

## **Nagelian Arguments Against Egoism**

Ethical egoism is a wicked doctrine that is wickedly hard to refute. On ethical egoism, the fact that I would suffer is no reason by itself for you not to torture me. This may seem implausible—monstrous, even—but what evidence can we offer against it? Here I examine several arguments which receive some expression in Thomas Nagel's work.<sup>i</sup> Each tries to show that a normative reason to end my pain is a reason for all agents. The arguments in Section 1 emphasize reasons that don't entail agents and thus purportedly apply to all agents. In Section 2, I examine the Argument from Dissociation, according to which my pain seems bad upon reflection, even without reflecting on its relation to me. Section 3 examines the Argument from Inability, which claims that my occurrent pains would seem bad to me, even if I couldn't think about their relation to me. Finally, I discuss the Argument from Introspection, according to which I seem, introspectively, to have a reason to end my pain, a reason that has nothing to do with the pain's being mine. Egoism, as Sidgwick thought, is resilient;<sup>ii</sup> all but one of these arguments fail utterly. However, the Argument from Introspection provides some grounds for rejecting egoism.

### **1. Arguments Using Reasons That Don't Entail Agents**

#### **Background**

Some facts entail the existence of agents—that is, they entail that at least one agent exists. *During WWII, Jimmy Stewart flew missions over Germany while Ernest Hemingway*

*got drunk in Paris* is one such fact. Other facts are consistent with there being no agents, for example, *the earth is more than 6,000 years old*.

Practical reasons are facts that count for or against performing actions.<sup>iii</sup> *Quisling betrayed King Haakon VII*, for example, is a fact and a reason for Haakon to punish Quisling. *It's sleeting* is a fact and a reason for me to stay indoors. Like facts in general, reasons might or might not entail the existence of agents. *Quisling betrayed King Haakon VII* entails that agents exist; *it's sleeting* does not.

When I say that a reason entails no agents—when I say, in other words, that a reason is consistent with there being no agents—I mean that the fact which is the reason entails no agents. For example, when I say that the reason, *it's sleeting*, entails no agents, I mean that *it's sleeting* entails no agents—an uncontroversial claim. I don't mean *it's sleeting*, conjoined with its being a reason, entails no agents. That claim is controversial, since something's being a reason arguably entails that some agent exists for whom it is or could be a reason.

Reasons that entail agents might seem to bear on just those agents—or on just some of them. *Quisling betrayed King Haakon VII*, for example, might seem to give only Haakon a reason to punish Quisling—after all, Haakon was the one betrayed. (If all Norwegians had a reason to punish Quisling, that reason might be, *Quisling betrayed Norway's people*.) Or suppose that *smearing sunblock on my bald head would prevent me from peeling and itching*. That might be a reason for only me to put on the sunblock—after all, it is *my* head that would peel and itch. (Please know that I am not endorsing these intuitions; I am just laying the groundwork for some arguments against egoism, which ultimately I'll reject.)

In a similar vein, reasons that entail no agents might seem to bear on everyone. For example, *being kind is virtuous* should be a reason for anyone to pet my cat, provided it's a reason for someone—after all, there seems to be no reason for it to apply to some agents but not to others.<sup>iv</sup> To take another example, if *that would be littering* is a reason not to throw Duff beer bottles into Onondaga Lake, then presumably that reason applies to everyone—since it entails no one's existence, there seems to be no reason for it to be restricted to certain agents.

When I say that a reason 'bears on everyone' ('applies to everyone' / 'is unrestricted'), I mean that it bears on everyone who can act on it, and that it *would* bear on anyone who *could* act on it. Thus, when I ask whether a reason to end my pain bears just on me, or on everyone, I am asking whether it would bear on just me, or on everyone, if everyone could act on it. Also note that a single fact may be a reason for different agents to do different things. *Being kind is virtuous*, for example, may be a reason for me to pet my cat and for you to feed your dog. But when I ask whether a reason applies to everyone, I am asking whether the reason is a reason for everyone to perform the same act (that is, acts aimed at the same outcome). For example, when I ask whether *my pain is awful* applies to everyone, I am asking whether it is a reason for everyone to end my pain.

*Do reasons that entail no agents bear on everyone?* B. C. Postow cogently argues that some reasons that entail no agents *might* be restricted to certain agents; that idea, she thinks, is coherent.<sup>v</sup> However, even if it is, there might still be a presumption for thinking that non-agent-entailing reasons are unrestricted. I'll grant that presumption, for the sake of developing a set of arguments against egoism. As we shall see, those arguments fail, even given that assumption.

**Developing the form of the argument**

The last paragraph suggests the following principle: if a reason R entails no agents, then, probably, R applies to every agent. This principle can be used to formulate arguments against egoism. However, it needs to be revised. To explain why, I need to distinguish between complete and incomplete reasons.

A complete reason states conditions sufficient for the existence of a reason (a reason which may, of course, be overridden by other reasons). Often, however, in stating a reason, we merely state a salient part of a complete reason, leaving some details in the background. For example, if you ask me why you should go to college, I might say, ‘Knowledge is good.’<sup>vi</sup> I’ve stated a reason for you to go to college, but it’s incomplete, since I haven’t articulated any connection between knowledge and college. A complete reason for you to go might be: *going to college would make you more knowledgeable, and being knowledgeable is good.*

Is the above really a complete reason for you to go to college? One might think not, since it doesn’t entail that *you can go to college*—a fact which is arguably required for your having a reason to do so. However, I’ll stipulate, as part of what I mean by ‘complete reason,’ that a complete reason for P to do A may leave in the background that P can do A. *Taking aspirin would ease my pain*, for example, is a complete reason for me to take aspirin; it need not be, *taking aspirin would ease my pain, and I can take aspirin*. This stipulation will make the upcoming arguments less cumbersome without begging any questions.

Again, consider the principle: *if a reason R entails no agents, then, probably, R applies to every agent*. Now we are in a position to see why it needs to be revised. Even if a reason entails no agents, it might seem to be restricted to certain agents, if it's understood as part of a complete reason that does entail agents. Above I said that *it's sleeting* is a reason for me to stay indoors. That reason entails no agents. But suppose it is a reason for me to stay indoors only because I don't like getting hit by sleet. Although *it's sleeting* entails no agents, we now suppose it to stand proxy for a complete reason that does entail agents: *if I went outside, I would get hit by sleet, and I wouldn't like that*. Hence, *it's sleeting* might seem to be restricted to me, if understood to stand for *that* complete reason.<sup>vii</sup>

Therefore, let's reformulate the above principle as follows: *if a reason R entails no agents, nor is R understood as part of a complete reason that does, then, probably, R applies to every agent*. That principle is plausible. And so, to combat egoism, one might offer an argument of the following form:

- (1) X is a reason to end my pain that entails no agents (nor is X understood as part of a complete reason that does).
- (C) Therefore, probably, X is a reason for every agent to end my pain.

Here and throughout, I use 'pain' to refer to painful experiences.

This argument can be sharpened. As it stands, egoists needn't deny (C) on every substitution for 'X.' After all, egoists may believe that other agents do have reasons to end my pain—reasons that appeal to something other than the fact that my pain would end. What egoists deny is that other agents have *noninstrumental* reasons to end my pain. A

noninstrumental reason to do something is a reason that just concerns doing that thing. Thus, egoists deny that other agents have any reasons to end my pain that just concern ending my pain. Let's reformulate the argument accordingly:

(1) X is a noninstrumental reason to end my pain that entails no agents (nor is X understood as part of a complete reason that does).

(C) Therefore, probably, X is a noninstrumental reason for every agent to end my pain (and so, probably, egoism is false).

Ultimately, I'll reject all instances of this argument.

### **Instances of the argument**

What should we substitute for X? Nagel says,

There's a reason for me to be given morphine which is independent of the fact that the pain is mine—namely that it's awful.<sup>viii</sup>

Here Nagel emphasizes that a reason to end my pain—'it's awful'—is somehow independent of the pain's being mine. In doing so, Nagel *might* be offering a freestanding argument against egoism. Alternatively, he might merely be stating the conclusion of some argument he gave earlier (though I'm not sure which argument that would be). Let's suppose that Nagel is offering a freestanding argument. Really Nagel should be

emphasizing that *it's awful* is somehow independent of the pain's being anyone's; for even if the reason were independent of the pain's being mine, if it depended on the pain's being someone's, there would be no *prima facie* problem for egoism—after all, in that case, *it's awful* might be a reason only for that someone whose pain it was. To state the best version of this freestanding argument, let's replace 'X' with *the pain is awful*. In doing so, we plausibly interpret independence in terms of non-entailment; *the reason's being independent of the pain's being anyone's* is interpreted in terms of *the reason's not entailing the existence of any agents*. Here is the argument.

(1a) *The pain is awful* is a noninstrumental reason to end my pain that entails no agents (nor is it understood as part of a complete reason that does).

(C) Therefore, probably, *the pain is awful* is a noninstrumental reason for every agent to end my pain (and so, probably, egoism is false).

Call this the 'First Instance.' Employing the notion of awfulness, as it does, invites the following objection. Awful pains are not distinguished as a group by any common quale—severe cramps, burns, backaches, throbbing pains and stabbing pains, for example, share no felt properties peculiar to awful pains.<sup>ix</sup> For that reason, many philosophers believe that a pain's being awful consists in nothing intrinsic to the pain, but in how the pain relates to its bearer.<sup>x</sup> There are many species of this view. A pain's being awful has been thought to consist in:

(i) The pain's being strongly disliked by its bearer.

- (ii) The pain's strongly inclining its bearer to fight it.
- (iii) The pain's being spontaneously evaluated by its bearer as very harmful.
- (iv) The pain's being noninstrumentally very bad for its bearer.<sup>xi</sup>

These views are naturally understood as making robust modal claims. On (i), for instance, any possible awful pain would be strongly disliked by a bearer.

On any of these views, *the pain is awful* modally entails the existence of a pain-bearer, in the sense that it is metaphysically impossible for an awful pain to lack a bearer. On (i), for example, *the pain is awful* would entail that a bearer exists who strongly dislikes the pain. Now premise (1a) doesn't say that *the pain is awful* entails no bearers; it says that *the pain is awful* entails no agents. Is (1a) therefore safe from this line of attack? Given any of (i)-(iv), (1a) would be false, if the existence of a pain-bearer entails the existence of an agent. But that entailment doesn't hold; arguably, at least, there is no contradiction in supposing that a pain-bearer can be passively miserable, incapable of action (and so not an agent). If so, then the First Instance may seem safe from this line of attack.

However, the attack can be forcefully pursued. First, views (i)-(iii) arguably entail the existence of a bearer who can act; for in (i), the bearer *strongly dislikes* the pain; in (ii), the bearer *is inclined to fight* the pain; and in (iii), the bearer *spontaneously evaluates* the pain. So, on these theories, (1a) is arguably false: arguably, *the pain is awful* would entail the existence of an agent. I say 'arguably' because it is unclear whether being able to evaluate or dislike an experience suffices for agency. But second, and more powerfully, given any of (i)-(iv), the inference from (1a) to (C) is very weak. For even if *the pain is awful* entails no agents, it would entail a pain-bearer; and, in fact, pain-bearers typically are



agents (you and I, for example, are both pain-bearers and agents). In this case, the reason—*the pain is awful*—seems insufficiently independent of agents to warrant the conclusion that it likely applies to all agents. To put the point differently: if *the pain is awful* entails a pain-bearer, then one might plausibly deny that it's a reason for every agent to end my pain—for it might turn out that the pain-bearer entailed by the reason is an agent, to whom the reason might be restricted.

The First Instance is not defenseless against this attack. The attack assumes that one of (i)-(iv) is true, and those theses may be denied.<sup>xii</sup> However, rather than enter into the complex debate of what a pain's being awful consists in, we may avoid these objections altogether, by replacing 'X' with a putative noninstrumental reason that isn't about the pain's being awful.

A pain is 'hateful to the objective self,' Nagel says, due to what it's like: '[my] pain . . . is just as clearly hateful to the objective self as to the subjective individual. I know what it's like even when I contemplate myself from outside, as one person among countless others.'<sup>xiii</sup> Why might the objective self—as opposed to the self *qua* sufferer—hate what the pain is like? Perhaps the objective self can recognize *what it's like* as a reason to end the pain at least partly because that reason entails no agents.<sup>xiv</sup> So, consider this new version of the argument:

(1b) *What the pain is like* is a noninstrumental reason to end my pain that entails no agents (nor is it understood as part of a complete reason that does).

(C) Therefore, probably, *what the pain is like* is a noninstrumental reason for every agent to end my pain (and so, probably, egoism is false).

Call this the ‘Second Instance.’ It avoids objections that stem from the concept of awfulness.<sup>xv</sup> However, a similar objection can be made to the Second Instance as to the First, capitalizing on the notion of pain, rather than awful pain. ‘An experience’s being a pain,’ according to the objection, ‘consists in the experience’s being disliked by its bearer; or in its inclining its bearer to fight it; or in its being spontaneously evaluated by its bearer as harmful; or in its being noninstrumentally bad for its bearer. Hence, (1b) may be false, and anyway the inference from (1b) to (C) is very weak (in analogy with the objection to the First Instance).’

However, these theories of pain are less plausible than the similar theories of awful pain. For people on certain drugs report having pains that they don’t mind one bit. Such experiences, it seems, are not disliked by their bearers; do not incline their bearers to fight them; are not spontaneously evaluated by their bearers as harmful; and aren’t noninstrumentally bad for their bearers. Thus such cases seem to provide counterexamples to these theories of pain. However, they don’t seem to provide counterexamples to the aforementioned theories of awful pain. We aren’t inclined to say that experiences we don’t mind are *awful*, since ‘awful’ has such strong normative connotations.

### **Why every instance of the argument fails**

Even though I have defended the Second Instance from one objection, two others remain. In fact, every plausible instance of the argument is open to two powerful objections, the first of which will seem familiar.

Many philosophers believe that pains (or any mental states) can't exist unowned, and so the existence of a pain entails the existence of a bearer. On this view, *what the pain is like* entails that a pain-bearer exists. Thus, changing X from *the pain is awful* to *what the pain is like* doesn't get rid of the worry that the reason entails the existence of a pain-bearer. And so the same objection again has force: (1b) may be false (if *what the pain is like* entails the existence of a pain-bearer who can act), and even if it's true, the inference from (1b) to (C) comes into question as follows: if *what the pain is like* entails a pain-bearer, we will want to know whether the bearer is an agent before concluding that the reason applies to all agents. Similar remarks hold for the First Instance, which replaces 'X' with *the pain is awful* (this time springing from the mention of pain, not from the mention of awfulness). Or, to take a new example, suppose we appeal to *pain is bad* as a reason to end my pain. By 'pain is bad,' I mean, 'if a token pain exists, then it's bad.' So understood, 'pain is bad' doesn't entail that there are any token pains, much less any agents. However, *pain is bad*, as a reason for me to act so as to end my pain, is incomplete: it presupposes that a pain would end if I so acted. The complete reason would be something like: *pain is bad, and acting in that way would end a pain*. And now the reference to a pain arguably entails the existence of a bearer, which leads to the same two-part objection.

This objection will arise on every plausible version of the argument, since any legitimate substitution for X—any reason for ending my pain which just concerns the pain—will either refer to the pain or painful experience or will be understood as part of a complete reason that does. Thus, every token of (1) will be open to the objection that pains can't be unowned.

Second, egoists may say that *what the pain is like* is an incomplete reason to end my pain, and that the complete reason will obviously entail the existence of an agent. The complete reason, they may say, is *what the pain is like for me*, which obviously entails the existence of an agent. Thus, they may deny (1b).

This objection will also apply to every plausible instance of the argument. With regard to earlier arguments, egoists may say that, as a reason to end my pain, *it's awful* is short for *it's awful for me* (or *pain is bad* should be replaced with *that pain is bad for me*). The egoist may say that any legitimate substitution for X—any noninstrumental reason to end my pain—will either refer to me or must be understood as part of a complete reason that does.

Hence, arguments like these fail. Critics may always dispute the inference from premise to conclusion by claiming that the reasons substituted for X, if completed, entail the existence of bearers who might be agents, and they may always dispute the premise by claiming that the reasons substituted for X—if they really are reasons—are proxies for obviously agent-entailing reasons.

## **2. The Argument From Dissociation**

According to egoism, the noninstrumental reasons to end my pain apply only to me. Perhaps we can see that this is false—that some noninstrumental reasons to end my pain apply to others—by thinking of my pain without thinking of it as mine. Nagel says:

I know what [my pain is] like even when I contemplate myself from outside, as one person among countless others. And the same applies when I think about anyone else in this way. The pain can be detached in thought from the fact that it is mine without losing any of its dreadfulness.<sup>xvi</sup>

This line of thought—the argument from dissociation<sup>xvii</sup>—is supposed to spell trouble for egoism. As presented, however, it doesn't go far enough. Nagel asks us not to think of the pain as mine, but he allows us to think of it as belonging to 'one person among countless others.' Yet given this stipulation, the fact that the pain would still seem dreadful is no threat to egoism. For the egoist will say that, at such moments, in grasping that the pain is dreadful or awful, we merely grasp that it provides a reason for that 'one person among countless others.' A better argument against egoism would ask us not only not to think of the pain as mine, but not to think of its bearer at all—not even as a faceless dot in the crowd.

According to this argument, my pain seems bad when dissociated in thought from its bearer. My throbbing headache, for example, seems bad when one thinks of it as just a throbbing headache. So, my pain must be bad, in one respect, due merely to what it's like (*not* due to what it's like for me, or what it's like for its bearer)—so egoism is false. Let's put the argument in standard form, filling in some missing steps:

- (1) My pain seems bad when imaginatively thought of merely as a pain.
- (2) Therefore, my pain is bad, in one respect, due merely to what it's like.

For ease of expression, let ‘R’ stand for *what it’s like*. If my pain is bad due merely to R, then R is a complete reason for someone to end it. In saying this I assume an inference from disvalue to reasons; I assume that if my pain is bad due to R, then someone is such that if she *could* end my pain, R *would* give her a reason to do so. I take this inference to be analytic, or at least extremely plausible. Also note that R is a *noninstrumental* reason to end my pain because R (*what it’s like*) just concerns my pain. Therefore:

(3) R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for someone to end my pain. (from 2)

(3) entails:

(4) Either R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, or R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for someone else to end my pain. (from 3)

I’ll now prove the denial of egoism from (4) by showing that it follows from each of (4)’s disjuncts. In what follows, let ‘S’ stand for an arbitrarily selected person who is not me.

(5a) Suppose R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (assumption, for the sake of performing a constructive dilemma)

(5b) Therefore, egoism is false. (from 5a)

(6a) Suppose instead that R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain. (assumption, for the sake of performing a constructive dilemma)

If a reason applies to me, but not to you, there must be some explanation why. It can't just be a brute fact that, for example, I have a reason to save this drowning child, but you don't. Perhaps the explanation is that I am the lifeguard, while you are merely a sunbather. Or perhaps the explanation is that I am the child's father, whereas you don't know the child. These explanations may fail. However, if I have a reason, but you don't, there must be some explanation why.

If R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, why wouldn't it be a reason for others? The answer can't be, 'others can't end my pain.' On my terminology, this explanation is a *non sequitur*; for the question may be rephrased as: if R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, supposing I could end it, why wouldn't it be a reason for others, supposing they could end it? For egoists, the answer is clear: R is a reason for me, but not for others, because the pain is mine, and not theirs. There are no other plausible explanations. Hence:

(6b) R is also a complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain, unless the pain's not being S's *discredits* that putative reason for S (that is, accounts for why it really isn't a complete noninstrumental reason for S).

(6c) If the pain's being mine doesn't contribute to R as a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, then the pain's not being S's does not discredit R as a putative complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (premise)

(6d) The pain's being mine doesn't contribute to R as a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain. (from 6a)

(6e) The pain's not being S's does not discredit R as a putative complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (from 6c and 6d)

(6f) R is a complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain.

(from 6b and 6e)

(6g) Therefore, egoism is false. (from 6f)

(7) Therefore, egoism is false. (constructive dilemma, 4, 5a-5b, 6a-6g)

Steps 3-7 seem solid. However, the argument faces a strong objection. When I imagine what a pain is like, it always seems to be mine. It's not that I believe the pain to be mine or have the thought *it's mine*, upon imagining it; it's just that it seems to be mine. For example, in grasping *what it's like for John to hear fingernails scraping across a blackboard*, it's as though, at that moment, I am hearing such a sound. With this in mind, reconsider (1): 'My pain seems bad when imaginatively thought of merely as a pain.' If I imagine a pain, and it seems to be mine, do I think of it 'merely as a pain?' If I do, then we can affirm (1), for pains imagined in that way do seem bad. However, (2) would not follow (that my pain is bad, in one respect, due merely to what it's like). After all, the pain might seem bad because of *what it would be like for me, if it were mine*; so, it might actually be bad, not due merely to what it's like, but due to what it's like for its actual bearer. Alternatively, if my imaginative effort doesn't count as thinking of the pain merely as a pain, then I am in no position to assess (1); I cannot say, on this basis, that my pain seems bad when imaginatively thought of merely as a pain. Either way, the argument goes bust: either the inference to (2) fails or (1) lacks support.



### 3. The Argument From Inability

While criticizing egoism, Nagel offers the following thought experiment: ‘if I lacked or lost the conception of myself as distinct from other possible or actual persons, I could still apprehend the badness of pain, immediately.’<sup>xviii</sup> Nagel doesn’t elaborate, but here is how the argument might continue. In apprehending a way in which the pain is bad, I grasp a reason to end it. However, under those circumstances, that reason couldn’t involve the pain’s being mine. Hence, the reason applies to everyone; egoism is false.

To assess this argument, we first need to know more about the hypothetical situation in which I lack ‘the conception of myself as distinct from other possible or actual persons.’ In that situation, would I have any sort of self-concept? If I would, then the argument obviously fails. Suppose, for example, that in a moment of severe disorientation, I can think ‘I exist’ but can’t think about how much of the world I compose. In such a case, one might say that I have the concept of *myself* (since I can think ‘I exist’) but lack the concept of *myself as distinct from other possible or actual persons* (since I can’t think about whether others are distinct from me). If I felt pain under these circumstances, I could apprehend its disvalue by apprehending that *that pain is bad for me*. And so, the thought experiment wouldn’t show that the reason I grasp is independent of the pain’s being mine.

More sympathetically, let’s suppose that lacking the concept of *myself as distinct from other possible or actual persons* entails lacking the concept of *myself*—after all, having a concept of *myself* might seem to require knowing that I am distinct from what is

not me. Or better yet, let's just rephrase the beginning of Nagel's argument as follows: 'if I lacked or lost the conception of myself, I could still apprehend at least one way in which my current pains are bad.' But the argument still faces a problem. I might have the concept of a person or a bearer, despite lacking the concept of myself. And thus I might apprehend the badness of the pain merely by apprehending *that it is bad for a person (or bad for its bearer)*. And if *that* is what I apprehend, then it is not clear why the reason applies to everyone, and not just to the bearer of the pain.

So, a further twist: 'if I lacked or lost the concepts *myself*, *person* and *bearer*, I could still apprehend at least one way in which my current pains are bad.' Now in apprehending that the pain is bad, I couldn't apprehend that *my* pain is bad or that a *person's* or *bearer's* pain is bad—or so it seems. The argument, however, still makes a controversial assumption: that apprehending that *my* pain is bad requires having the concept of myself. Many philosophers believe that we can grasp some information nonconceptually—that is, without using concepts.<sup>xix</sup> If so, then I might apprehend that my pain is bad, with the content of *my*, at least, represented nonconceptually.

Alternatively, I might apprehend that a person's (or bearer's) pain is bad, with the content of *person's* (or *bearer's*), at least, represented nonconceptually. Perhaps these states of affairs are impossible. However, the argument may be reformulated to avoid this issue, without being weakened. Here is how:

(Premise 1) If I lacked or lost any means of representing the contents of the concepts *myself*, *person* and *bearer*, I could still apprehend at least one way in which my current pains are bad.<sup>xx</sup>

The subject in Premise 1 lacks any means of representing the contents of *myself*, *person* and *bearer*. It is hard to imagine, in general, being such an individual. Thus, it may be hard to assess Premise 1. But the thought experiment can also let the subject generally retain those capacities. On this new version, I can represent (whether conceptually or not) the contents of *myself*, *person* and *bearer*; however, for some bizarre neurophysiological reason, I can't apply those contents to my current pains.<sup>xxi</sup> So, I can't think 'my pain is bad' or 'some person's (or bearer's) pain is bad.' Nor can I think 'that, whatever it is, which is mine, is bad.' But I could think, while in pain, 'that pain is bad.' This might make the premise easier to assess. On this final formulation:

(1) If I lacked or lost any means of applying the contents of the concepts *myself*, *person* and *bearer* to my current pains, I could still apprehend at least one way in which those pains are bad.

This is like step (2) of the Argument from Dissociation, which was: 'My pain is bad, in one respect, due merely to what it's like.' (1) doesn't say that my current pains are bad 'due merely to what they're like.' However, if I am in pain and cannot apply the contents of *myself*, *person* and *bearer* to those pains, then presumably my grasp of their disvalue just concerns what they're like.

From (1), we can infer:

(2) Some reason R, which doesn't turn on the pain's being mine, is a complete noninstrumental reason to end my pain.<sup>xxii</sup>

And now we may suppose that R = 'what it's like.' (Nothing changes if we suppose R to be, say, *the pain would end*.) Thus, (2) is virtually identical to step (3) of the Argument from Dissociation: '[*What it's like*] is a complete, noninstrumental reason for someone to end my pain.' So, now the Argument from Inability can mimic the Argument from Dissociation. In what follows, let 'S' stand for an arbitrarily selected person who is not me.

(3) Either R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, or R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (from 2)

(4a) Suppose R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (assumption, for the sake of performing a constructive dilemma)

(4b) Therefore, egoism is false. (from 4a)

(5a) Suppose instead that R is a complete, noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain. (assumption, for the sake of performing a constructive dilemma)

(5b) R is also a complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain, unless the pain's not being S's *discredits* that putative reason for S (that is, accounts for why it really isn't a complete noninstrumental reason for S). (nondeductively from 5a)

(5c) If the pain's being mine doesn't contribute to R as a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, then the pain's not being S's does not discredit R as a putative complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (premise)

(5d) The pain's being mine doesn't contribute to R as a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain. (from 5a)

(5e) The pain's not being S's does not discredit R as a putative complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain. (from 5c and 5d)

(5f) R is a complete noninstrumental reason for S to end my pain.

(from 5b and 5e)

(5g) Therefore, egoism is false. (from 5f)

(6) Therefore, egoism is false. (constructive dilemma, 3, 4a-4b, 5a-5g)

Steps 2-6 of the argument appear solid. However, there is a strong objection to (1). Here again is that premise:

(1) If I lacked or lost any means of applying the contents of *myself*, *person* and *bearer* to my current pains, I could still apprehend at least one way in which those pains are bad.

Before stating the objection, I should note that the argument conflicts with the higher-order thought theory of consciousness (HOT). According to HOT, my mental state is conscious just in case it is accompanied by the thought that I am in that state.<sup>xxiii</sup> On this view, for my mental state to be a conscious pain, I must think of it as mine. Thus, given HOT, the antecedent of (1) is unrealizable, for I couldn't lack or lose any means of applying the content of *myself* to my current pains. (I assume that the pains at issue are conscious.<sup>xxiv</sup>) So, given HOT, (1) is either false or vacuously true (I needn't

declare which). Either way, given HOT, the argument fails, for (1) either would be false or wouldn't entail anything of significance (in particular, it wouldn't entail (2)). Of course, none of this matters if HOT is false, but I won't try to assess it here.<sup>xxv</sup>

The strong objection to (1) is that we have no evidence for it, independent of whatever evidence we might have for rejecting egoism. Consider the following. For a pain to seem like mine, I would have to represent it as mine. So, if I couldn't apply the content of *myself* to my pain—if I couldn't represent it as mine—then it wouldn't seem like mine. Would pain under such conditions seem bad? It's difficult if not impossible for one to imagine having pain that doesn't seem like one's own. (We may have had such pain as infants, but we can't now imagine what that pain was like.) Hence, it's difficult if not impossible to imagine whether one's pain would seem bad to one, under those conditions. For this reason, (1) lacks support.

The Argument from Inability thus fails.

#### 4. The Argument From Introspection

Is pain at all bad? Is it noninstrumentally bad? How bad is it? In assessing pain, we typically defer to the judgment of sufferers—or at least, we typically place great weight on their assessments. My judgments *qua* sufferer, I think, are typical: while in pain, I believe I have a reason, and not merely a motive, to end the pain; I believe I have a reason to end it just for the sake of doing so; and I believe that reason to be strong, when the pain is severe. When I say these things about my experiences, you will probably defer to my judgment. As Nagel says, you don't want 'to overrule the clearest authority present in the situation.'<sup>xxvi</sup>

The sufferer's opinion *is* authoritative, for to be in pain is to be very closely connected to the pain and its immediate evaluative import. Of course, you might agree with my judgments because of your own experience: when you suffer, you know that you have a strong, noninstrumental reason to end your pain, and you assume that my pain is similar. Either way, you respect the authority of a sufferer—either my authority or yours.

The starting-point of the Argument from Introspection is thus: *introspective judgments weigh heavily in evaluating pain*. Arguments against egoism are often thought to beg the question by assuming the point of view of the universe. This argument, by contrast, is based on respect for the point of view of the individual.

What else can the sufferer tell us about the disvalue of pain? Note that I can think about my current pains without entertaining the thought that they're mine, or indeed anyone's.<sup>xxvii</sup> In fact, this is common: one just focuses on the pain *qua* pain. Even if pains must have bearers, I can think about my pain without thinking of its having a bearer, just as I can, say, think about a house without thinking about the fact that it occupies space. And even if pains partly constitute their bearers, I can think about my pain without thinking of its having a bearer, just as I can, say, think about some dirt without thinking of its partly constituting the earth.

When I focus on a painful experience of mine just *qua* pain, I still think I have a reason to end it.<sup>xxviii</sup> In fact, I am sure that I do. At such moments, I seem to have a noninstrumental reason to end the pain—that is, a reason which just concerns ending the pain—which is complete even without entailing that, or relying on the fact that, the pain is mine. The first premise of the Argument from Introspection is thus:

(1) Introspection provides some evidence that there is some complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain—call it R—which doesn't turn on the pain's being mine.

I'll suppose that *the pain would end*—that reason for me to end my pain—can substitute for R. (Nothing changes if we suppose the reason to be, say, *what the pain is like*.) It may seem odd to say that a reason to end my pain is that the pain would end. However, so long as the claim may be true, its oddity is irrelevant.

Some philosophers don't think *the pain would end* is a complete reason for me to end my pain, because they think it's not a reason for me if my pain is deserved. On this view, I have no reason at all to avoid my just punishment.<sup>xxix</sup> Such philosophers may still accept (1), on my reading of R; they may still think that introspection provides some evidence that *the pain would end* is a complete reason for me to end my pain. However, it will be better, as the argument goes along, if such philosophers think of R as standing for *the undeserved pain would end*. This won't affect the discussion. The important issue will be whether *the pain would end* is incomplete, not because it leaves out desert, but because it leaves out the fact that the pain is mine.

Consider this objection to (1): 'When you're in pain, the pain seems to be yours, even if you don't entertain the thought that it's yours. Hence, the complete reason you grasp while in pain might be, *my pain would end*; the possible effects of this background awareness, this awareness of the pain's being yours, can't be easily dismissed. Thus, introspection provides no evidence that *the pain would end* is a complete reason; (1) is false.'



Here is my reply: ‘When I’m in pain, the pain does indeed seem to be mine. However, that awareness doesn’t seem to matter when I focus on the pain *qua* pain—all that seems to matter, from the inside, is that *the pain would end*. What I fixate on—the pain—seems like enough for my having a reason. This might be illusory, but (1) doesn’t boast of decisive evidence—it merely holds that introspection provides some evidence that the reason is complete. And that is true.’

Now I’ll begin arguing for the next premise, which is that no evidence outweighs the introspective evidence cited in (1). Introspection suggests that I have a complete, noninstrumental reason to end my pain, independent of the pain’s being mine. Why believe otherwise?

One might argue that *the pain’s being mine* is of great normative significance. However, that alone wouldn’t weigh against the claim that *the pain would end* is a complete reason. After all, the significance of ownership might consist merely in the importance of a different complete reason. Perhaps both *my pain would end* and *the pain would end* are complete, independent, reasons for me to end my pain. On that view, you and I both have a reason to end my pain, but I have an extra reason. Many philosophers hold this view.<sup>xxx</sup> To offset the evidence cited in (1), we need evidence for thinking that ownership is not only significant, but that any complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain must refer to the pain’s being mine.

One can argue that *the pain would end*, as a reason for me, must implicitly trade on the pain’s being mine, by suggesting that if the purported reason were detached in some way from the pain’s being mine, then it wouldn’t be a reason. The following argument, however, doesn’t work: ‘*the pain would end* isn’t a reason for me to end other

people's pains; so, *the pain would end*, as a reason for me to end my own pain, must trade on the pain's being mine.' The premise merely assumes egoism.

Other arguments 'detaching' the purported reason from the pain's owner, to show that the reason turns on ownership, also fail. In the Argument from Dissociation, it was suggested that someone's pain seems bad when imaginatively thought of merely as a pain. Maybe so. But there is little plausibility in saying: 'someone's pain doesn't seem bad when imaginatively thought of merely as a pain; so, *the pain would end*, as a reason for me, must trade on the pain's being mine.' And according to the Argument from Inability, if I felt pain but couldn't attribute it to a bearer, it would seem bad. Maybe so. But there is little plausibility in saying: 'if I felt pain but couldn't attribute it to a bearer, it would not seem bad; so, *the pain would end*, as a reason for me, must trade on the pain's being mine.' The premise in each argument badly needs support.

I have found no evidence at all weighing against the evidence cited in (1). Hence:

(2) No evidence outweighs the introspective evidence cited in (1).

And on the basis of (1) and (2), we may conclude:

(3) There is some complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain—R—which doesn't turn on the pain's being mine.

The argument now continues in a familiar way.

(4) If R is a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain, then it's a complete noninstrumental reason for you to end my pain, unless the pain's not being yours *discredits* that putative reason for you (that is, accounts for why it really isn't a complete noninstrumental reason for you). (premise)

(5) If the pain's being mine doesn't contribute to R as a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end it, then the pain's not being yours does not discredit R as a putative complete noninstrumental reason for you to end it. (premise)

(3), (4) and (5) entail the denial of egoism; no more premises are needed.

(6) The pain's being mine doesn't contribute to R as a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end it. (from 3)

(7) The pain's not being yours does not discredit R as a putative complete noninstrumental reason for you to end it. (from 5 and 6)

(8) If R is a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end it, then it's a complete noninstrumental reason for you to end it. (from 4 and 7)

(9) R is a complete noninstrumental reason for you to end my pain.

(from 3 and 8)

(C) Therefore, egoism is false. (from 9)

How strong is the Argument from Introspection? Given (3), it's irresistible. According to (3), *the pain would end* is a complete noninstrumental reason for me to end my pain. How strong is the argument for (3)? According to (1), introspection counts in

its favor, while according to (2) we have no evidence against it. Critics, of course, can try to produce such evidence. Absent that, they will have to deny that introspection counts in (3)'s favor. They will have to say that my belief, while in pain, that *the pain would end is a complete reason for me to end it*, receives no warrant from introspection. However, we regard introspection as probative in answering other normative questions about pain—questions such as, is this pain bad? is it noninstrumentally bad? how bad is it? If so, then my belief in this instance should receive some warrant from its introspective genesis. Hence, the Argument from Introspection has some force against egoism.

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<sup>i</sup> See Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 156-162. Of course I will cite Nagel as I go along.

<sup>ii</sup> See Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1906; repr. 1981), p. 420, pp. 497-498 and elsewhere.

<sup>iii</sup> A referee wonders whether 'Santa Claus is coming to town' is a normative reason for little Johnny to be good for goodness' sake. 'Santa Claus is coming to town' is not a fact, since (lamentably) it's false. Hence, if it is a normative reason for Johnny, then some non-facts are normative reasons. But I don't believe it is a normative reason for Johnny,

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even if his parents present it as such, and even if it is *Johnny's reason* for being good (where *Johnny's reason* is a psychological or motivating reason, not a normative reason).

<sup>iv</sup> Here I say that *being kind is virtuous* is a reason for anyone to pet my cat, provided it's a reason for someone. Would it be a reason for people who are allergic to cats? I think so; such people merely have a greater reason not to pet my cat (namely, that they would have an unpleasant, allergic reaction to doing so). Would it be a reason for people who don't like cats? I think so, even though (i) such people are unlikely to act on that reason; and (ii) such people may have a greater reason not to pet my cat (namely, that they prefer not to).

<sup>v</sup> According to Postow, the reason to promote the general good might apply only to world leaders; that position, she argues, is coherent. 'Why would anyone take such a position? It may simply accord with her moral intuitions. Or it may represent the best way to reconcile some of her other moral views.' Furthermore, says Postow, rule-utilitarians might think that the reason applies only to world leaders because 'the ideal moral code may include a rule directing world leaders to promote the general good without including a rule directing everyone to promote the general good.' See B. C. Postow, 'Agent-Neutral Reasons: Are They for Everyone?' *Utilitas*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (July 1997), pp. 249-257 (the quotations are from p. 253).

<sup>vi</sup> This is inscribed on a statue at Faber College in the movie *National Lampoon's Animal House*.

<sup>vii</sup> See B. C. Postow, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250 and Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 194.

<sup>viii</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

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<sup>ix</sup> This point (or something similar) has been made by many authors: Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 127; John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 2, para. 8; Georg Henrik von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 67-69; William P. Alston, 'Pleasure,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 344; Kai Nielsen, 'Hedonism and the Ends of Life,' *Philosophical Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1973), p. 24; Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 63; Rem B. Edwards, *Pleasures and Pains: A Theory of Qualitative Hedonism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 83-86; James Griffin, 'Modern Utilitarianism,' *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, No. 141 (1982), p. 333; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 493; Paul M. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1984), p. 52; T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Rational Foundations of Ethics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), p. 130; Richard J. Hall, 'Are Pains Necessarily Unpleasant?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. XLIX, No. 4 (June 1989), p. 646; Noah Lemos, *Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 67; Norton Nelkin, 'Reconsidering Pain,' *Philosophical Psychology*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1994), p. 329; Christine M. Korsgaard, *The sources of normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 148; and Fred Feldman, 'On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures,' *Ethics* 107 (April 1997), p. 449.

However, some authors have disputed the point: G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 12-13, 78; C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1930), p. 229; J. S. Feibleman, 'A Philosophical Analysis of Pleasure,' *The Role of Pleasure in Behavior*, R.

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G. Heath, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 252; Carolyn Morillo, *Contingent Creatures* (London: Littlefield Adams Books, 1995), p. 97. David Chalmers says in passing that pain ‘is often used to name a particular sort of unpleasant phenomenal quality. . .’ (*The Conscious Mind* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 17). L. W. Sumner believes that physical pleasures share a distinctive quale, but instances of enjoyment (which are what matter for ethics) do not. (*Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 108-109)

<sup>x</sup> See, for example, Christine M. Korsgaard, *The sources of normativity*, p. 148 and Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 37.

<sup>xi</sup> Some version of each of these views has been endorsed or favorably mentioned by more than one philosopher. The pain’s being strongly disliked by its bearer: Richard J. Hall, ‘Are Pains Necessarily Unpleasant?’ p. 646; Paul M. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, p. 52. The pain’s strongly inclining its bearer to fight it: Christine M. Korsgaard, *The sources of normativity*, p. 147; Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 38. Gilbert Ryle advances a behaviorist forerunner of this view in *Dilemmas* (Cambridge University Press, 1958). David Brink endorses a combination of these last two views in ‘Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons,’ *Reading Parfit*, Jonathan Dancy, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 112. Kurt Baier and Derek Parfit don’t distinguish between them but endorse some view in this vicinity. (See Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 272, 273 and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 493 and 501.) The pain’s being spontaneously evaluated by its bearer as very harmful: W. B. Gallie, ‘Pleasure,’ *The*

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*Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume, XXVIII (1954), pp. 147-164; Norton Nelkin, 'Reconsidering Pain,' p. 332. The pain's being noninstrumentally very bad for its bearer: Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 127; Kai Nielsen, 'Hedonism and the Ends of Life,' p. 24; E. J. Bond, *Reason and Value* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 128.

<sup>xii</sup> What else might a pain's being awful be thought to consist in? 'Awful' means 'highly unpleasant' (with stronger normative and emotional connotations). On what unpleasantness consists in, see Stuart Rachels, 'Is Unpleasantness Intrinsic to Unpleasant Experiences?' *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 99, No. 2, (May 2000), pp. 187-210. On my view, the unpleasantness of an experience consists in features intrinsic to it, features that account for its being intrinsically bad. Hence, a pain's being awful, on my view, consists in features intrinsic to the pain, features that account for the pain's being intrinsically very bad.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 160. What Nagel means by 'the objective self' isn't pellucidly clear, but I won't pause over that, since it's not important for our purposes.

<sup>xiv</sup> I have said that reasons are facts that count for or against performing actions. *What it's like*, however, doesn't seem to be a candidate for facthood; it makes no sense to say, 'I believe that *what it's like*.' By 'what it's like,' however, I mean 'the pain's being like that' (or 'the pain is like that'), where that is understood to refer to the subjective properties of the pain. It is perfectly good English to say, 'I believe that the pain is like that.' On this usage, '*what it's like* is a reason to end my pain' means '*the pain's being like that* is a reason to end my pain.'



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<sup>xv</sup> Even if the pain is awful—even if that’s what the pain is like—‘what it’s like’ refers to the pain’s phenomenology without using the concept of awfulness. And we can grasp what the pain is like without thinking in terms of the pain’s being awful. Thus I say in the text that the argument avoids objections stemming from the concept of awfulness.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>xvii</sup> ‘Here the argument from dissociation seems to me persuasive.’ (p. 160) I believe Nagel is referring to the argument quoted in the text.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 161. In saying that he could apprehend ‘the badness of pain’ under such conditions—rather than, say ‘one way in which the pain is bad’—Nagel suggests that the only reasons there are for ending pain apply to everyone. But this suggested thesis is stronger than he needs to deny egoism. In what follows, I will talk about apprehending merely one way in which pain is bad.

<sup>xix</sup> See, for example, Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 122-129 and 154-160; Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992); and Michael Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* (U. S. A.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 74-77.

<sup>xx</sup> Alternatively: ‘if I lacked or lost any means of representing the complete content of any thought or theory containing the concepts *myself*, *person* and *bearer*, I could still apprehend at least one way in which my current pains are bad.’

<sup>xxi</sup> ‘A thinker might really have a language of thought, and it might be that attempts to concatenate his Mentalese symbols for the concepts F and b produce strange chemical reactions that prevent him from entertaining the thought Fb.’ (Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts*, p. 43)

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<sup>xxii</sup> Earlier I insisted that the subject in Nagel's thought experiment be barred from applying the contents of *person* and *bearer* to his pains. Had I, the subject, been able to apply those contents to my pains, we could not now conclude that the reason I grasp doesn't turn on the pain's being mine. For suppose I'd had that ability. Then I might have apprehended the badness of the pain by apprehending that *it's bad for its bearer*. This reason might be said to turn on the pain's being mine since I am the pain's bearer, or since 'its bearer' refers to me.

<sup>xxiii</sup> David Rosenthal advocates this thesis in several places. See, for example, 'Two Concepts of Consciousness,' *Philosophical Studies* 49 (1986), pp. 335; 'A Theory of Consciousness,' Report No. 40 (1990), Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF), Research Group on Mind and Brain, University of Bielefeld, pp. 36-37; and 'Thinking that One Thinks,' *Consciousness*, Martin Davies and Glyn W. Humphries, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), p. 199.

<sup>xxiv</sup> (1) may be changed to: 'If I lacked or lost any means of applying the contents of *myself*, *person* and *bearer* to my current unconscious pains, I could still apprehend at least one way in which they're bad.' But now the argument employing (1) has even less intuitive appeal, for it assumes: (i) that there are unconscious pains; (ii) that unconscious pains are bad; (iii) that we can apprehend the badness of our unconscious pains; and (iv) that we can apprehend that badness even when lacking the ability to apply the contents of *myself*, *person* and *bearer*. The conjunction of (i)-(iv) is too controversial to base an argument on.

<sup>xxv</sup> For criticism of HOT, see Alex Byrne, 'Some Like It HOT: Consciousness and Higher-Order Thoughts,' *Philosophical Studies* 86 (1997), pp. 103-129.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Nagel, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> There is no contradiction between this claim—that I can think about my current pains without entertaining the thought that they’re mine—and my earlier claim that when I imagine what a pain is like, it always seems to be mine.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Nagel says, ‘the [sufferer’s] awareness of how bad [the pain] is doesn’t essentially involve the thought of it as his.’ (p. 161) I’m making a similar point: that the sufferer’s awareness that the pain gives him a reason to end it doesn’t essentially involve the thought of it as his or anyone’s.

<sup>xxix</sup> Just as introspection goes to show that I have reason to end my pain, independent of the pain’s being mine, it also goes to show that I have reason to end my pain, independent of whether the pain is deserved (since I seem, introspectively, to have a reason to end my pain, even if the pain is deserved, or even if I don’t think about whether the pain is deserved). No one has ever, to my knowledge, provided evidence that I have no reason at all to end my deserved pains. Thus, on my view, *the pain would end* is a complete reason for me to end it; no reference to desert is necessary. Note that merely showing the importance of desert for evaluating pain wouldn’t constitute evidence that I have no reason at all to end my deserved pains. After all, the significance of desert might consist merely in the importance of a different reason. Perhaps *the pain is deserved* is a reason against ending my pain, while *the pain would end* is a reason for ending it. On that view, desert is important, but what the pain is like matters too.

<sup>xxx</sup> It is hard to find people saying exactly this, but Nagel and Jonathan Bennett, for example, almost certainly hold this view. Nagel: ‘the personal standpoint must be taken into account directly in the justification of any ethical or political system which humans can be expected

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to live by. This is an ethical and not merely a practical claim.’ (*Equality and Partiality*, (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 15) Bennett: ‘each person is morally entitled to give some special weight to his own wants and needs and interests, just *qua* his.’ (‘On Maximizing Happiness,’ *Obligations to Future Generations*, R. I. Sikora and Brian Berry, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 69)