

Pain



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What does feeling a sharp pain in one's hand have in common with seeing a red apple on the table? Some say not much, apart from the fact that they are both conscious experiences. To see an object is to perceive an extramental reality--in this case, a red apple. To feel a pain, by contrast, is to undergo a conscious experience that doesn't necessarily relate the subject to an objective reality. Perceptualists, however, dispute this. They say that both experiences are forms of perception of an objective reality. Feeling a pain in one's hand, according to this view, is perceiving an objective (physical) condition of one's hand. Who is closer to truth? Because of such metaphysical issues, the subjectivity of pains combined with their clinical urgency raises methodological problems for pain scientists. How can a subjective phenomenon be studied objectively? What is the role of the first-person method (e.g., introspection) in science? Some suggest that the subjectivity of pains (and of conscious experiences in general) is due to their metaphysical irreducibility to purely physical processes in the nervous system. Can this be true? The study of pain and its puzzles offers opportunities for understanding such larger issues as the place of consciousness in the natural order and the methodology of psychological research. In this book, leading philosophers and scientists offer a wide range of views on how to conceptualize and study pain. The essays include discussions of perceptual and representationalist accounts of pain; the

affective-motivational dimension of pain; whether animals feel pain, and how this question can be investigated; how social pain relates to physical pain; whether first-person methods of gathering data can be integrated with standard third-person methods; and other methodological and theoretical issues in the science and philosophy of pain.

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