologically diverse.

### 2.1. *What if unpleasantness is something felt?*

Even if unpleasantness may appear as something felt, there seems to be no unitary feeling that *all and only* unpleasant experiences share. That is, it is not evident that we can discern one and only phenomenology that all and only unpleasant experiences have and by dint of which they all can be classified as belonging to the same group.

This idea also applies to pleasant experiences and, in fact, most of the literature on the heterogeneity of experience is about pleasure. The idea is similar, there is no unitary qualitative aspect that all and only pleasant experiences share and by dint of which they are pleasant. Feldman (2004) provides a good example of this intuition:

Reflection on sensory pleasures quickly reveals an enormous phenomenological heterogeneity. Perhaps this can be expressed more simply: sensory pleasures are all “feelings”, but they do not “feel alike”. Consider the warm, dry, slightly drowsy feeling of pleasure that you get while sunbathing on a quiet beach. By way of contrast, consider the cool, wet, invigorating feeling of pleasure that you get when drinking some cold, refreshing beer on a hot day . . . [T]hey do not feel at all alike. After many years of careful research on this question, I have come to the conclusion that they have just about nothing in common phenomenologically. (Feldman, 2004: 79)

Feldman’s intuition is, I take it, that even if we agree that the warm and cool feelings in each of the situations *feel* pleasant, there seems to be no discernable unitary feeling in virtue of which both qualify as such. This intuition is also held for unpleasant experiences. If you think of many of the unpleasant experiences that you might have, such as feeling a

particular pain, feeling dizzy, experiencing itching, hunger, thirst, etc., there is nothing phenomenal, no conscious unitary feeling, in virtue of which all and only these experiences can be grouped as all belonging to the same type of experience. Korsgaard (1996) writes along these lines:

If the painfulness of pain rested in the character of the sensations . . . our belief that physical pain has something in common with grief, rage and disappointment would be inexplicable. For that matter, what physical pains have in common with each other would be inexplicable, for the sensations are of many different kinds. What do nausea, migraine, menstrual cramps, pinpricks and pinches have in common that makes us call them all pains? (Korsgaard, 1996: 148)

It is worth noting that Korsgaard is using here the word ‘pain’ in a very loose sense. That is, nausea is not a pain as a headache is, most would agree. Many would concur too that feeling nausea is unpleasant, but it is not a pain as the feelings of being cut or burnt are. Pinpricks and pinches are stimuli that *cause* pain, but they are not pains themselves. The word that she should be using here is ‘unpleasant’. That is, all these affective experiences are extremely diverse and they do not seem to have one single phenomenal aspect that unifies them all and by dint of which they qualify as such.

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

### **The heterogeneity problem**

We have a very strong intuition that:

- 1) Unpleasant experiences are *unified*. It is in virtue of *feeling* unpleasant, of having this phenomenal character, that all and only unpleasant experiences qualify as such.

However, after careful introspection, there is also the strong intuition that:

- 2) Unpleasant experiences are very *diverse*. There is nothing qualitative, nothing phenomenal, *no unitary feeling*, that all and only unpleasant experiences share and in virtue of which they all count as unpleasant.

It is crucial for a theory that takes hedonic tone to be phenomenal to explain how all unpleasant experiences are so because of a phenomenal property, even if there seems to be no unitary feeling that is shared among all and only unpleasant experiences. The idea is not that we simply call a bunch of experiences ‘unpleasant’ based on a completely arbitrary ground. On the contrary, what is at the heart of the heterogeneity problem is that there is a good reason why we take all unpleasant experiences to have some unity. It is because they have something qualitative in common, they share *a common* feature. In the same way we may collect a bunch of the objects and put them on the same bag on the basis of their redness, we may think that we could organize unpleasant experiences as belonging to the same group on the basis of their experienced unpleasantness. But can we really apply this strategy when it comes to these experiences? In order to tackle this issue, some theorists have adopted a different strategy. They do not think that unpleasantness is phenomenal.

## 2.2. *What if unpleasantness isn't something felt?*

Another way to explain the unity of divergent unpleasant experiences is to deny that the common link is phenomenal. For example, according to the desire theories approach, unpleasantness is not a phenomenal property. In the case of a typically unpleasant sensory experience, such as an unpleasant pain, the experience's hedonic tone is accounted for by referring to a desire for this pain not to be occurring.<sup>3</sup> If we accept this kind of view, we can offer a straightforward solution to the heterogeneity problem: what unifies all

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<sup>3</sup> To be more precise, the desire must have certain features in order to be able to account for the unpleasantness of the experience (Heathwood, 2007). Broadly, the desire must be: 1) *intrinsic* to the pain, the desire is for the pain sensation not to be occurring for its own sake, 2) *simultaneous* to it, the desire and the pain sensation have to co-occur, and 3) directed *de re*, as opposed to be a *de dicto* desire.

unpleasant experiences is a common type of desire for these experiences not to occur, rather than something felt, i.e., a common unpleasant unitary phenomenology.<sup>4</sup>

Clark (2005), for example, argues that unpleasantness is not a quale. He thinks that negative affect should be understood by referring to its motivational role of *aversion*.<sup>5</sup> ‘Aversiveness is an essential but relational property of those states we call "painful" [i.e., unpleasant pains]. But then the properties that such relational characterizations describe are not qualia . . . So painfulness is not a quale. It is at best a motivational disposition occasioned by a quale.’ (Clark, 2005: 187) Clark’s proposal is very similar to what desire theories take unpleasantness to be. In the case of a pain, for instance, being unpleasant is not an intrinsic property of the pain sensation, unpleasantness is what this pain sensation provokes: aversion.

However, there is an important reason to think unpleasantness is indeed a quale. If we think it isn’t, this leads to a Euthyphro dilemma. Consider an unpleasant pain. Is a pain unpleasant because we are averse to it? This is what Clark appears to suggest, that the unpleasantness of a pain is extrinsic to the pain sensation. It is only unpleasant insofar we stand in a relation of aversion to that pain quale, which is not in itself hedonic. Or the other way around, are we averse to a pain because there is something about that quale that makes us want to avoid it? This is in line with how we often think avoidance works. Unpleasantness is intrinsic to pain. There is something bad about that quale in itself, which explains our natural rejection to it. Whereas the first horn of the dilemma seems unintuitive, but it is what a theorist such as Clark would have to defend, the second one is not available to a theory such as Clark’s, because, on his view, unpleasantness is not intrinsic to the pain

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<sup>4</sup> I take this to be the standard and more convenient way of interpreting desire views regarding hedonic tone: unpleasantness is not a phenomenal property. If it were, then desire theorists would not be avoiding the tension that the heterogeneity problems raises, they would still have to explain how such phenomenal unity, constituted in this case by a desire, aversion, etc., cannot be identified after careful introspection. I thank an anonymous referee for pointing out this possible interpretation of the extrinsic approach of unpleasantness, where affect is phenomenal, but constituted by an attitude.

<sup>5</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for insisting in taking this point into account.

quale; unpleasantness depends on us having an aversion to a pain sensation, instead of us having such aversion because of the way the pain feels.

There have been attempts to save this kind of approach from the dilemma (Brady, 2017; Heathwood, 2007). Brady argues that the Euthyphro dilemma gets dissolved if we ascribe the property of being unpleasant to the whole *compound* experience, rather than ascribing this property only to the sensation that is being desired not to occur. In the case of an unpleasant pain, rather than thinking that a pain sensation has negative affect in virtue of being desired not to occur, which leads to a Euthyphro dilemma, we should attribute the property of unpleasantness to the compound of: 1) the pain sensation and 2) the attitude (desire, aversion, etc.) directed at that pain quale. In this way, there is simply no dilemma to be raised.

However, even if Brady is right, there are still unsolved issues (Sapién, 2018): 1) we cannot provide a non-instrumental justification of the attitude that constitutes unpleasantness, and 2) we have not yet given an account for the motivation behind such aversion from a psychological point of view of the one who experiences the relevant quale. This is problematic precisely because these are the kind of things that we would expect a constitutive theory of unpleasantness to explain. Briefly, the idea is the following.

Clark, for instance, could tell an *evolutionary explanation* behind this aversion. He could argue that there is an *instrumental normative reason* for us to be hardwired to show avoidance behaviour in the presence of a pain quale. It is *desirable* that we tend to avoid having these experiences *so that* we maintain ourselves safe and alive, given the high association of pain qualia with some form of body injury. It is instrumentally good. Hall (1989) had something similar in mind; ‘evolution has done its work very well and almost every living creature in the animal kingdom finds the sensations accompanying almost every kind of nociception unpleasant. So goes the evolutionary story.’ (Hall, 1989: 648)

However, I think that there are two important elements missing. When we think of an unpleasant experience, there is the strong intuition that there is something *intrinsically bad* about it, its unpleasantness, which explains why we, *sentient* beings: 1) avoid those experiences, we are motivated to act because of how the experience feels, and 2) it is good

for us, non-instrumentally, to avoid them, because they are bad in themselves. The evolutionary tale about avoidance cannot fill the gaps regarding these two aspects.

Instead, we could accept that unpleasantness is something felt, as many theorists about hedonic tone do, as our very deep intuition suggests, and try to figure out how we can account for the phenomenal diversity of it.

### **3. The distinctive feeling theory**

In this account, unpleasantness is a unitary qualitative property, a distinctive feeling, that all and only unpleasant experiences have and by dint of which these experiences qualify as such. This theory is, basically, the denial of premise 2) of the heterogeneity problem.

The main issue for this theory is, therefore, the heterogeneity problem. The distinctive feeling theory tells us that all unpleasant experiences share the same ingredient, as it were, which is a *unitary feeling* of unpleasantness, the same and only for all unpleasant experiences. However, according to the heterogeneity problem, there is no single qualitative aspect, no single unitary phenomenal property, no single ‘ingredient’, by dint of which all and only unpleasant experiences qualify as unpleasant. If the heterogeneity problem exists, the distinctive feeling theory is wrong.

I think there are relevant reasons why we shall reject the distinctive feeling theory and look into other more promising candidates: 1) this theory relies heavily on an undeveloped metaphor, and 2) even if we developed such metaphor, we cannot discern the same unitary unpleasant feeling among unpleasant experiences as we can identify similarities among other divergent experiences.

#### *3.1. The distinctive feeling*

Bramble (2013) defends the idea that pleasant and unpleasant sensory experiences are respectively pleasant and unpleasant in virtue of a *distinctive feeling*. This is a quality, a phenomenal aspect in virtue of which a sensory experience qualifies as pleasant or

unpleasant. In other words, the distinctive feeling is a *phenomenal property* of mental states such as sensory experiences. Unpleasant auditory, taste, touch, or pain experiences are all unpleasant because they instantiate the phenomenal property of being unpleasant, i.e., because they share a common distinctive unpleasant feeling.

But what does distinctive mean? Here are three relevant ways in which we could understand something phenomenal being ‘distinctive’: 1) in terms of a *unitary* feeling, i.e., it is the same and only phenomenal property in virtue of which all and only sensory experiences that are unpleasant qualify as such, we cannot divide this feeling into qualitative sub-parts; 2) in the sense that it is *accessible* to our stream of consciousness, the distinctive feeling is something that is part of our conscious experience, we can direct our attention to it, at least under normal circumstances, and thus compare it to other phenomenal experiences and make reports about it; and 3) that it is *irreducible*, it cannot be accounted for in terms of something more fundamental in our theory of the mind.<sup>6</sup>

Bramble argues that even if it *seems* as if there is no unitary feeling in all and only unpleasant experiences after a first introspective glance, *there is*, in fact, such feeling. However, this feeling is not easy to notice because it is ‘permeating’ the sensory experiences. This permeation is meant to explain why, after simple introspection, it seems as if there was no distinctive phenomenal property that unifies all pleasant or unpleasant sensory experiences, respectively. ‘Clearly, if “the pleasant feeling” exists, it does not make these sort [*sic*] of experiences pleasant by being ‘tacked on to them’, so to speak, in any crude fashion. Instead, it must be the sort of feeling that can come in extremely low intensities, and very finely discriminable locations within one’s experiential field, so that it can come scattered throughout one’s experiential field.’ (Bramble, 2013: 210)

According to the heterogeneity problem, if we make a list of all of the experiences that have negative affect and we introspect them, we will not be able to find one single distinctive feeling that all and only these experiences share. In other words: of course all

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<sup>6</sup> I owe noticing this third sense of ‘distinctive’ to Frederique de Vignemont. See, for example, the discussion whether the sense of bodily ownership is distinctive or it can be reduced to either spatial awareness, to agentive awareness, or to affective awareness (de Vignemont, 2018).

and only unpleasant experiences share one property, they all are unpleasant! But the key intuition is that all these experiences are not unpleasant because they all share *the same and only distinctive phenomenal* property of unpleasantness.

### **The distinctive feeling theory**

Unpleasantness is a unitary feeling that all and only unpleasant experiences share and by dint of which they qualify as such. Unpleasantness is a phenomenal property that permeates mental states.

#### *3.2. What does permeation mean?*

What could it mean for a distinctive feeling to *permeate* our experiences, instead of it merely being *tacked on* to them? Bramble does not go into detail in order to explain what permeation means when it comes to phenomenal properties. The idea of permeation is a nice metaphor and it does capture how hard it is to pin down how unpleasantness is something felt. However, I find it hard to accept that such feeling exists in such unitary way by appealing to our introspection and then account for the difficulty of detecting such feeling by referring to an undeveloped metaphor.

In order to be charitable, I think we can try to make sense of permeation by translating the proposal into visual language. Suppose that the distinctive unpleasant-feeling is analogous to the distinctive red-feeling that typical experiences of seeing something red have. Following the distinctive feeling theory, there is a shared distinctive hedonic tone when we experience a cut, a burn, a headache, etc. However, this feeling is hard to find after introspection, given the subtle permeation with which unpleasantness modifies pain experiences.

One recognises some similarity in the experiences of seeing a ladybird, of seeing a stop sign on a traffic light, and of seeing a stereotypical apple. All of these experiences are phenomenologically similar because they have some shared red-feeling-ness. In other words, we could distinguish the same red-feeling-ness as being present in these examples. If this is a fair analogy, we can try to understand what it would mean for distinctive red-

feeling-ness to be permeating our visual experiences, so we can make sense of the permeation of the distinctive unpleasantness.

Suppose that you have the visual experience of a Magritte painting. I can think of two ways of making sense of the notion of visual permeation. First, in the way that water *permeates* a sponge by filling its cavities with water, if the Magritte painting were filled with tiny red dots, these would be dispersed and filling the cavities of the painting. These subtle red dots in the painting translate into red-feeling-ness permeating your experience of a Magritte painting. In the same way that the dots are ‘scattered throughout one’s experiential field’, red-feeling-ness is spread throughout your visual experience (see Fig. 1). A second alternative is to understand permeation as a filter. Imagine you go to the museum wearing red shaded glasses: your experience of the painting is then filtered with a red tonality, you still identify the painting as a Magritte but now it has a red permeation (see Fig. 2).<sup>7</sup>

Contrast these two possibilities as opposed to what being ‘tacked on’ would mean in terms of a phenomenal property of experience. If someone attached a big red stripe to the Magritte painting, the red stripe would be literally tacked on to it. This would not translate into your experience being finely permeated by red-feeling-ness, but rather into having red-feeling-ness being tacked onto it (see Fig. 3).

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<sup>7</sup> Even if Fig. 2 might not be exactly what happens when one wears coloured shades, the modification of the pixels of the image turned closer to the red spectrum is meant to exemplify how your visual experience of this image now has some red-feeling-ness. This image modification results, the idea goes, in your visual experience having permeating red-feeling-ness. Sometimes the modification of the painting might be so subtle, so fine grained, that it would result in an almost unnoticeable red-feeling-ness at an experiential level.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

The feeling is not ‘tacked on’ to the experience, Bramble says. In other words, the fact that our unpleasant pain experiences are permeated with such distinctive unpleasantness does not imply that this unpleasant feeling will always be easily localisable, discernible, accessible, etc. What Bramble proposes should be rather similar to figures 1 or 2 and not at all like figure 3. This should give us a better idea of what Bramble has in mind when he says that a distinctive feeling permeates our experiences.

### *3.2. Accessibility of the unitary unpleasant feeling*

Let’s consider figures 1, 2, and 3. I think that there is something similar and discernible among these three images. There is some red-feeling-ness that we can access and compare among all these instances. This is an example of some common phenomenal aspect among various diverse phenomenal experiences. This, however, is something that does not seem to occur when we compare unpleasant experiences *qua* their unpleasantness. Whereas we are able to detect shared red-feeling-ness in various different visual experiences, even when it is subtle, we cannot detect shared unitary phenomenal unpleasantness among diverse unpleasant experiences, subtle or not.

Let me make this clearer. If we compare somewhat similar unpleasant experiences, it is already quite hard to detect the exact same unitary unpleasant feeling. Let’s illustrate this. Pinch yourself in different parts of your body. Are all these experiences unpleasant in the same way? Now, let’s compare less similar experiences. Hit yourself in those same places. Is the unpleasantness of these experiences the exact same unpleasantness that you had when

you pinched yourself? Now, *just imagine* that you burn yourself in the same areas of your skin. Could you detect the same distinctive unpleasantness?

All these are unpleasant experiences related to bodily damage, yet it is very hard to detect *the same* unitary unpleasant feeling in all of them. If we think of the many other unpleasant experiences that we might undergo, like tasting or smelling something rotten, feeling nauseous, being tired, sad, heartbroken, etc., we will not be able to go ‘Aha, there is that distinctive unpleasant feeling again!’ It looks like if unpleasantness is phenomenal, it is not a unitary feeling, not even a subtle permeating one.<sup>8</sup>

Consider another example of detecting some phenomenal sameness. When we look at different faces, there is some form of similarity among them, we see them as being similar, as being a face, even if they are different regarding many respects.<sup>9</sup> This does not appear to be the case when we try to detect a unitary unpleasant feeling, especially when we consider the vast variety of unpleasant experiences. If we think unpleasantness is phenomenal and want to account for its variations, we should revise other theories that allow us to account for a more fine-grained diversity within the phenomenology of affect.

#### **4. The dimensional theories of unpleasantness**

There are different ways in which unpleasantness may vary as a feeling. When an experience is more unpleasant than another one, there is, strictly speaking, some change: it feels different. It is hard, however, to express what it is that remains the same and what is phenomenologically changing. In this section I will discuss two approaches in order to

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<sup>8</sup> Moreover, some argue that even if two experiences appear to us as being the same regarding some aspect of their phenomenal character, that does not imply that these experiences actually have the exact same phenomenal character (Fara, 2001). ‘[W]e should reject the entailment from sameness in lookings [or feelings] to sameness in phenomenal character.’ (Sebastián, 2018: 7) If this is correct, this implies that not only do we fail to identify unitary unpleasantness, but also that even if we did, there are reasons to doubt it is the exact same phenomenal feeling.

<sup>9</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this comparison.

account for variations of unpleasantness. The notion of dimension, i.e., the possibility of taking different quantitative values within a given scale, will be crucial to make sense of the proposals.

I refer to the first approach as the *intensity theory*: unpleasantness is a single dimension along which sensory experiences may vary. The idea comes from Kagan (1992). I briefly consider a critique from Bramble (2013), who thinks that Kagan's analogy is inapt. I will argue that the intensity theory, even if enlightening, is limited in order to account for the whole range of diversity of unpleasant experiences. So I turn to another approach that I call the *determinable theory*. This is based on Crisp's (2006) proposal about enjoyment. The determinable theory provides a straightforward answer to the heterogeneity problem. Broadly, in the same way that scarlet is a way of being red, and red is a way of being coloured, a headache is a way of being an unpleasant pain, and an unpleasant pain is a way of being an unpleasant experience. However, this theory has a fundamental difficulty: accounting for cases of pain not being unpleasant.

#### 4.1. *The intensity theory*

This proposal relies on an analogy: volume is to sound what pleasantness or unpleasantness are to mental states. If this analogy is correct, one of its virtues is that it acknowledges an important feature of negative affect: some experiences are worse than others. According to this view, unpleasantness is a single dimension along which experiences may be ranked. Here is what Kagan (1992) says:

An alternative move is to identify pleasantness not as a component of experiences, but rather as a *dimension* along which experiences can vary. As an analogy, consider the loudness of auditory experiences — that is, sounds. It is obvious that loudness or volume is not a *kind* of sound. And it seems plausible to insist that loudness is not a single kind of component of auditory experiences. Rather, volume is a dimension along which sounds can vary. It is an aspect of sounds, with regard to which they can be ranked . . . Similarly, then, pleasure might well be a distinct dimension of mental states, with regard to which they

can be ranked as well . . . For it seems to me that there is a sense in which a specific volume is indeed an ingredient of a given sound, along with a particular pitch, and so forth. (Kagan, 1992: 172 – 173)

Kagan's proposal is about pleasantness, but something very similar can be said for unpleasantness: it is an aspect along which different experiences can vary. Since volume is a dimensional property with intensities, we can explain that some sounds *are louder* than others. If unpleasantness is a dimensional property with intensities, we can explain that some unpleasant experiences feel worse.

### **The intensity theory**

Unpleasantness is a phenomenal property of mental states; this property is a single dimension along which unpleasant experiences can be ranked as being more, less, or equally unpleasant as any other unpleasant experience *qua* its shared unpleasantness.

Bramble (2013) argues that Kagan's analogy is inapt and, therefore, he would think that the intensity theory is inadequate too. 'Consider that, for most pleasant experiences, one can reduce their pleasantness to nothing, while leaving the experience intact, whereas one cannot ever reduce the volume of an auditory experience to nothing and still be left with the auditory experience in question.' (Bramble, 2013: 209) A simple way of explaining Bramble's critique is to focus on volume as a property of sound. Whereas volume is an *essential property* of sound, being pleasant or unpleasant isn't essential to mental states such as sensory experiences.

Sound is often understood as a physical phenomenon, as a perturbation in a medium such as air; these perturbations can be measured in waves and the standard way of understanding sound's volume is in terms of the amplitude of its waves representing the medium's magnitude of perturbation. The bigger the volume the bigger the wave. If the wave has no size, this means that there is no perturbation in the medium, that there is no sound. This is why volume is essential to sound. In contrast, being pleasant or unpleasant is not essential for sensory experiences. We could have a taste experience of drinking coffee

without it being pleasant or unpleasant, the idea goes. Whereas sound cannot exist without volume, certain sensory experiences can exist without having a hedonic dimension.

There is a simple way of dealing with this critique. We could take Kagan's analogy as comparing the hedonic tone of *unpleasant experiences* with sound's volume. That is, if volume is essential to sound, we can argue that being unpleasant is essential to unpleasant experiences. In this way, even if it is true that a sound must have volume in order to exist, the analogy is apt because an unpleasant experience has to be unpleasant in order to exist as an unpleasant experience. The analogy is finally apt regarding essentiality.<sup>10</sup>

#### *4.1.1. The heterogeneity problem for the intensity theory*

There is, however, a much more important problem for the theory: whereas volume *only* varies in one scale, unpleasantness *not only* varies in terms of one single dimension.

The intensity theory has to show that all and only the experiences that are unpleasant are unified in virtue of having the same phenomenal unity, the same phenomenal dimension, and that the only variation among all these unpleasant experiences, *qua* their affect, is regarding changes of intensity regarding the same unitary felt unpleasantness. The theory, however, does not seem to be able to meet this requirement.

Consider pleasantness. I agree that hiking, listening to music, and reading philosophy can all be pleasant, as Kagan points out (1992: 172–173). However, I do not think that their pleasantness can *only* vary in intensity regarding the same feeling. If we think that hedonic properties are ultimately something that is part of our conscious phenomenology, we should be able to detect that it is the same feeling that is being compared among the various

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<sup>10</sup> Another possible strategy to show that there is no issue with the analogy between sound and hedonic properties is to argue that a sound could take the value 0 of volume and it would still be a sound. Similarly, we could argue that an unpleasant experience could take a 0 value in a ranking of unpleasantness and still be an unpleasant experience. I prefer the presented solution because it would be hard to distinguish a pleasant experience from an unpleasant one regarding the same sensory feeling if both have value 0 in their ranking, respectively. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this possible strategy.

instances of experiences. It is quite hard to identify the *same* pleasant feeling among *all* pleasant experiences. Kagan admits that it is odd to say that there is something phenomenal shared among all these experiences, but he insists that: ‘pleasantness might well be considered an ingredient of (conscious) mental states in general, albeit an ingredient that we will only notice if we “chop up” experiences in some nonstandard ways.’ (Kagan, 1992: 173)

The same can be said for unpleasant experiences. It is not particularly hard to accept that experiencing grief, nausea, suffering from severe burns, having a headache, etc. are all unpleasant. What is controversial is that all these experiences are unpleasant in virtue of the same shared phenomenal aspect, and that the only difference regarding their unpleasantness is that some of these experiences are more unpleasant than others based a single phenomenal scale.

If we understand unpleasantness as being similar to volume, the analogy seems limited. It is relatively clear what makes the volume of a sound more intense than another one: it has a major impact on the fluid that it disturbs and, thus, its measurement results in a bigger wave. But there are two aspects of unpleasant experiences that make it hard to accept the analogy with volume: 1) that it is not clear, even regarding one phenomenal dimension, what makes an unpleasant experience more intense than another, and 2) it is not obvious that all unpleasant experiences, when compared regarding their unpleasantness, are being judged on the basis of one single phenomenal scale.

Let me clarify this last idea. For this, allow me to perform some armchair experiments. Pinch yourself softly! It hurts a little; lets call this experience *A*. Pinch harder! It hurts more; this is experience *B*. Now pinch much harder to get experience *C*. I think we would be tempted so say that even if these three experiences are somewhat similar, *C* is more unpleasant than *B*, and *B* is more intense than *A*. If the intensity theory is right, what makes an unpleasant experience more intense than another is that the same type of unpleasantness is somehow present in *A*, *B* and *C*. This may not be so hard to accept.

Compare the unpleasant feeling of being pinched to the one we have while being mildly or severely burnt. Is there a shared unpleasant feeling with all the three previous

pinching experiences? It is harder to tell. The heterogeneity of unpleasantness becomes clearer the broader the type of unpleasant experiences we want to compare.

Contrast a migraine with a stomachache or a toothache. They vary in location, clearly, but are they all *achy* because of the exact same phenomenal quality of unpleasantness that differs only in intensity? Suppose that they rank with the same intensity *qua* their unpleasantness, they are all *excruciating* according to the McGill Pain Questionnaire, and that they last the same amount of time.<sup>11</sup> There is going to be an obvious difference regarding a sensory component of the experience, but it does not seem clear that they are unpleasant in the exact same phenomenal way. Compare a *horrible* migraine with *horrible* grief. Are these two horrible unpleasant experiences horrible in the exact same phenomenal way? I think that the careful comparison between a wide variety of unpleasant experiences shows that there is no unitary phenomenal dimension among all and only these experiences and in virtue of which they all qualify as unpleasant.

The intensity theory acknowledges that unpleasant experiences may have differences *qua* their unpleasantness: multiple intensities. However, this is not enough to shed light on all the possible variations regarding unpleasantness.<sup>12</sup> The variations of the different ways of being unpleasant will be easier to capture once we introduce the following theory, since

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<sup>11</sup> It is relevant to notice that according to a pain questionnaire, such as the McGill one, as well as in the general scientific understanding of pain, unpleasantness is taken to only vary in intensity within a single dimension and that other phenomenal variations are ascribed to a sensory component.

<sup>12</sup> Aydede (2014) may seem to propose a similar approach to Kagan's. 'Just the fastness or slowness of dances can be recognized across all different types of dances, the pleasantness or unpleasantness common to various otherwise quite different sensations is detectable, indeed introspectively available.' (Aydede, 2014: 113) However, this proposal may face similar worries if the intensity of unpleasantness is understood as a single linear detectable dimension. In fact, Aydede thinks that hedonic tone can be explained in terms of a range of psychofunctional processes, suggesting that unpleasantness *should not* be understood as one-dimensional — I thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out. I favour the interpretation of hedonic tone as multidimensional, as I explain in the last section of this paper. This suggests that an approach such as Aydede's could also be adapted to the model I propose.

we will be not looking for phenomenal unitary sameness among various unpleasant experiences *qua* their unpleasantness.

#### 4.2. *The determinable theory*

How can we preserve the intuition that unpleasantness is something felt, while accounting for the wide phenomenal diversity within unpleasant experiences? A good way of doing this is incorporating the notion of determinables and determinates. For this, I will first explain the main features of the distinction that we need to have in mind in order to make full sense of Crisp's (2016) proposal about enjoyment. Enjoyment can be easily translated to the discussion about unpleasantness. I will explain what I take to be the determinable theory, this will be useful to confront the heterogeneity problem. I will show, however, that this solution entails a very significant problem.

##### 4. 2. 1. *The determinable-determinate distinction*

The determinable-determinate distinction serves to account for different items belonging to a common group.<sup>13</sup> The distinction, for instance, has been particularly useful to explain colour variation. The differences among determinates of a common determinable are explained in terms of variations along the shared dimensions that constitute a determinable. One of the initial mentions of the distinction was, indeed, in reference to colour.

[T]he several colours are put into the same group and given the same name colour, *not on the ground of any partial agreement*, but on the ground of *the special kind of difference* which distinguishes one colour from another; whereas no such difference exists between a colour and a shape. (Johnson, 1921: 176, my emphasis)

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the determinable-determinate distinction see Funkhouser (2006, 2014), Johnson (1921), Prior (1949), and Wilson (2009, 2017).

Similarly, Prior (1949: 13) says ‘redness, blueness, etc., all characterise objects, as we say, “in respect of their colour” . . . And this is surely fundamental to the notion of being a determinate under a determinable.’ So what is this *special kind of difference* that Johnson talks about? How is it that redness and blueness vary *in respect to their colour*, as Prior mentions? Once more, let’s employ the notion of dimension.

Dimensions are the essential properties of a determinable and in virtue of which each of its determinates varies from the rest. Determinates of a common determinable have different values along *the same* essential dimension, or dimensions, of a common determinable. Kagan was right, when making the analogy with volume, to notice that unpleasantness may vary along *a* dimension. His proposal can be illustrated by this distinction. He could say that unpleasantness — as well as pleasantness — is a one-dimensional determinable. However, given the phenomenal complexity of the unpleasantness of various experiences, it is more than tempting to think that there might be multiple dimensions along which unpleasantness may vary.

Let’s focus on being coloured in order clarify the distinction. Three dimensions arguably constitute this property: hue, saturation, and brightness. These elements are necessary and sufficient for being coloured. Being coloured is equivalent to the disjunction of all the possible combinations along hue, saturation, and brightness. Accordingly, being red is the disjunction of the possible combinations of hue, saturation, and brightness, but within a more limited range than being coloured. Red is a determinate of being coloured, and also a determinable of being magenta, of being crimson, etc. That is, *some determinates can also be determinables*.

A determinable, such as being coloured, that is not a determinate of any other determinable is a *super-determinable*. Accordingly, a determinate that is not also a determinable is a *super-determinate*. For example, take a *very* precise shade of red, such as Coca-Cola red. It is composed by a very particular hue, saturation, and brightness. Shades of red, such as Coca-Cola red or Ferrari red, could be good examples of super-determinates: they are not determinables of anything else.

This accounts for what Johnson had in mind. The ‘special kind of difference’ between colour and shape is that they are different determinables, i.e., different essential dimensions constitute them. When we talk about different ways of being for various determinates of a common determinable, this means that the variation between these determinates is explained in terms of variation along *the same* dimensions. Something similar can be said for unpleasant experiences, which accounts for how unpleasant experiences are so diverse, and do feel different, even if they belong to a common type.

But before entering into the details of how unpleasant experiences can be understood as a determinable, let’s illustrate how not to understand the determinable-determinate distinction for our purposes. This will serve us to clarify why, in particular, the distinctive feeling theory was not able to account for unpleasantness phenomenal diversity. Wilson (2017) explains:

The determination relation appears to differ from other specification relations. In contrast with the *genus-species* and *conjunct-conjunction* relations, where the more specific property can be understood as a conjunction of the less specific property and some independent property or properties, a determinate is not naturally treated in conjunctive terms (*red* is not a conjunctive property having *color* and some other property or properties as conjuncts) [. . .] (Wilson, 2017)

I think that a good way of making sense of the determinable-determinate distinction, as Wilson points out, is to say that different determinates vary among themselves *non-additively*. To say that being coloured is a determinable is to say that the colour properties that fall under it differ from one another *non-additively*. The difference between being a particular shade of red and being a particular shade blue *is not* that being red consists in *being coloured* plus being *R*, whereas being blue consists in *being coloured* plus being *B*; rather, being red consists in being coloured in a *particular way*, and being blue consists in being coloured in a *different particular way*. Each of these particular ways is the result of the values that each particular way, each super-determinate, takes regarding the same essential dimensions.

Contrast this to the different ways of being a young animal. This is closer to what we take to be the difference genus-species. Being a *kitten*, a *cub*, a *lamb*, and a *sheep* share the same property of *being a young animal*. However, the differences among these items is explained in terms of variations of *different* dimensions: only the property of being a *kitten* entails being a *cat*, only the property of being a *cub* entails being a *bear*, only the property of being a *lamb* entails being a *sheep*, and so on. Being a *kitten*, a *cub*, a *lamb*, and a *sheep* vary additively and, therefore, even if they all belong to a common group, they are not determinates of a common determinable.

#### 4. 2. 2. *Being an unpleasant experience as a determinable*

Crisp (2006) proposes that the mistake in trying to find something in common in experiences that we enjoy is that we are thinking in terms of finding a determinate feeling, rather than such phenomenal character in terms of a determinable property. He understands enjoyment as some form of sensory pleasure, something phenomenal that unifies experiences that feel good.

Enjoyment, then, is best understood using the determinable-determinate distinction, and the mistake in the heterogeneity argument is that it considers only determinates. Enjoyable experiences do differ from one another . . . But there is a certain common quality . . . feeling good . . . The determinable–determinate distinction also helps us to be clear about the role of ‘feeling’ in this analysis: feeling good as a determinable is not any particular kind of determinate feeling. (Crisp, 2006: 109)

There are a few rather terminological things to say about Crisp’s passage. First, his idea can be equally applied to experiences that *feel bad*, i.e., several instances of experiences can be explained as determinates of the common feeling-bad determinable. Instead of referring to these determinables as ‘feeling good’ or ‘feeling bad’, I refer to them as being pleasant or unpleasant.

Second, I should also point out that when I mention determinables and determinates, I refer to properties. Being unpleasant is a property of mental states, and the same applies to the different ways of being unpleasant. To make sense of this proposal in order to address the heterogeneity problem, we can compare the property of being unpleasant, or unpleasantness, to other features such as the property of being red, or redness, when it comes to objects, or to the property of being red-feeling, or red-feeling-ness, when it comes to visual experiences.

### **The determinable theory**

Unpleasantness is a determinable and phenomenal property of mental states. There are certain ways of being unpleasant, such as a pain. Pain is a determinate of unpleasantness. Moreover, pain is also a determinable; there are ways of being a pain. A specific way of being a pain, e.g., a very precise headache is a super-determinate of the pain determinable.

The key is to understand that different determinates of the same determinable are not unified by dint of sharing a distinctive single ingredient *plus something else*. In this way, different unpleasant experiences are not unified by sharing the same single ingredient of unpleasantness plus something else. Instead, being an unpleasant experience is a determinable with determinates such as being the feeling of nausea, of itch, of pain, etc. These determinates are particular ways of being unpleasant and they vary from each other non-additively. We can give an answer to the heterogeneity problem once we adopt this approach.

A clear way of making sense of this is to make an analogy with being coloured. All ways of being coloured are different, yet they belong to the same kind. How can being red and being blue be different and yet both be ways of being coloured? The answer is that they are both determinates of the same determinable. Being red and being blue are different non-additively. They do not share a distinctive coloured-ness plus something else. The same can be said about the difference between being magenta and being scarlet; they do not share some unitary redness plus something else, they are different ways of being red non-additively.

Let's now consider different ways of being an unpleasant experience. This means that being an unpleasant experience is a determinable with various determinates such as being an itch, being a pain, being a cramp, etc. Being an itch and being a pain do not share a common ingredient of unpleasantness plus something else that makes them different. They are different ways of being unpleasant non-additively. In the same way that there is no unitary coloured-ness shared between being red and being blue, there is no unitary shared unpleasantness between being an itch and being a pain, as the distinctive feeling theory understood unpleasantness.

According to the heterogeneity problem there is no single unitary phenomenal ingredient common to all and only unpleasant experiences and by dint of which these experiences are unpleasant. This is compatible with the claim that being an unpleasant experience is a determinable property. All it means to have an unpleasant experience is to have a mental state with a super-determinate property of being an unpleasant experience in a very particular way. These different super-determinate properties entail being unpleasant without unpleasantness being a unitary phenomenal ingredient common to all of them.

If we understand being an unpleasant experience as a determinable, the heterogeneity problem fades away. We can maintain that being unpleasant is a phenomenal property, and also accept that it is not a common unitary ingredient common to all and only unpleasant experiences.

#### *4. 2. 3. Pains that are not unpleasant*

There is a critical problem for the determinable theory. This way of understanding pain in relation to unpleasantness entails that pain is necessarily unpleasant. Determinate properties entail their determinables. However, it does not seem to be necessary that pain is unpleasant.

If being red is a determinate of being coloured, being red *necessarily entails* being coloured. If being a pain is a determinate of being unpleasant, then being a pain entails, *necessarily*, being unpleasant. More precisely, a super-determinate of pain implies that such experience must be necessarily a pain and thus unpleasant. This means that being a

particular pain without being unpleasant is *impossible*, as it is impossible to be Ferrari red, without being both red and coloured. However, there are cases that suggest that people might experience pains that are not unpleasant: pain asymbolia is often taken to be the more convincing example of this.

The question whether pain is necessarily unpleasant has been around the philosophical discussion for a while (Pitcher, 1970). More recently, philosophers consider that it is not only possible, but that there are actual examples of pain experiences that are not unpleasant. Pain asymbolia is a neurological condition that has drawn a lot of attention in the philosophical discussion about pain (Bain, 2013; Corns, 2014; Grahek, 2007; Gray, 2014; Klein, 2015a; de Vignemont, 2015). Asymbolics do not react in the usual way to harmful stimuli that would normally cause pain, yet they claim that they feel pain. This condition, some philosophers think, provides strong evidence of the existence of pains that are not unpleasant.

In other words, there might be mental states that instantiate the phenomenal property of being a pain, people identify the experiences as feeling like a pain, without instantiating any property of unpleasantness, without identifying that same pain experience as being hedonic. Most philosophers nowadays consider unpleasantness to be a distinct property from the one that constitutes a sensory pain. This allows them, in particular, to tell a coherent story about what is happening in the case of asymbolics.<sup>14</sup>

The discussion about pain asymbolia shows that even if there were no actual cases of pains that are not unpleasant, it is *possible* that there might be. It seems at least conceivable that pain experiences could exist without being unpleasant. The determinable theory fails to

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<sup>14</sup> One of the interesting consequences of disentangling the property of being a pain from being hedonic is that there could be, in principle, *purely pleasant* pains. However, there is no evidence that I am aware of suggesting that this actually happens. The possibility of experiences that could be simultaneously unpleasant and pleasant has been suggested (Klein, 2014). The closest case that I have encountered of a pain that is solely pleasant is mentioned by Moscoso, while considering cases of masochism (2011: 222-31). The case is about the ascetic Margaret Mary Alacoque, a 17th century nun and mystic, who constantly and systematically sought out pain, and other typically unpleasant experiences, and she said that only pain made her life bearable (Bougaud, 1875: 145). However, there is no conclusive evidence of the factuality of such possibility.

account for the pain asymbolia cases, if these do exemplify pains that are not unpleasant, and for the possibility of non-unpleasant pains, which we should be able to capture since the property of being a pain and being unpleasant do not seem to be necessarily linked. Even if the present theory does deal with the heterogeneity problem, taking into account pain asymbolia forces us to reject the proposal.

## **5. The structure of unpleasantness**

I propose to adapt Crisp's intuition, while taking unpleasantness as distinct from other sensory properties. By doing this, we obtain several benefits: 1) this view maintains the strong intuition that unpleasantness is something felt, something phenomenal; 2) it can account for the possibility of non-unpleasant pains; 3) it can account for the *Ploner case*, i.e., an example for which it is claimed that an unpleasant experience lacks only its pain phenomenal aspect; 4) it can easily explain how two sensory experiences can vary only hedonically, i.e., one is pleasant and the other unpleasant; 5) this theory is able to account for the heterogeneity of unpleasant experiences, and 6) it provides a blueprint for the constitutive theories in order to account for the heterogeneity of unpleasantness.

According to the current theory we should apply the determinable-determinate distinction solely to the unpleasantness of an unpleasant experience. There are different ways of being unpleasant, various *unpleasantnesses*, and each of this is a different way of being hedonic. Here is what an unpleasant experience is according to this approach.

### **The unpleasantnesses theory**

An unpleasant sensory experience is constituted of two phenomenal properties: 1) the phenomenal property of being a sensory experience and 2) a phenomenal super-determinate property (u1, u2, u3, etc.) of the unpleasantness determinable.

In this way, we can easily account for the *possibility* of asymbolics having pain experiences that are not hedonic at all. They would have a mental state with the phenomenal property of being a pain, but without the phenomenal property of being unpleasant. Another advantage

of dissociating the property of being a pain from the property of being unpleasant is that we can account for cases where, presumably, someone has an experience that is unpleasant, without being a pain or a phenomenal experience in any other way. Some think that we could have phenomenal experiences that are just unpleasant, and that there is an actual example of this.

Some researchers claim that their ‘results demonstrate, for the first time in humans, a loss of pain sensation with preserved pain affect.’ (Ploner, Freund, & Schnitzler, 1999: 211) This is based on a single case of a man who, after a stroke, lost to a good extent the capacity to have sensory experiences, such as the ones produced by thermal stimuli. According to this study, ‘[i]n the patient reported here, clinical examination and cutaneous laser stimulation revealed . . . *loss of sensory discriminative pain component and preserved motivational-affective dimension of pain.*’ (Ploner, Freund, & Schnitzler, 1999: 213) If this case is real, or even possible, this approach to unpleasantness allows us to make sense of it. A mental state could instantiate the property of being unpleasant, without the property of being a pain.<sup>15</sup>

The unpleasantnesses theory has another advantage: we can easily explain how different sensory experiences may vary *only hedonically*. We can explain how the same type of sensory experience can sometimes be pleasant and at other times unpleasant. Take, for instance, the gustatory experience of tasting chocolate; this experience is one of tasting chocolate in virtue of a phenomenal property chocolate-taste-feeling-ness, say.<sup>16</sup> We can have chocolate-taste-feeling experiences that are sometimes pleasant, and at other times unpleasant. How? These two experiences, the one that is pleasant and the one that is unpleasant, seem to be ways of being chocolate-taste-feeling experiences. However, it does not seem that we can account for these experiences being different by appealing to the

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<sup>15</sup> Another example of a purely unpleasant state could be depression, where it seems that there is no particular intentional object to which the experience is directed at, it is an experience of pure unpleasantness (Barlassina & Hayward, forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> I call the phenomenal property of having an experience of eating something that tastes like chocolate chocolate-taste-feeling-ness, as opposed to the property chocolate-taste-ness. Whereas the former is a property of mental states, the latter is a property of things that taste like chocolate, such as a cake.

determinable-determinate distinction. The pleasant chocolate-taste-feeling experience and the unpleasant chocolate-taste-feeling experience vary *additively*. These experiences are chocolate-taste-feeling *plus* something else, i.e., they are either pleasant or unpleasant.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, we should explain how to deal with the heterogeneity of unpleasant experiences. According to the present account, unpleasantness is phenomenal, but there is no unitary feeling of unpleasantness because different unpleasantnesses vary non-additively. The current proposal is in line with the intuitions behind the heterogeneity problem. All unpleasant experiences qualify as such in virtue of instantiating unpleasantness as a phenomenal determinable property. All unpleasant experiences have negative affect in a certain way, u1, u2, u3, etc. and each of these particular ways of being hedonic, each of these unpleasantnesses, varies from the others non-additively, without unpleasantness itself, understood as a unitary determinate feeling, being a common ingredient to them all.<sup>18</sup>

## 6. The dimensions of unpleasantness

There is, however, an important aspect about this proposal that needs to be developed. Namely, which are those dimensions of variation that would account for the multiplicity of unpleasantnesses?

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<sup>17</sup> I leave open whether pleasantness and unpleasantness are determinates of a common determinable. This will depend on these properties varying non-additively or not, i.e., if pleasantness and unpleasantness share the same essential dimensions of variation.

<sup>18</sup> One could argue that there are also different ways of being a pain, and that being a pain is also a determinable property. That is, that there are different ways of being a pain experience that are determinates of a common determinable. If this were correct, it would imply that there are different determinates of being a pain, pa1, pa2, pa3, etc. These would be phenomenal properties and would vary from one another non-additively. This could be a way to deal with heterogeneity concerning pain phenomenology. Given the rich phenomenology of pain, I am inclined to think that, if it is a determinable property, it is multidimensional: pain does not vary solely within a single scale. However, I do not think that we need to get into the details of this, since the heterogeneity problem, as we have understood it for the purpose of this paper, focuses only on the hedonic dimension of experience.

I am not the first to allow for the possibility that there might be various ways of being unpleasant. Labukt (2012), for example, argues in favour of a pluralistic version of hedonic tone in order to deal with the heterogeneity of experience. But he insists that we should have ‘some fairly well-founded ideas about what the different hedonic tones are’ before accepting such view (Labukt, 2012: 199).

I think that even if we do not have quite yet an extensive list of the different forms of being unpleasant, we have a good way to account for the metaphysics of it. We can understand unpleasantness as a phenomenal determinable. However, the theory may appear as lacking a positive proposal for the *concrete* dimensions of unpleasantness. The proposal might look too speculative.

That said, even if we do not know *exactly* which are the dimensions along which unpleasantnesses may vary, we can accept that unpleasantness’ dimensions exist. We can accept that different unpleasant experiences do feel different *qua* their hedonic dimension, just as we can agree that there is a the variation of different visual experiences, even if we know nothing about their precise dimensions of variations. We can accept that there are different ways of being unpleasant, without yet knowing which are the precise dimensions along which unpleasantnesses might vary. As Funkhouser puts it:

[T]he concept of a determination dimension is quite general and it applies to various kinds — kinds with essences that are *phenomenological*, functional, *qualitative*, etc. *We can certainly disagree over the determination dimension of a particular kind, but so long as this disagreement is reasonable, the very existence of such disagreement helps confirm that we share an intuitive understanding of the concept of determination dimension and the task of discovering them . . .* Scientific kinds are of particular interest to the metaphysicians and I assume that the determination dimensions for such kinds typically are to be discovered by *a posteriori* investigation. (Funkhouser, 2014: 30, my emphasis)

If Funkhouser is right, it is probably an empirical affair to discover which are the precise felt dimensions of unpleasantness as a kind, as a determinable, in the same way that it is

rather an empirical affair to discover the dimensions along which being an experience of colour may vary, or the multi-dimensions among diverse olfactory experiences (Young, Keller, & Rosenthal, 2014). However, it is a philosophical task to point out that the determinable-determinate distinction helps us to understand the structure of unpleasantness in order to address its heterogeneity.

That said, I do think that we can provide some *a priori* progress regarding this issue. We can make sense of the structure of the unpleasantness determinable according to the diverse constitutive theories of unpleasantness. The full development of how to best account for unpleasantness as a determinable would need an entire paper. However, I provide in the next and last section a general idea of how this could be done. This shows the advantage of understanding the structure of unpleasantness as a determinable and how this can be incorporated by the different constitutive accounts of unpleasantness in order to deal with hedonic heterogeneity. There are two main ways in which this might be done: 1) by thinking that unpleasantness is unidimensional, and 2) by considering, as I do, that it is multidimensional.

### *6. 1. Unpleasantness as unidimensional*

Suppose you are not convinced about the critique to the intensity theory, you see no reason to accept that hedonic tone varies in ways that are not captured in changes of intensity within a single phenomenal dimension. Even if this is the case, understanding unpleasantness as a determinable is useful. Determinates of a common determinable may vary along one single scale; for example: *mass* is a determinable that takes different determinate values in *grams* (or other mass unit) and *temperature* is a determinable which takes different values in *degrees* (or other temperature unit). Different mass or temperature values are different instances that belong to the same group that vary non-additively, they do not differ from one another by sharing a common property plus something else. Instead, they take different values along *the same* constitutive dimension. Determinables can be unidimensional. We can derive then a unidimensional understanding of unpleasantness.

## Unidimensional unpleasantness

Unpleasantness is a determinable property that has only one dimension of determination.

The unidimensional understanding might be adapted for theorists who take unpleasantness to be phenomenal or not. Let's start with the ones who do take unpleasantness to be something felt. The different content theories could adapt what they take unpleasantness to be into changes in degree along a unitary type of content.

For evaluative theorists, such as Bain (2012), the unpleasantness of a pain consists, roughly, in representing a sensory pain with evaluative content, that is, *as being bad* for oneself. Whatever makes a pain worse, or less bad for oneself, would account for the different values on the same scale of badness. If we followed an imperativist account of unpleasantness, where negative affect consists in some form of imperative content, the intensity of the command would account for the value on the scale that such unpleasantness would have. In fact, Martínez and Klein (forthcoming) have proposed a model that would explain the intensity of unpleasantness based on a scale. They think that the priority that we assign to different mental states with imperative content accounts for how unpleasant these are. The type of ranking that they argue for would nicely adapt to the unidimensional account of unpleasantness.

Understanding unpleasantness as a determinable is useful even if we thought that it is not a phenomenal aspect of experience, as externalists do. If we are desire theorists, we could still understand unpleasantness as a determinable to account for its intensity: the more we want an experience not to be occurring, the more unpleasant it is. This will depend on how we account for some desire being stronger than other, which is no simple affair. I will not go into the details of this, since it may involve numerous complications regarding how to precisely account for desire strength. However, I believe this offers a gist of how the determinable structure of unpleasantness can be employed.

That said, I think that we should be able to account for various unpleasantnesses, where these differences are: 1) phenomenal and 2) multidimensional.

## 6. 2. *Unpleasantness as multidimensional*

Unpleasantness is rich in its phenomenology. Other forms of experience, such as visual and olfactory experiences, are, at least, as vast. In the case of these sensory experiences, we think that they are multidimensional; it is, I think, quite natural to conclude that unpleasantness must be too.

Content theorists seem to take unpleasantness as unidimensional. However, I think they will not find it so hard to accept that phenomenal variations of unpleasantness are multidimensional. This will be easier to accept if we provide a clear way of accounting for such phenomenal diversity within hedonic tone.

### **Multidimensional unpleasantness**

Unpleasantness is a determinable property with more than one dimension of determination.

Let's start with *evaluative content theories*. Consider an unpleasant pain. Is there only one way in which one may represent something as being bad for oneself? I think not. One of the important worries about evaluativism is that this account does not explain *precisely* what it means for one to represent a bodily state or disturbance as being bad. It is probably about time to start filling in this gap and, in doing so, noticing that a bodily state may be represented as being bad in a myriad of ways. I can think of at least two relevant ways in which a bodily disturbance might be represented as being bad: 1) insofar this disturbance is highly associated with tissue damage, which is bad for our body, and 2) in the sense that it is attention grabbing, and does not allow us to perform other activities.

Allowing that there is more than one way in which a bodily state may be represented as being bad would account for unpleasantness as multidimensional. How bad a given unpleasant feeling is regarding those dimensions, would allow us to rank different unpleasantness, compare them, classify them, and create a space model of negative affect.

Now consider *imperative content theories*. There are, roughly, three different proposals about what kind of imperative content constitutes unpleasantness:

1) A *world-directed* content, where unpleasantness is constituted by an imperative mental state  $I_1$  about a state of the world  $p$ , where  $I_1$  has the form “See to it that  $p$  does not exist.” (Martínez, 2015)

2) A *mind-directed* imperative content  $I_2$ , about another imperative mental state  $Im$ , where these are co-occurrent yet distinct mental states, and  $I_2$  has the form ‘Less of  $Im!$ ’ (Klein, 2015b).

3) A *self-directed* imperative content  $I_3$ , where unpleasantness is constituted by a reflexive imperative, where this  $I_3$  imperative has the form ‘Less of me!’ (Barlassina & Hayward, forthcoming).

The subtler differences and advantages of these versions of imperativism are not worth considering at this point. However, what is relevant pointing out is that these different versions could be allies rather than competitors.

That is to say, if imperativists accepted that the phenomenology of unpleasantness is diverse enough so that we cannot account for it only by refereeing to one type of phenomenal dimension, we could explain that these different imperative contents could precisely account for the diverse ways in which unpleasantness feels. Similar to what I said about evaluative content theories, the unpleasantness of pains seems to mix at least two dimensions: 1) one regarding our body parts, and 2) one about the experience itself.

Unpleasantness feels complex because, following this approach, it is commanding us to do more than one thing. Not only does it order us to do something about the world and our bodies, it is also telling us to do something about itself. It does not seem to me that this over complicates the approach. Instead of thinking that these contents are describing *the* right way of accounting for unpleasantness, we could see that they were describing *a* aspect of it. A rich affective phenomenology commands us to provide a richer type of content.

## Conclusion

It is not obvious how to narrow down what unpleasantness is from a phenomenological point of view. Nor is it very clear how to disentangle it from other phenomenological aspects of an experience or how to analyse unpleasantness itself, as a separate phenomenal aspect. However, I think we have compelling reasons to believe that unpleasantness is felt and that it varies widely.

Introducing the determinable-determinate distinction helps us to account for the phenomenal variations of such feeling. Moreover, if we take unpleasantness to vary hedonically in ways that cannot be accounted in terms of variations of intensity of one single phenomenal dimension, the determinable-determinate distinction becomes particularly handy since, according to this view, important qualitative differences can be explained by referring to multidimensional variations of a single determinable.

I conclude that all and only unpleasant experiences are unpleasant in virtue of instantiating unpleasantness, a determinable phenomenal property that has multiple essential dimensions. Now that we know which is the structure of unpleasantness, how it is built, we can start testing what material adapts better to its configuration.

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