A detailed scientific illustration on a light-colored, textured background. The central focus is a large dragonfly with a yellow and blue body and transparent wings. Surrounding it are various other insects: a yellow and black striped beetle on the left, a brown and white patterned moth at the top, a small striped beetle at the top right, a large brown and black patterned moth on the right, a red beetle on the left, a green beetle on the right, and a large brown beetle at the bottom left. Several raspberries are scattered throughout, some whole and some cut open to show their internal structure.

Against sentientism

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I. Sentientism

- *Sentientism*: sentience is both necessary and sufficient for moral status.

“Consciousness is the ground of all value. Whenever anything is good or bad for someone, it’s because of their consciousness. Consciousness has value, what a conscious creature values has value, and relations between conscious creatures have value. If a creature has no capacity for consciousness, nothing can be good or bad for it from its own perspective. And it’s natural to conclude that if nothing can be good or bad for a creature, then the creature has no moral status.” (Chalmers 2022: 341-2)

- *My view*: all sentient beings and all agents, regardless of overlap, have welfare / moral status

Outline

2. Sentientism and beyond
3. Definitions and main thesis
4. Agential value
5. Experience or Resonance?



Sentientism (Jamie Woodhouse/
sentientism.info)

II. Sentientism and beyond

- **Insights of sentientism**
 - moral status protects morally significant interests, which requires capacity for welfare
 - welfare presupposes a subject
 - only sentient beings are subjects
- *Can they suffer? Vs. Do they have agency?*
- **My view:** all sentient beings and all agents, regardless of overlap, have welfare / moral status
 - Like sentientists, I assume that a fundamental link between welfare and moral status. But I reject sentientism about moral status by rejecting sentientism about welfare.

II. Sentientism and beyond

- **Chalmers's Vulcans (2022)**
- This prompts an **informal argument**:
 - (i) We can conceive of beings who lack sentience but whose lives are sites of valence.
 - (ii) If such beings exist, they have some moral status—there are ways it would be wrong to treat them for their own sake.
 - (iii) Moral status does not fundamentally depend on sentience



III. Definitions

- *Sentience*. Capacity to experience positively or negatively valenced affective states (pain, pleasure, joy, frustration, warmth, hunger, anger, sadness, boredom, anxiety, distress, etc.).
 - *Broad*: capacity for subjective experience, or phenomenal consciousness.
 - *Narrow*: capacity to have subjective experiences with positive or negative valence. (Browning and Birch, 2022)

The New York Times

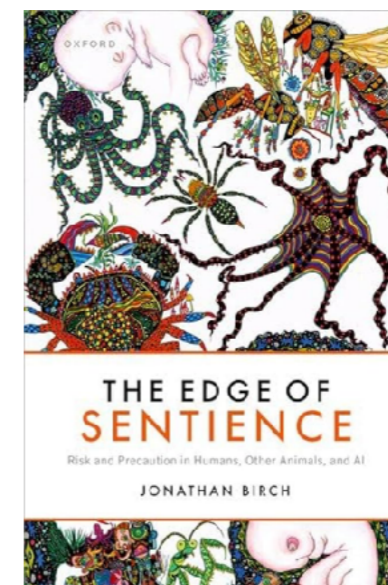
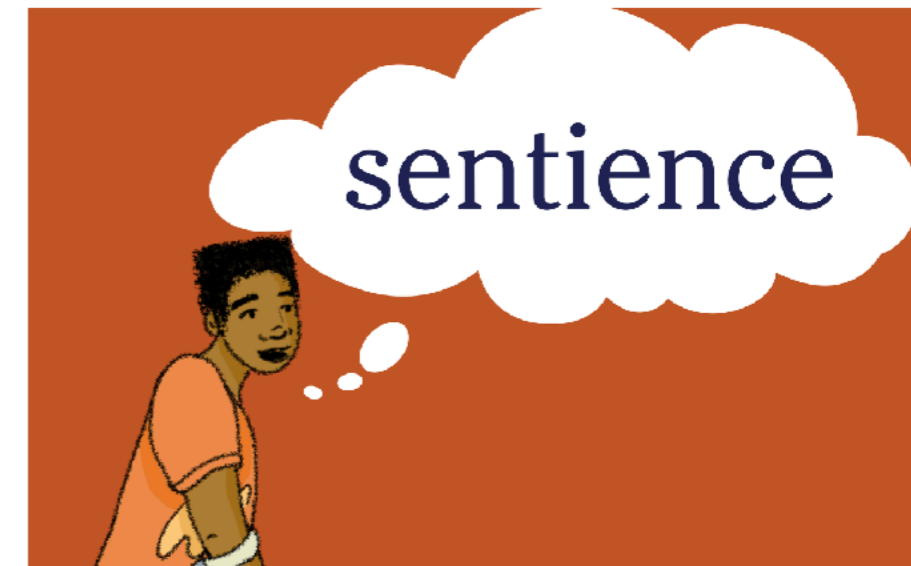
Word of the Day: *sentience*

This word has appeared in 22 articles on NYTimes.com in the past year. Can you use it in a sentence?

Share full article



15



III. Definitions

- *Welfare*: how well or poorly a subject is doing, or how well or poorly their life is going for them. Welfare is prudential value and denotes the set of basic goods (and bads) that a subject can accrue and has self-interested reasons to want, desire, pursue, prefer (and avoid). Prudential value also gives moral agents reasons to care about, attend to, help, benefit, etc.
 - $X = \textit{welfare subject}$ iff X has the capacity for welfare (can accrue prudential value).
- If X has *moral status*, moral agents morally ought to treat X in certain ways for X 's sake. That is, X 's having moral status means that X 's interests matter morally for their own sake, and X 's interests explain why one morally ought to treat them in such ways.

III. The main thesis

- WELFARE: All and only welfare subjects have moral status.
 - *Sentientist restriction* on welfare and moral status: (A) All and only creatures to whom things matter can have a welfare, and (B) things can matter to all and only sentient creatures.
- AGENCY: Agency is a sufficient moral-status-conferring property
 - *agency* = intentional, flexible, goal-directed behavior; e.g. “minimal agency”, pro-attitudes, sensory input, and cognitive representations rationalize behavior (Dretske)

IV. Agential value



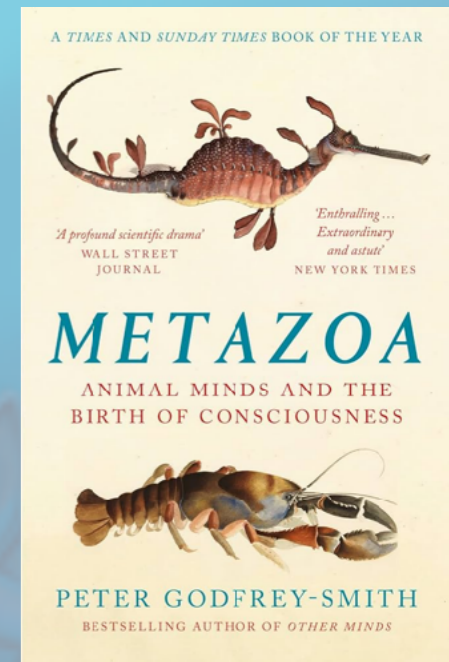
- Agency \neq life; mere tools \neq agents
- **AGENTIAL WELFARE:** some morally significant interests are based on agency; it is basically and *pro tanto* good (bad) for an entity to have such agential interests promoted (setback).
- “Welfare platforms”

“It is only with the emergence of the welfare platform that organisms began to experience states of affairs as good or bad, as pleasurable or painful, as things to approach or avoid. ... Moral standing arose with valuing, and valuing arose with embodied experiences of valence.” (Powell et al. 2021: 235)

 - Includes invertebrates

IV. Agential value

- *Conjecture.* Aims came first in animal life, even if they were closely associated with the evolution of consciousness. Maybe at some point, somewhere in the phylogenetic tree, the agential basis of consciousness went on without experience. Action-perception nexus at the root of the evolution of experience around the so-called Cambrian explosion (c. 540 million years ago) (Godfrey-Smith 2020). “Roughly... the evolution of animal agency brings with it the origin of subjects” (105).
- *Pace* the standard view that it is consciousness that constitutes or allows for value (Kriegel, 2019; Powell et al., 2021; Siewert, 1998; for criticism, see Levy, 2014), and consciousness is the central question for moral status (Shepherd, 2018).



- **AGENTIAL WELFARE** implies that agency generates prudential value.
- **AGENTIAL VALUE**: some states and events are prudentially good or bad for a subject because they promote the subject's aims or because they involve the exercise of agency (e.g., planning, decision-making, exploring, playing, etc.).
- **PHENOMENAL VALUE** (cf. Kammerer, 2019): states or events can only be prudentially good or bad for a subject because of their intrinsic qualitative character (e.g., hedonic states, emotions, feelings, and moods).
 - **PHENOMENAL VALUE***: some states and events are prudentially good or bad for a subject because of their intrinsic qualitative character.

- Does valence require consciousness?
- Hedonism:
 - (i) a *valenced* aspect of affective experience (sensations, feelings, emotions, and moods typically have a positive or negative valence) and
 - (ii) a *qualitative (phenomenal)* aspect of valence.
- But (i) and (ii) do not entail each other. We can imagine valence without affect even if they are two sides of the same coin for the sorts of creatures that we're familiar with. Valence need not be phenomenally conscious; valence as the nonconceptual representation of value (Carruthers 2018).

V. Experience or Resonance?

- *Experience Requirement*: something can be good for a subject only if it affects their experience in some way, and differences in the subject's level of well-being correspond to experiential, or phenomenological, differences (Griffin, 1986; Rosati 2009; Deilj 2021; cf. Lin 2021).
- *Resonance Constraint*: a thing, x , is basically good for some subject, S , only if either S has a satisfied positive attitude toward x or x itself involves S 's having a satisfied positive attitude toward something. (Heathwood, 2021: 15; originally, Railton, 1986: 9)



Thank you!

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Conference draft with references and handout at nicolasdelon.com