

Speciesism and Painism: Some Further Thoughts

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Speciesism

I invented the word *Speciesism* in 1970 and since then it has been written about by many thinkers including Peter Singer and Richard Dawkins.

The period 1970 to 2010 was a period of unprecedented reform for nonhuman animals. In Britain twelve new animal protection laws were passed, while in the EU no less than forty-two new pieces of animal welfare legislation became law.

Speciesism is mostly about human arrogance and discrimination against other animals merely because they are of another species. It is an irrational prejudice like racism and sexism, and is based upon morally irrelevant differences such as size, complexity, dissimilar appearance to humans (e.g. octopuses and lobsters), or apparent lack of rationality or intelligence. But it is painience that matters, not rationality or intelligence.

Seventy years ago humans and animals were regarded as being entirely different. Christianity insisted that humans (allegedly created in the image of God) were in a separate category. Animals were said to lack 'souls' and 'rationality.' So what? Perhaps Aristotle and Aquinas really meant 'consciousness.'

Early animal rights campaigners were often anti-slavers. They included Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and William Wilberforce.

In 1789 Bentham said of animals—"The question is not can they reason? Nor can they talk? But can they *suffer*?"

Anti-speciesism follows the hitherto ignored moral implications of Darwinism.

Animals and children, being unable to defend themselves verbally, have similar moral standing. Both groups need special protection.

Our important moral similarity with the other species is our common capacity to experience pain. There is growing scientific evidence that many nonhuman species can suffer. For me, pain (broadly defined) is at the centre of Ethics.

Painism

Painism (1990) is a moral theory that covers all painient beings, human and others.

In my theory of *Painism*, pain is very broadly defined to include all negative experiences:

e.g.

Why is lack of liberty wrong?	Because it causes pain.
Why is denial of equality wrong?	Because it causes pain.
Why is injustice wrong?	Because it causes pain.

“Pain” means all forms of suffering and so includes all negative psychological states:

e.g.

Why is fear wrong?	Because it causes pain.
Why is depression wrong?	Because it causes pain.
Why is boredom wrong?	Because it causes pain.
(e.g. animals kept in farm, laboratory and other cages)	
Why is unsatisfied drive wrong?	Because it causes pain.
Why is guilt wrong?	Because it causes pain.
Why is disgust wrong?	Because it causes pain.

- *The only moral wrong is causing (or permitting) pain to others. Who do we mean by “others”? We mean anything external to ourselves that can experience pain, whether it is a human or nonhuman animal, a robot, a machine, or an alien from outer space (provided they are all sentient, or to be precise, *painient*).*
- We are mainly concerned about *quantities* of pain (intensity x duration) and not the vehicles or qualities of pain. There are no *morally lesser types* of pain or pleasure as Mill suggested.

So X amount of pain in a dog or a robot matters equally with X amount of pain in a human.

- As regards the classic conflict between Consequentialists such as Bentham on one side, and Deontologists such as Kant on the other, Painism supports Bentham’s belief that *what matters is the end result in terms of pains and pleasures*, but it also agrees with the Kantian view that *each individual matters*. As pain seems to be more powerful than pleasure, Painism proposes that our main *duty* is to prevent, stop or reduce the pain of others, starting with the Maximum Sufferers. A lesser duty is to give pleasure to others and make them happy (e.g. by giving them comfort, care, or mutually enjoyable sex).

- The word “pain” covers all negative experiences. Arguably, however, the word “sentient” covers only the senses (omitting thoughts and even emotions for example.) The word *painient* is more precise. It excludes positive sensations such as warmth but can include all negatives, including negative thoughts. Maybe an alien from outer space could be sentient but not painient. Her reactions to danger or damage could be ‘reflex’ and without feeling.
- Painism says we cannot add up pains (or pleasures) *across* individuals as happens in Utilitarianism because no-one actually experiences such totals. A pain, to be a pain, has to be experienced. Utilitarianism totals the pains and pleasures of all individuals affected. Painism does not allow such totalling (aggregation) *across* individuals.
- The trouble with Utilitarianism is that a group of sadists or rapists can be allowed to torture a victim provided the total of all their pleasures adds up to more than the victim’s pain!
- A masochist consents to pain because he derives a pleasure from doing so that is greater than the pain. If they cause the avoidance of greater future pains, both guilt and fear can have good effects.
- You cannot add up the experiences of loves or fears of a group of people and make a meaningful total, so why do it with experiences of pain? There are barriers that block the passing of consciousness from one individual to another. Normally, no-one else can *directly* experience my consciousness (although the artificial connection of one brain to another might one day enable this). My empathy with what you are feeling is not identical with your suffering.
- So the *quantity of sufferers* in a disaster does not matter, morally speaking. The wrongness of an event should be measured by the amount of pain experienced by *the Maximum Sufferer*. One individual suffering agony matters more than a million suffering slightly. So in “Trolley Situations” (familiar to all philosophers) killing fewer victims is not necessarily morally better than killing many victims. It is the amount of pain felt by each individual (particularly the Maximum Sufferer) that matters.

Painism focuses upon all sentient *individuals*.

It focuses upon *pain* (broadly defined).

It focuses upon *victims* (not upon doers or “agents”).

Painism is '*consequentialist*.'

Pain avoidance is the immediate objective.

But happiness remains the ultimate objective.

Pain is the great destroyer of happiness.

Pleasures can help to produce happiness.

Painism says it is correct to add up contemporaneous pains and pleasures *within* individuals but not *across* them. But it is difficult to play off pains against pleasures because pains are nearly always *more powerful* than pleasures. For example, most would forego several hours of ecstasy in order to avoid an hour of expert torture. Furthermore, pains are not exact negatives of pleasures. There are also some differences between a pleasure and a reduction of pain.

If pain was to be considered the exact negative of pleasure then a cost-benefit analysis would be theoretically possible between one individual on each side of the equation, e.g. the pain of the Maximum Sufferer versus the pleasure of the Maximum Beneficiary.

Pain

- Pains and pleasures colour all our experiences and affect most of our behaviour.
- Pains, and their avoidance, dominate our lives.
- Pain is sometimes defined as “unpleasant sensory or emotional experience.”
- But in Painism I define pain more widely to also include perceptual, cognitive and mood states—i.e. perceptions, thoughts, and moods. They can all be negative, causing suffering.
- So there are at least five types of pain or suffering that are relevant to Painism:

(i) negative sensations (e.g. 'physical' or nociceptive and neuropathic pains)

(ii) negative feelings or emotions (e.g. grief, fear, disgust, horror, frustration or boredom)

(iii) negative perceptions (e.g. of ugliness, distortion, mutilation, negative hallucinations and other unpleasant interpretations of sound, vision, touch or smell)

(iv) negative thoughts of (e.g. shame, rejection, danger, loss, guilt and awareness of failure, unfairness, criticism, insult or death)

(v) negative moods (e.g. depression caused, for example, by loss, frustration, or prolonged stress etc.)

All these experiences are unpleasant.

- In scientific psychology 'pain' is similar to concepts such as 'negative reward,' 'negative reinforcement,' 'punishment,' and 'aversive stimulus'.
- Pains of all five types can be severe, moderate, or mild, and brief (acute) or long lasting (chronic).
- Pain is always a *negative* experience and this unpleasant quality is often associated with electrical and chemical activities in brain networks such as the *anterior cingulate cortex*.

Ten Questions

1) Is Painism only concerned with Maximum Sufferers?

No. Painism may give priority to Maximum Sufferers but it is concerned with *all* sufferers.

2) Are Trade-Offs (e.g. cost-benefit analyses) allowed in Painism?

Yes, but trade-offs can only be between *individuals*. The trade-off of big pains for smaller ones is possible. So is the trade-off of small pleasures for larger ones. But the trade-off of pains against pleasures is less certain.

Causing severe pain that is unconsented-to is never justified, nor does one individual's pleasure ever justify another's pain. (I regard these rules as arbitrary but axiomatic.) But causing slight and brief pain in one individual in order to avoid or reduce severe pain in another may well be justified. The brevity of the pain here seems to be important.

3) Does intensity of pain matter more than its duration?

Painism sees the *amount* of pain as approximately the product of intensity and duration of recent pain.

Amount of pain = Intensity of pain x Duration of pain

4) Does the sequence of pains and pleasures matter?

Yes, later pains (or future pains) count for more than earlier pains. (All's well that ends well and all's wrong that ends badly.)

5) Is severe pain considered worse than death?

Yes, possibly, if death is painless.

Death, even if it is painless and ends in oblivion, still matters because of the pain it causes to relatives and friends.

6) Can the intensity of pain be measured?

Yes. The British government's Home Office has been scientifically estimating the intensity of pain in animal experiments for some thirty years. This work comes under the administration of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, and is based upon my CRAE recommendations made in 1976. Similar procedures and principles (such as the principle that the severity of a sufferer's pain matters more than the quantity of sufferers) should also be applied to human welfare legislation.

7) Should severe pain be treated separately?

No, but severe pain is a very different experience from slight pain (e.g. a brief irritation, a moment's inconvenience, or a passing twinge).

8) Is human nature intrinsically good or bad, compassionate or cruel?

Human nature is both compassionate *and* cruel. Painism encourages natural compassion and inhibits natural callousness.

9) Does the lack of Free Will invalidate Painism?

No more than it may invalidate other moral systems. Free Will may be like Quantum Mechanics rather than Newtonian Physics. Quantum Physics includes an element of unpredictability or freedom. I believe the brain is a complex machine and the consciousness of our decisions only occurs *after* our brain has taken the decisions. But who understands Time? Who understands Consciousness?

10) If the brain operates according to Quantum laws does this answer the problem of Determinacy and Moral Responsibility?

To an extent. Subatomic particles *appear* to have Free Will. Why do they go one way rather than another? How can they influence each other at a distance? Particles 'wait' to be observed before they 'act.' Is such "observation" the same thing as *consciousness*? *Our experience of our apparent Free Will may be our direct experience of the operation of Quantum Physics itself.*

Triage

So how should a painist nurse or doctor behave at the scene of a large accident where there are many casualties?

They should apply the rules of Painist Triage:

(i) give immediate analgesic and other help to:

(a) those in agony (especially those who are going to die), and

(b) those whose lives are at immediate risk

(ii) then treat all the others to reduce their pain and make them well.

Action (i)(a) means reducing the pain of Maximum Sufferers. As soon as this is Done, the Painist nurse or doctor should move on and treat the new Maximum Sufferers, and so on. So amongst those in pain they should always treat the Maximum Sufferers first. Painism here puts the relief of agony at approximately the same level of priority as saving life. In order to avoid later suffering, painists also help those who are not yet in pain.

CONCLUSIONS

- Painism not only brings together the best of Utilitarianism with the best of other Ethical theories, it also joins philosophy with psychology by bringing together their previously separated languages. It overcomes some of the problems of modern Ethics. It has been hailed as the “best candidate” moral theory. (Joy 2019)
- Pain is a very strong foundation on which to build a moral theory.
- We all know about the reality of pain. It is a basic part of all our lives. It is not like trying to build an ethical theory upon what an unknown God is supposed to want us to do.
- Anything that causes pain (e.g. racism, sexism, or speciesism), however ‘natural’ it is, is prima facie morally wrong.
- Painism is consequentialist. It focuses not upon the character of the doer but upon the experience of the victim.
- A country’s government has the duty to care for all painients within its borders, not only humans. Painience itself gives rights and moral standing. All painients qualify as persons and citizens, and should be called “she,” “he,” or “they,” as appropriate.
- Painism gives emphasis to each painient individual.

- The science upon which Painism is based, in particular the evidence that nonhumans can experience pain, exposes the irrationality of Speciesism.
- As already said, Painism is concerned with the amount of pain (suffering) experienced by each sentient individual regardless as to what that individual looks like (robot, alien, or animal). So X amount of pain in a sentient robot matters the same as X amount of pain, in, say, an armadillo or a human.
- When assessing a moral situation, simply look for the individual pains arising.
- Painism uses modern and secular language but is close to the moralities of Jainism, Buddhism, and some other faiths, and to the concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). It is also close to Christianity's emphasis upon love for our neighbours, where Painism would define 'neighbours' or 'others' to include all sentient (painient) things.
- Perhaps the great difference between beings is not whether they are alive or not, but whether or not they are painient. Increasingly, we should all feel part of the community of consciousness and respect it.

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Glossary of Useful Words

Pain	=	any form of suffering or negative experience.
Painient	=	able to feel any form of suffering or negative experience
Sentient	=	able to feel sensations, including positive ones
Consciousness	=	general awareness

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Biographical Note / Nota biograficzna

Dr Richard Ryder gained his MA (Experimental Psychology) and PhD at Cambridge University and was Mellon Professor at the Department of Philosophy at Tulane University. He invented the terms *Speciesism* in 1970 while working in Oxford, and *Painism* in 1990. He is currently President of the Animal Interfaith Alliance (AIA) and President of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA.)

Dr Richard Ryder uzyskał tytuł magistra psychologii eksperymentalnej i stopień doktora na Uniwersytecie w Cambridge i był profesorem filozofii w Tulane University. Zaproponował termin *speciesism* w 1970 roku pracując w Oxfordzie a termin *painism* w 1990r. Jest przewodniczącym Animal Interfaith Alliance (AIA) i przewodniczącym Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).