

[I feel your pain: do humans and animals suffer similarly?](i-feel-your-pain-human-animal-suffering.html "I feel your pain: do humans and animals suffer similarly?")

September 2011

[Dr Stuart Derbyshire](speakers.html#stuart-derbyshire "Stuart Derbyshire") and [Professor Anthony Jones](speakers.html#anthony-jones "Anthony Jones") will try to untangle the uniqueness and commonality of pain and suffering for humans and animals.



The suggestion of animal pain assumes an important level of equivalence between the psychological experience and biological development of animals and humans. These assumptions require critical assessment. Although there is biological similarity across the animal kingdom including shared nerve fibres that carry sensory information and trigger defensive reactions and comparable brain regions and hormonal stress responses, considerable biological differences between humans and animals remain manifold. To put it bluntly, the brains of all animals are underdeveloped compared to human brains and most neuroscientists believe that brain development has an important and necessary relationship with experience. Clearly for some, and maybe for all animals, pain experience can be rejected because they simply do not have the brains for it.

More provocatively, however, subjective experience, including pain, cannot be directly inferred from biological measures because such measures do not account for the contents of experience in general, and of pain in particular. To understand pain experience there is a necessity to examine the psychology of pain. Pain, as experienced by conscious human beings, is a subjective experience with content. That content is embedded in a symbolic system of language that animals have no access to. Thus pain is not merely incompatible with the biology of animals, pain is incompatible with the cognitive and emotional development of animals. There are, therefore, good reasons to reject any equivalence of human and animal pain experience.

There is, however, a perhaps understandable disquiet in denying animals any form of pain or suffering. It is difficult to reject the idea that an animal writhing in apparent pain is not in actual pain - something like pain appears to be shared. There is, possibly, a useful distinction between being in pain and knowing that I am in pain. Both animals and humans might be said to be in a state of pain but only humans can experience that they are in pain and explicitly share their condition with others as an acknowledged fact of being. This distinction between being and knowledge feels like a distinction that can work but, as we will explore, it does not work in the way expected because sheer being can only be lived and not experienced.

Some background readings

[Jeff McMahan's podcast on Vegetarianism](http://hw.libsyn.com/p/5/2/1/521a92b74beabb61/Jeff_McMahan_on_Vegetarianism.mp3 "Jeff McMahan's podcast on Vegetarianism"), on Philosophy Bites and relevant for the moral considerations at stake

[Human use of animals](http://hw.libsyn.com/p/2/4/7/2473b64cb69bc79e/Peter_Singer.mp3 "Human use of animals"), with Peter Singer on Philosophy Bites

<http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/sites/default/files/files/Animals%20Chapter%204%20The>

[%20Capacity%20of%20Animals%20to%20Experience%20Pain,%20Distress%20and%20Suffering.pdf" target="_blank" title="The capacity of animals to experience pain, distress and suffering">The capacity of animals to experience pain, distress and suffering, Chapter 4 of 'The ethics of research involving animals', Nuffield Council on BioEthics</p><p>Morality of Using Animals, debate between philosopher's Jan Narveson and Gary Francione, The Abolitionist Approach</p>Should apes have rights, video of Battle of Ideas 2010 session on WORLbytes site <p>In defence of animal experimentation, by Patrick Hayes, spiked online 22 June 2011</p><p>Nature and nurture, then and now, Timandra Harkness, Culture Wars 30 June 2011</p><p>Animals don't have morality, people do, by Helene Guldberg, spiked review of books June 2011</p><p>Pain and suffering in non-human animals, by Steve Cooke, opinion piece July 2011</p><p>Man is more than an overdeveloped monkey?, by Tim Black, spiked review of books Aug 2011 </p><p>Knock out one gene to knock out chronic pain, by Jessica Hamzelou, New Scientist 09 September 2011</p><hr id="null" /><p> </p><h3>Listen again \(variable quality\)...</h3><p>Speakers on pain and suffering - click on the Play button: {mp3}pain-suffering-speakers-intros{/mp3}</p><p> </p><p>Initial discussion and replies - click on the Play button: {mp3}pain-suffering-discussion-initial{/mp3}</p><p> </p><p>Further discussion and replies - click on the Play button: {mp3}pain-suffering-discussion-concluding{/mp3}</p><p><h3>...and sorry but that's where the recording cut out.</h3><p> </p><h3>Click on photo for write-up from an attendee at the event
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hspace="4" vspace="4" width="650" height="389" align="middle" /></p><p> </p><p>My first visit to @manchestersalon...painless, Write-up by Darren Jenkinson (@psyc_social), Psyc_Social Blog 30 September 2011</p><p> </p><hr id="null" /><h3>Sponsors and Partners</h3><p>This discussion is jointly organised by the Manchester Salon and the Cafe Scientifique, Manchester to help develop a deeper appreciation of the science rationality behind discussions on public policy. To ensure the widest possible engagement, this discussion is included as part of the Manchester Science Festival programme as a trailblazer event. The International Anthony Burgess Foundation are thanked for generously making the venue available for the discussion, and Simply Better IT have also helped make this discussion possible by covering the costs associated with speakers' travel and accommodation costs.</p><p></p><p>For the second year, the Manchester Salon is participating in the fabulous Manchester Science Festival, which is celebrating its fifth year. With over 200 events for families and adults, you can expect an exciting nine days of cutting-edge research, the brightest minds and amazing events. You'll have the chance to delve into immersive experiences, explore the science of the city by foot, join in the debate, enjoy hands-on activities, see awe-inspiring films and much more. Watch out for trailblazers throughout the year and join us at events throughout Greater Manchester during 22 - 30 October 2011.</p><p> </p><p>The International Anthony Burgess Foundation Engine House, Chorlton Mill, Cambridge Street, Manchester, M1 5BY. The Engine House is available to hire for all occasions: lectures, readings, music events, film screenings, meetings, conferences, parties and more. Facilities include a flexible performance space, accommodating up to 100 (seated theatre-style, more if standing); has a PA system, lectern and microphones, mixing desk and facility to record

events. Stage lighting is installed. There is a Bosendorfer grand piano available to play, a Steinway practice piano and a William Foster harpsichord, all once the property of Anthony Burgess himself. They also have a 8'x6' fastfold screen for front and rear projection, and a high-quality multimedia projector.

<h3>Sponsoring and Partnering</h3> <p>If you would like to sponsor a future discussion, or partner in promoting it, please get in touch via the sponsorship page or the sponsor the Salon form.</p>