




# Pain, suffering, and the time of life: a buddhist philosophical analysis

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## Abstract

In this paper, I explore how our experience of pain and suffering structure our experience over time. I argue that pain and suffering are not as easily dissociable, in living and in conceptual analysis, as philosophers have tended to think. Specifically, I do not think that there is only a contingent connection between physical pain and psychological suffering. Rather, physical pain is partially constitutive of existential suffering. My analysis is informed by contemporary thinking about pain and suffering as well as Indian Buddhist philosophy.

**Keywords** Pain · Suffering · Affect · Intentionality · Buddhist philosophy · Time

In this paper, I explore how our experiences of pain and suffering structure our experience over time. I argue that pain and suffering are not as easily dissociable, in living and in conceptual analysis, as philosophers have tended to think (Corns, 2014; Klein, 2015). Specifically, I do not think that there is only a contingent connection between physical pain and psychological suffering. Rather, physical pain is partially constitutive of existential suffering. That is, when one experiences physical pain, one endures suffering of an existential sort. The argument I will defend in this paper is as follows:

1. Pains are homeodynamic affects.
2. Homeodynamic affects have horizontal and not just object intentionality.
3. Homeodynamic affects are partially constitutive of existential suffering.

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C. Pains have horizontal intentionality and are partially constitutive of existential suffering.

In §1, I explain why pains are homeodynamic affects. Homeodynamic affects are those feelings associated with the living body's self-regulation processes. In §2, I explore what Indian Buddhist philosophers have to say about the problem of pain and suffering, focusing on the work of Buddhaghosa, Vasubandhu and the Pāli sutta material. In §3, I argue that that pain's intentional structure is informative, it tells us something about the world, thus supporting the second premise of my main argument. I then argue for premise three by claiming that pain is a form of suffering. When we understand pain as a homeodynamic feeling and take seriously the larger role that I interpret Buddhist philosophers as affording homeodynamic feeling, their role in making us suffer becomes clear (§4). I conclude with some thoughts on what it might mean for a Buddhist to achieve the eradication of suffering.

## 1 Pains are homeodynamic affects

This section offers evidence and reasoning in support of the first premise of my main argument: pains are homeodynamic affects. I begin with some conceptual considerations, followed by some phenomenological reflections, and finally, some empirical evidence.

### 1.1 Conceptual motivations

Homeodynamic affects let you know something is out of balance in the body. As Klein points out, “We eat and drink primarily because we get hungry and thirsty [...] Homeostatic sensations, by motivating situationally appropriate actions, are thus an efficient method for ensuring behavioral homeostasis” (Klein, 2015, 14).<sup>1</sup> When our homeodynamic equilibrium is disturbed by perturbations from the environment, then episodic, local homeodynamic affects arise that inform of an imbalance by commanding us to act to restore equilibrium.

When you feel thirsty, that is your body telling you that you are deficient with respect to potable liquids. If it has been too long since you last ate, then you feel

<sup>1</sup> A note on the differences between ‘homeostatic’ and ‘homeodynamic’ is in order. They refer to the same process. ‘Homeostasis’ puts emphasis on the fact that an organism survives by aiming for a kind of steady-state that allows it to persist in the face of an unstable world. The organism withstands the onslaught of environmental perturbances by maintaining a balance. This balance is what the ‘stasis’ in ‘homeostasis’ refers to. This process of self-regulation is also ‘homeodynamic’ because perturbations born of self-world contact are constant. Perfect balance is asymptotic. Persistence is achieved when those fluctuations occur within a permissible range of excitation; organismic stability is really meta-stability. The organism is not aiming at a steady state but at preservation of dynamic flexibility that keeps it robust across a variety of self-world interactions. Therefore, I use the term ‘homeodynamic’ to refer to this most basic level of bodily affect. It is a more accurate description of the regulatory micro-dynamics of the organism.

hunger. That is your body telling you that there is a deficiency with respect to necessary nutrients. When you feel the need to go to the washroom, that is your body telling you that there is an excess of waste inside the body that needs to be expunged. These specific interoceptive affects are felt as departures from the affective baseline of homeodynamic equilibrium. Pain is also like this: "Pain's primary role – the one that can't be replaced – is to keep us from aggravating existing injuries" (Klein, 2015, 30). Pain is an imperative that tells you to protect some part of the body so it can heal and homeodynamic equilibrium can be re-established.

An imperative is a command like 'Close the door!' Klein argues that imperatives do not, "...convey any information about the reason why [they] want you to close the door, [they don't] tell you anything about what the world is like (except indirectly), and [their] function is not to inform you" (Klein, 2015, 3). Instead, the function of a pain is to let you know that something is wrong and that you should protect the local area of your body that is signaling that homeodynamic equilibrium has been breached (because of excess or deficiency). I will provide a qualified argument against this claim in §3 on the grounds that there are ways beyond causal origin that pains can be informative.<sup>2</sup> This connection between the motivating quality of pain experience and action is important: "The linkage between motivation and action-types is partly constitutive of the homeostatic sensations. The whole point of homeostatic sensations is to get you to do something. In ordinary circumstances, doing that thing will remove the threat that caused the homeostatic sensation in the first place. Different threats require different responses. Hence, different sensations are associated with different action-types" (Klein, 2015, 16). What makes pains motivational is that they command us to act in ways that protect the body from harm so that a local imbalance can heal and equilibrium can be restored.

## 1.2 Phenomenological motivations

Pains motivate the organism to correct for a *felt* excess or deficiency. Part of what gives the feeling of thirst, hunger, or pain its motivating quality is the fact that it lets the organism know that things are out of balance. This sense of things being out of balance is salient to us in the form of an action that the feeling commands us to perform: "What we are aware of is the action that a homeostatic sensation motivates us to perform. I may not know much about the underlying physiology of hunger, even

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to distinguish between commitment to the view that pain has a type-identity of being a homeodynamic affect (which I defend) and that tokens of this type have content which is formatted imperatively rather than descriptively. I am friendly to the view that pain content is formatted in this way, but this is consistent with pain's having a complex formatting which admits of other dimensions to its content. Klein (2015) defends *pure* imperativism. I have no such commitments. See Corns (2014) for an astute and critical analysis of the possibility of any unified account of pain. She notes that, "Philosophical accounts of pain traditionally focus on three mental state types: emotions, perceptions, and sensations" (2014, 356), thus, leaving out a consideration of pains as having imperative content. I think this omission is a mistake. But I agree with her that, "...paradigmatic pain experiences also have thoughts and motivational responses as components. A paradigmatic pain feels like something, is about something, includes a perception of something, and makes us want to do something" (Corns 2014, 356).

vaguely. I do know, however, that when I'm hungry, I need to eat" (Klein, 2015, 18). This lack of balance is felt by the organism when a local homeodynamic sensation arises. The organism must then have *some* sense of what that balance consists in such that departure from it is felt as significant. This holistic sense of balance in the body that becomes disturbed by local incursions of imbalance, I call this 'the feeling of being alive' (Smith, 2022; Thompson, 2007, 229–30). This more hedonically neutral homeodynamic affect is a holistic felt bodily sense. Without a feeling of homeodynamic equilibrium, there would be a chasm between an unconscious sense of balance and a conscious sense of imbalance. For example, once you have finished drinking your water and the thirst dissipates, does your sense of the body completely disappear? Once the pain of your running cramp subsides, do you stop feeling what is happening in your torso? The answer to both questions is, 'No'.

We have a sense of balance that lets us know when the action commanded by the local sensation has been completed. How do we know that the protective or compensatory action commanded of us in the sensation has been successfully completed? We feel the feeling of being alive again and the absence of the motivating local sensation that commanded us to return to that state of equilibrium.<sup>3</sup> Pains are an example of local perturbations arising within the phenomenological milieu of the lived body. They signal that some part of the body must be protected.<sup>4</sup> The pain is felt as a command to protect that part of the body. The local feeling is experienced in this way on account of its constituting a disequilibrating state of the body. The command motivates because the protection it demands of the part of the body in which it is arising tells the subject that a holistic state of unbalance has arisen, some part of the body must now be protected to allow for the restoration of balance.

### 1.3 Empirical motivations

Homeodynamic affects are physically realized by the extended nervous structure of the interoceptive system. Differentiation in the diameter of nerve fibers in the dorsal horn of the spinal cord has allowed neuroscientists to isolate a group of nerve fibers that connect multiple levels of information processing in the brain to the entire body (Craig, 2002, 657). This anatomical arrangement means that the brain has a direct

<sup>3</sup> Here I want to acknowledge a potential objection from Leder's excellent work *The Absent Body* (1990). Leder might object that the disappearance of the body from awareness is precisely a structural attribute of our phenomenological horizon. That is the surface of the body disappears from awareness in the *ekstasis* of embodied perception through the latter's engagement with its world, and it disappears in terms of *visceral depth* because of the irrelevance of bodily depth of the ordinary practice of everyday activity. Leder refers to these modes of bodily disappearance as 'corporeal primitives' (1990, 19). However, in a footnote he also acknowledges that there is "a certain body-awareness that ceaselessly accompanies activity" (ibid, 177–8 fn. 27). Thus, I think we should read 'disappearance' not as an absence from consciousness but as a receding into the tacitly experienced phenomenological background.

<sup>4</sup> This is because the body is vulnerable. Here I agree with Russon that: "to the extent that the meaningfulness of our world depend on the *determinateness* of our (mortal) bodies, that meaningfulness is inherently *vulnerable*. More precisely, 'to be meaningful' and 'to be vulnerable' cannot be separated, with the result that suffering is inherent to the developed forms of our meaningful human lives" (206, 184). I will have occasion to return to these themes, and to Russon's treatment of them, below.

channel through the spine to informational feedback from the entire body. There is a constant cascade of afferent signals coming from this embodied network of nerves into the brain through the dorsal horn of the spine.

Pain has often thought to be a sensory affect, an affective gloss on exteroceptive signals regarding tissue damage caused by factors external to the organism.<sup>5</sup> Instead, we should think of pain as a homeodynamic feeling that motivates protection of an affected body part (Craig, 2003). This is because the actual path of the nociceptive signals (signals pertaining to pain) is grounded in the aforementioned network, one that ramifies through the entire body and several levels of organization in the pre-cortical and cortical brain. Pain is a local signal in the body-wide self-regulatory system. What pain signifies is a disequilibrium in homeodynamic interoception.<sup>6</sup> Pain is the result of the whole living body being engaged in a process of homeodynamic self-regulation. Any and all local sensations of pain arise in the context of a holistic embodied subjectivity, one whose deviation from a balanced level of permissible excitation makes the local sensation feel the way it does. These feelings command actions that lead to the restoration of homeodynamic equilibrium.<sup>7</sup> This view of pain gives a biologically grounded explanation of why an organism's being able to feel pain is adaptive. The functional role of pain is to help you protect your body.

Another plausible candidate for why we feel pain is that it helps us detect damage. This latter view struggles to explain some peculiar features of pain experience; by contrast, the homeodynamic imperative view does much better. First, we often feel pains that aren't indexed to occurrent bodily damage but only potential damage; for example, when I step on something sharp and feel the pain but don't press down with my foot hard enough to damage the outer dermal layer, or the pain of a fire's heat before I actually burn my hand (Klein, 2015, 2). Second, there are manifold cases of severe bodily damage occurring but no onset of pain for some time afterwards. So, pain and damage seem to be doubly dissociable. But if pain is a homeodynamic command to protect the body, then we can understand both of the peculiar cases. In the case where there is pain without damage, the pain commands protection as a preventative measure. In the case where pain is absent in the

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<sup>5</sup> Phenomenological philosophers concerned with pain have glossed this phenomenon as obviously sensory in nature (e.g. Geniusas 2020, 44) and justify this through adverting to a Husserlian approach to phenomenological description that, "is possible only if it places in brackets the accomplishments we come across in the science of pain" (Geniusas 2020, 14). By understanding pain's biological role through its type-identification as a homeodynamic (rather than sensory) affect, we come to understand its phenomenal character as a component of the existential predicament of an embodied milieu. This kind of disagreement about methodology will also bear on my positive characterization of pain's intentionality, for which see below (§3).

<sup>6</sup> This extended network of nerve fibers that innervate the entire body sends afferent signals of many sorts to the brain, pain being only one.

<sup>7</sup> I will interpret Buddhist philosophers as arguing that the very process of homeodynamic self-regulation is itself a subtle and pervasive form of suffering. If that is so, then it looks like local pains are themselves specific and obvious instances of a more general existential predicament, one that situates the embodied subject in a world of suffering. See §4.

presence of severe bodily damage, the pain only sets in once the subject has had a window of time to get themselves out of harm's way.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 The buddhist world of *dukkha*

Buddhist philosophers have been centrally concerned with the problem of pain and suffering for thousands of years. The main term here is *dukkha*. It can be translated in different ways: pain, suffering, unsatisfactoriness, stress, etc. The term means different things in different contexts, and it is this plasticity that I want to focus on presently (cf. Heim, 2021).

### 2.1 Some basics

As a way of drilling down into some of the various shades of meaning of *dukkha*, consider this important passage from the first discourse the Buddha gave to his former ascetic companions after he attained liberation: "Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of *dukkha*: birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair are *dukkha*; association with the unloved is *dukkha*; separation from the loved is *dukkha*; not getting what is wanted is *dukkha*. *In short, the five clinging-aggregates are dukkha*" (SN V, 421; Bodhi, 2000, 1841). Most of the list seems fairly straightforward. However, the last clause (in italics) does not seem to obviously follow from those that precede it even though it is listed as a kind of summary that is meant to briefly explain the more expansive list that came before it.

I will analyze this passage in the next subsection. For now, we can note that from a Buddhist philosophical perspective, "...pain can be seen as something greater than a localized sensation of hurt. As a sensibility and a state of consciousness that overwhelms the whole person, pain gives the whole person power over the hurt: what one does with pain can affect pain itself" (Gomez, 2007, 101). This expansive conception of pain is normally explicated in terms of three kinds of *dukkha*. Here is a brief summary from a discourse in the Saṃyutta Nikāya: "Bhikkhus, there are these three kinds of suffering. What three? Suffering due to pain, suffering due to formations, suffering due to change. These are the three kinds of suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path is to be developed for direct knowledge of these three kinds of suffering, for the full understanding of them, for their utter destruction, for their abandoning" (SN V, 56; Bodhi, 2000, 1561). This tripartite breakdown features in a few other discourses as well (e.g. SN IV, 259; DN III, 216); however, the suttas remain strangely quiet about how we should understand the details of this three-part schema of *dukkha*.

<sup>8</sup> Obviously, there is more that could be said here. I am unable to go into more detail on account of space. For a nice overview of these and other related issues, see the chapters and responses in Aydede (2005).

## 2.2 Three levels of *dukkha*

To unpack the relationship between all these different sorts of *dukkha* we turn to Buddhaghosa's commentarial gloss: "Herein, bodily and mental, painful feeling are called *intrinsic suffering* because of their individual essence, their name, and their painfulness. [Bodily and mental] pleasant feeling are called *suffering in change* because they are a cause for the arising of pain when they change (MN I 303). Equanimous feeling and the remaining formations of the three planes are called *suffering due to formations* because they are oppressed by rise and fall" (Vis 499, XVI 35). Let's explore each of these levels in turn.

The first level is *dukkha-dukkha* which is suffering that is obvious but also infrequent. It includes the *dukkha* of bodily pain, mental anguish, old age, sickness, death, etc. Thus, this level of *dukkha* embraces both physical pain and what we ordinarily think of as psychological suffering. Even so, Buddhist philosophers of every stripe make a strong distinction between physical pain (*dukkha*) and pleasure (*sukha*) on the one hand and psychological pain (*domanassa*) and pleasure (*somanassa*) on the other (cf. DN II 313) (Kachru, 2021). This strong distinction between mental and physical pain is echoed by Āryadeva in second chapter of the *Catuhśataka*: "For the privileged pain is mental; For others it is physical. Day after day both types of pain afflict this world" (CŚ II.8, Lang, 2003, 139). In his commentary on this verse, Candrakīrti adds the following explanation:

Pain is indeed twofold: physical and mental. In this world privileged people have all the prerequisites for pleasure. They come from the best families and have great wealth. But they have many desires and they suffering constant mental pain from not getting what they want. They suffer also from their abundant envy because the high positions they covet are difficult to get. Physical pain affects those from poor families who have inferior food, bedding, clothing, and shelter because of their low status (CŚ-ṭ §135, Lang, 2003, 139).

There are three important points to mention here that lay the groundwork for what I will say in §4. First, there is an important connection between the kind of psychological suffering we undergo when we live privileged lives and the way we tend to generate habitual reactions to physical pain. Namely, as we become more accustomed to comfort and luxury, we become very attached to those boons and increasingly aversive to anything remotely unpleasant. Second, physical pain and psychological pain instantiate a kind, they are both forms of *dukkha* because they afflict those who undergo them. Heim (2021) notes, "Feelings can be, we might say, indelibly tied up and intertwined with the psychological processes that shape or control the nature of the response, and sometimes it is a useful mode of teaching to describe them in such terms" (94). Finally, it looks like this first level of *dukkha* is fairly exhaustive. And yet, the Buddhist philosophers believe that there are two more levels of *dukkha*.

The second level of *dukkha* is *viparinama-dukkha*: the *dukkha* of change and impermanence.

This kind of *dukkha* is more subtle and pervasive than the first and occurs frequently. The main examples are being separated from loved ones and being united



with those we hate. Even the pleasant situations in life eventually transform into unpleasant situations: “It is this transformation of pleasure into pain that gives the suffering of change its name. Pleasure, here, is seen as worthy of desire, but dangerous and to be discarded since it is conducive to suffering” (Harris, 2014, 247). You will be, at one point or another, united with that which you despise, and separated from that which you love. This kind of suffering makes a mockery of pleasures because it forces the subject to note the utter inevitability of pleasure changing into pain. This kind of wide-scope consideration of inevitability, coupled with the third form of *dukkha* – to be explored presently – provides a hermeneutical lens through which the meaning and value of physical pain is interpreted by subjects undergoing it. We can now start to see the Buddhist philosophical motivations for eschewing any strong distinction between pain and suffering.

The third form of *dukkha* is the most important for our considerations because it connects the Buddhist philosophical project directly to our earlier discussion of pain as a homeodynamic affect. This third kind of *dukkha* is called *saṅkhāra-dukkha*, the *dukkha* of conditionality. This form of *dukkha* is the subtlest and most pervasive, it happens constantly. It is equated with the five aggregates affected by clinging. The five aggregates (*khandha*-s) are a pervasive scheme for thinking about the basic processes that constitute the human being. They are: *rūpa* or the physical form and bodily sensitivity that makes our body not just a physical object but a living sensitive being. Second is *vedanā*, ‘feelings’ or ‘sensations’: this is the part of the mind that makes it so that things we encounter are experienced having a hedonic valence. Objects are situated before us in a hodological space (Ganeri, 2017) which gives them a *feel* of being either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (Heim, 2021). Third is *saṃjñā/saññā* which is often translated as ‘perception’. This is misleading because modern uses of the term ‘perception’ do not adequately capture the functional profile of this aggregate. Better is ‘recognition,’ ‘apperception,’ or even ‘categorization’: all of these terms denote the capacity of this aggregate to organize the contents of perception according to equivalence classes, allowing us to apprehend perceptual particulars instantiations of kinds. The fourth aggregate, *saṃskāra/saṅkhāra*, is difficult to translate and define. I prefer ‘formations’ as this captures two important functions of this aggregate. The first is that this aggregate gathers the other mental processes together into an reactively functional unity. Second, this aggregate is both the generator of action and the result of action, *saṅkhāra*-s are both formed *and* forming. They are habitual reaction patterns, the part of the mind that reacts to experience thereby conditioning subsequent moments of experience in a way that further entrenches those very reaction habits. Finally, there is *viññāna/viññāna* which is often translated as ‘consciousness’. ‘Discernment,’ and ‘discrimination’ are also apt for they capture the *vi*- prefix as dividing and making distinctions and the *ñāna* component which means knowledge. Together, these five aggregates function cooperatively to constitute the temporal flow of embodied mental life.<sup>9</sup> We are constantly subjected to *dukkha* because the very fabric of the mental continuum is fraught with

<sup>9</sup> When Buddhist philosophers of different stripes reject the existence of a soul or self (*ātman*), they do so by explaining that anything the self might do in terms of the activities of the aggregates (Smith 2021).



habits of appropriation (*upadana*) and craving (*tanhā*), creating cognitive dissonance and subtle forms of agitation that pervade experience with a tacit existential malaise.

This kind of *dukkha* can be understood in the context of another important discourse from the suttas, purportedly the third discourse given by the Buddha, called the or *Adittapariyaya Sutta* or *Fire Sermon* (SN IV 19). The profundity of this discourse is in the way it uses the image of fire to characterize basic processes of sensory functioning:

Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what, bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, I say (SN IV 19; Bodhi, 2000, 1143).

The most philosophically relevant part of this passage for our purposes is that all the types of burning, all the *dukkha* there is – lust, hatred, delusion (the three unwholesome roots), birth, aging, death (primary examples of *viparinama dukkha*), and sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, despair (*dukkha-dukkha*) – are processed constantly in the very action of the embodied perceptual system making sensory contact (*phassa*) with its world. This kind of suffering is totalizing: “conditioned suffering is holistic, drawing attention to the situatedness of a particular sensation within an impoverished cognitive and perceptual system that functions under the influence of ignorance and craving” (Harris, 2014, 250). The burning of *dukkha* is omnipresent in the most basic sensory-motor interactions with one’s environment that give the organism the kind of information it needs to even have explicit feelings (*vedanā*) about it. It is this relentless self-regulation of mind-world interaction that is at the root of all misery. The Buddhist claim is that the experience of physical pain is always had through an existential lens of psychological suffering. As Harris, (2014) explains, “all *saṃsāric* experience is contaminated by anxiety and is unsatisfactory in being part of an impoverished system of pain” (252). Further, the suffering is not just explicit and obvious suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*), rather it is a pervasive and subtle form of suffering bound up with the organism’s incessant need to self-regulate.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of the homeodynamic view of pain we canvassed at the outset, the Buddhist view can be understood as making the claim that the very process of homeodynamic self-regulation is a kind of *dukkha*. Since on this view, pain is a species of homeodynamic affect, it follows that pain is itself a kind of *dukkha*, where *dukkha* here means a kind of suffering that is psychological and existential. It is psychological in the sense that the significance of pain for the sentient being is part of what it is to feel that pain. It is existential because pain plays a pervasive motivational role in our actions across the whole lifespan.

<sup>10</sup> Here my analysis should be contrasted with Russon’s who claims of the deepest level of *dukkha* that it indicates the presence of more “active attitudes rooted in our beliefs and desires” (2016, 184). As should be clear from my reconstruction of the three levels, on the basis of the commentarial literature, this more active way of understanding the third level of *dukkha* is to over-intellectualize its nature.

### 3 The intentional structure of pain

In this section, I will argue for the second premise of my main argument; namely, that homeodynamic affects have horizontal and not just object intentionality.

#### 3.1 On the supposed uninformative nature of pain

One of the intriguing features of pains is that they seem to be uninformative, they don't tell us anything about their causes. Consider the following passage from the outset of Klein's book (2015, 2):

Although the pain in my ankle motivates me, it gives me few clues as to why it's actually there. I know, of course, that I sprained my ankle, and that the sprain causes my pain. That is not information carried by the pain, however: I only know my ankle was sprained because I turned it a bit, and the next day it looked like an angry grapefruit. That's good evidence that I sprained it. But I could be wrong. My physician took time to rule out alternative causes, and that was not an absurd thing to do. When I can't infer causes, I often have no idea why I'm feeling pain: a mysterious backache, say, gives no indication whatsoever about what is causing it.

The sparsity of information contained in a pain experience helps it discharge its biological role in an efficient way: "The biological role of pain is a homeostatic one. Like hunger or thirst, pain is there to get you to act in ways that bring your body back into balance. Returning to balance only requires taking the right sort of actions. Your body doesn't need to tell you why—that information would only get in the way" (Klein, 2015, 3–4). I agree with this assessment as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. This way of thinking about how pains enter awareness is too restrictive and distorts the intentional structure of pain experience. Pain does not enter phenomenal awareness only as an object of our attention. As a homeodynamic sensation, pain arises as a local perturbation of a truly complex milieu of bodily affects. The feeling of pain is not *just* a local sensation in some part of the body that requires protecting. It is also something that has happened to *me* as a person (Smith, 2022). The holistic sense of self that is disturbed by the local perturbation gives us an avenue into thinking of the intentional structure of pain in a more expansive way, one that makes the phenomenal character of pain more informative than it can be under the narrower construal of pain's intentional structure.

#### 3.2 Two species of intentionality and the informativeness of pain

I begin with some observations about the phenomenal character of experience and the special nature of homeodynamic sensations as elements of our experience. First, distinguish between the subjective character of a phenomenally conscious experience and its qualitative character (Kriegel, 2009). The qualitative character of experience is that aspect of experience that makes the world seem a certain way to a conscious subject. For example, the redness of the red apple

is the qualitative character of my phenomenally conscious visual experience of the apple. The subjective character of experience is that aspect of it that obtains regardless of what the experience is about. Subjective character is an invariant feature of all experiences. That is, the subjective character of experience makes its content manifest to me from a first-personal perspective. It is what makes my experiences *for me* and your experiences *for you* (Zahavi, 2005).

Homeodynamic affects contribute to the phenomenal character of an experience qualitatively *and* subjectively. When pain arises, it distresses us and this tends to draw our attention to it. One is aware *of* pain as having a location in the body; the pain has a qualitative character. The pain is also a change in and *of me*. When I say, 'Ouch, that hurts!' in response to the arising of the local pain, I am expressing a thought to the effect that something about *me*, as the subject of the experience, has changed (Soteriou, 2013, ch. 3). The dual role that homeodynamic affects play in structuring our phenomenally conscious experiences has consequences for our understanding of the intentional structure of pain experience.

Consider the distinction between two forms of intentionality utilized by Phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty: that is, between object intentionality and horizontal intentionality (or act intentionality and operative intentionality). In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues, in critiquing Kant's theory of judgment, that, "...the unity of the world, prior to being posited by knowledge through an explicit act of identification is lived as already accomplished or as already there" (1945/2012, lxxxi). A distinction is being made between an explicit act and a prior unity of self and world that is the condition for the possibility of the act; these are distinct but related forms of intentionality. Act intentionality is "...the intentionality of our judgments and of our voluntary decisions..." (lxxxii), while operative intentionality is, "the intentionality that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge" (ibid.). Act intentionality has an explicit object which is the articulate content of the intentional attitude. Operative intentionality is our holistically embodied openness to the world that allows us to entertain particular act intentions.

Merleau-Ponty notes that this distinction has its origins in the work of Husserl, both of whom describe this more fundamental form of intentionality as *horizontal* in virtue of the way we remain persistently oriented towards the world through our bodily poise, regardless of what particular content might be manifest to us in a specific act of perception. Merleau-Ponty describes this kind of embodied orientation as, "...the natural movement that throws us into our tasks, our worries, our situation, and our *familiar horizons*" (1945/2012, 83–4, emphasis mine). For Husserl, this notion of horizontal intentionality is operative in his work on static phenomenology in *Ideas I* (1913/1982) and perhaps most substantially, in his last mature work, the *Crisis* (1954/1970).

Husserl describes the horizontal nature of object intentionality in evocative terms: "What is now perceived and what is more or less clearly co-present and determinate (or at least somewhat determinate), are penetrated and surrounded by an *obscurely intended to horizon of indeterminate actuality...an empty mist of obscure*

*indeterminateness is populated with intuited possibilities or likelihoods; and only the 'form' of the indeterminate surroundings are infinite, the misty and never full determinable horizon is necessarily there*" (Husserl, *Ideas I*, §27, 49, emphasis in original).<sup>11</sup> Husserl revisits a version of this argument in the *Crisis* as well when he invokes the notion of kinesthesia: "The actual kinestheses here lie within the system kinesthetic capacity, which is correlated with the system of possible following events harmoniously belonging to it. This is, then, the intentional background of every straightforward ontic certainty of a presented thing" (Husserl, *Crisis*, §47, 162). Husserl then distinguishes between an internal and external horizon for a particular object of perception. The internal horizon is the non-manifest profiles of the object that are implicated in the immediately present profile that we intuit when we perceive the object from our limited embodied perspective. The external horizon is the object's situatedness in a field of other objects whose distribution and value give the perceived object its context and meaning.<sup>12</sup> The idea that we need to keep in mind here is that a condition of possibility for the salience of an object in an act of perception is a kinesthetic capacity to be oriented to the object's absent profiles and its situatedness in a field of value and meaning that makes the particular salience of that object's profile manifest to us in an act of perception.

These phenomenological considerations of the horizontal intentionality of the embodied subject give us a way of thinking more carefully about the intentionality of pain. When we attend *to* a pain and note that it is uninformative with respect to its cause, we are taking an objective or act intentional attitude towards the pain. But the pain is itself a local perturbation of a holistic bodily subject who is situated in a meaningful world. In this section, up until now, my analysis has emphasized Merleau-Ponty's intellectual debt to Husserl's thought. But important differences begin to show when we apply their analysis of intentionality to the phenomenon of pain. To see this consider *Geniusas*' (2014, 2020, Ch. 2) excellent Husserlian analysis of pain's intentionality. He argues that in pain experience "...one is first and foremost absorbed in one's experience and only secondarily conscious of one's body, conceived as the object of pain experience" (45). He then concludes that the fact of this absorption entails that, "in the case of pain, we are faced not with intentional consciousness, but with a feeling-sensation" (*ibid*). So, on this view, pain becomes

<sup>11</sup> While the example here is predominantly perceptual, Husserl later on the same page invokes temporal horizons as having an infinite extension from now to the past and future – a topic which he takes up at length later (Husserl 2008). He also invokes the phenomenon of empathy as well as the field of language and meaning as defining horizontal intentionality (*Crisis* §70, 243 and Appendix IV, 358–9, respectively). I cannot treat of these aspects of Husserl's examination of horizontal intentionality. For the sake of brevity, I contain my analysis to the perceptual case, which also harmonizes with Merleau-Ponty's analysis. This also makes the connection to pain and suffering more concrete.

<sup>12</sup> For a nice summary of this line of argument, see Zahavi (2003, 96–7). Merleau-Ponty describes this aspect of horizontal intentionality in the following way: "Each object, then, is the mirror of all the others. When I see the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not merely the qualities that are visible from my location, but also those that the fireplace, the walls, and the table can 'see'. The back of my lamp is merely the face that it 'shows' to the fireplace [...] The fully realized object is translucent, it is shot through from all sides by an infinity of present gazes intersecting in its depth and leaving nothing there hidden" (1945/2012, 71).

a ‘stratified’ phenomenon: in its most basic case, it is a non-intentional ‘sensory feeling’, but once it modifies our attention and recruits our emotional response it becomes intentional as an emotional response to the world. I think this assessment is incorrect. As Grüny explains, “wherever the pain is situated and whether it has a perceptible cause or not, it is not a wordless event [...] We respond to being affected in a certain way, and this response contributes to how the world we encounter is perceived” (209, 125). Further, when we type-identify pain as a homeodynamic affect rather than a mere sensory feeling, we gain the conceptual resources to understand the primary feeling of pain as having a motor-intentionality that is discharged by its motivational role – embodied in its imperative content – to protect the affected part of the body (cf. Martínez, 2011).<sup>13</sup>

This more holistic, horizontal and operative intentionality is also at work in our pain experience for it gives context and meaning to the local experience. When we are in pain, the world shows up as altered because our action-possibilities are limited by our pain (Svenaeus, 2015). The actions commanded by a pain are primarily to protect the part of the body that needs to heal. But that kind of action has a holistic impact on the embodied subject’s action-potentials with respect to the world at large (Adams, 2020). Thus, granting that the particular qualitative content of a pain doesn’t tell us anything about what might have caused it – here I grant Klein’s claim that pains are uninformative *in that respect*—pains are still powerfully informative about our relation to the world in another vital way. Our pains, and the actions of protection that they motivate, condition our sense of what the world is like for us. Pains are informative because they give us a sense of what is possible for us and thereby alter our sense of what is relevant and salient in the world around us (Carel & Kidd, 2020).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Geniusas’s work on this subject is exceptional and thorough. For reasons of space, I am only able to address these worries in a preliminary way. Part of the issue here is that Geniusas’s Husserlian analysis is embedded in an attempt to trace the history of Phenomenological analyses of pain’s intentionality; he is sensitive to Husserl’s desire to synthesize the works of philosophers like Brentano and Stumpf. For more, see Geniusas (2014). As should be clear, my reconstruction of Merleau-Ponty’s account of horizontal intentionality, as applied to pain, shows that we should not think of bodily affect as a non-intentional sensation, but as part of a holistic embodied milieu that orients the subject in a motor-intentional arc towards the world. I think Husserl would agree, but I am framing the point critically here as a response to Geniusas’s way of interpreting Husserl.

<sup>14</sup> My critique of Klein’s imperativism in this section is usefully contrasted with an important phenomenological critique of Klein from Miyahara (2021). Miyahara notes that imperative theories of pain “overcome the objective concept of the body by acknowledging its inherent intelligence” (307). But he complains that this intelligence is still too dualistic on account of, “the body motivat[ing] the disembodied agent into protective actions by communicating with it in terms of mental contents” (ibid). Here we are agreed that “pain-coping does not involve a dualistic separation between the body and the agent [...]” Rather, in pain experience, there is a “form of habitual behaviour, i.e., a patterned embodied response to situations shaped through the agent’s history of engagement with the natural and socio-cultural environment (ibid). I have tried to reconstruct my view in a way that anticipates and avoids these kinds of concerns. That being said, I do not agree with Miyahara when he argues that cultural conditioning con-

## 4 Pain and suffering

Just as our object-oriented intentional relation to pains must be understood in the context of a holistic embodied horizontal intentional relation between subject and world, here I argue, as per the third premise of my main argument, that homeodynamic affects like pain are partially constitutive of a holistic existential suffering. To flesh out this view, I explore some arguments from the Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophers Āryadeva and Candrakīrti.

### 4.1 On the distinction between pain and suffering

Philosophers tend to be quite keen on strongly distinguishing between pain and suffering. For example, Corns argues for a strong distinction while acknowledging that we have good reason to think that hurt or suffering might be constitutive of pain: “This intuition may be hard to shake. For those of us who have never experienced pains that are not painful (at least not consciously), the very idea of them may remain dubitable. I think the strength of this intuition can be explained away by acknowledging that what is most important to us about our occurrent pains is their painfulness” (Corns, 2014, 364). She then adds that, “Those who hold that pain is essentially painful have made an understandable mistake: they have confused importance with essence” (365; see also Klein, 2015, 48). Klein helpfully distinguishes between the primary and secondary motivational force of pain. On this view, the primary motivational force of a pain is derived from its content, which is the sensation in the part of the body, that tells us to protect it. Anything else is secondary and thus extrinsic to pain (Klein, 2015, 45). This includes suffering, which is not part of pain at all: “...suffering is not a feature of pain: it is a response *to* pain. This means that suffering is only contingently connected to pain, and hence that pains only contingently hurt and feel bad” (Klein, 2015, 46–7).<sup>15</sup> The supposed contingency of the connection between pain and suffering rests on a number of arguments, not all of which I can canvass here. Instead, I focus on one problematic claim made

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Footnote 14 (continued)

stitutes a worry for imeprativists like Klein (cf. Miyahara 2021, 306). The fact that we can learn to react to pain in different ways according to cultural scripts is no argument against the fact that pain’s primary biological role is to motivate the subject to protect the part of the body that hurts. For a related line of argument focusing on the role of imagination and metaphor in making sense of pain, see Miglio and Stanier (2022).

<sup>15</sup> Note that the Buddhist philosophers we looked at previously would deny this latter claim. That is, they would claim that it is perfectly consistent to say that a bodily pain (*dukkha*) hurts but that it does not cause psychological anguish (*domanassa*). So, the move from pain, to hurt, to suffering seems a bit rushed. Klein collapses the hurtfulness of pains into the category of suffering. The Buddhists give us the conceptual resources to resist that move. For an astute analysis of the category of psychological pain in Indian Buddhism, see Kachru (2021), in particular: “And though the word “*domanassa*” was available to be used alongside many other words to enumerate and convey the degree and kinds of distress that comprise the suffering criterial of our way of being in the world, we find it very early used pairwise with *dukkha* to comprehend the totality of possible forms of pain, physical and psychological” (133).

by Klein that will motivate my return to the Buddhist philosophical lifeworld in the next subsection.

This problematic claim has to do with the way in which pains figure as a species in the genus of homeodynamic sensations. Klein notes that, “Homeostatic demands can’t be put off indefinitely. Hunger signifies a state that needs to be resolved sooner or later, on pain of death. Few demands will thus outrank severe hunger, for the obvious reason that most other things you might want require being alive to get. Whatever your other desires, then, the homeostatic sensations must remain non-optional parts of the motivational milieu” (Klein, 2015, 15). Such sensations, however severe, always play an important biological role: the maintenance of homeodynamic equilibrium. When we feel pangs of hunger, we don’t just experience a command to eat. We experience a command to eat, *or else...*the motivational primes of homeodynamic feelings command *on pain of death*.<sup>16</sup> The mortality constraint on meeting the commands of homeodynamic imperatives is part of what gives them such motivational force, even when the feelings are non-life threatening. We know just by feeling a homeodynamic sensation that such a feeling will be or could be life threatening if we do not act on it.

An immediate objection arises here. One might argue that infants who feel the pain of hunger have no knowledge whatsoever of any death threat that their hunger represents. Arguably, the interpolation of a knowledge of a threat of death is to over-intellectualize the first-order affective phenomenology of homeodynamic sensations like hunger or pain.<sup>17</sup> It is not necessary for a subject to represent the meaning of first-order affective phenomenology to themselves under the description of a death-threat for the fact of this phenomenology to represent such a threat in virtue of the motivating role of its imperative content. It is perfectly compatible to say that an infant has no explicit knowledge-*that* their hunger represents such a threat. Indeed, such a person does not yet have the cognitive-emotional capacities to represent facts to themselves in this way. But a lack of capacity to represent such a fact does not mean that the fact does not exist. And I submit that these facts do exist, and we first become acquainted with them through feeling our feelings. One can have an implicit, unthematized practical knowledge of their own fragility and finitude in virtue of feeling pains and hungers. Further, the motivational force of these feelings is informative about this threat to the proportion of their intensity.

This pervasive mortality awareness creates a radical existential context within which the commands of local feelings, including pains, are understood and obeyed. It is this existential context that prevents us from keeping pain and suffering distinct. The inevitability of death and the constant fight to self-regulate successfully in order to prevent death, is a powerful form of suffering, one that the Buddhist philosophers

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<sup>16</sup> On this point, Adams (2020) helpfully points out that, “For rational agents, pain has unconscious and/or conscious symbolic punch: not only does it signal bodily dysfunction and environmental misfits; it also signifies that the individual in one degree or another falls short of being a perfect specimen, that the individual is not only vulnerable but mortal. Burning pain not only warns us to take our finger off the hot stove; it is also one face of death!” (279).

<sup>17</sup> My thanks to an anonymous referee, Jennifer Nagel, and Danny Goldstick for pressing me to be clearer on this point.



believe is pervasive. If that is right, then all pain is experienced in the context of an existential form of suffering that provides meaning to that pain and motivational force to its commands.<sup>18</sup>

## 4.2 Āryadeva and Candrakīrti on the deep connection between pain and suffering

In this section, I analyze several arguments from Candrakīrti's commentary on the second chapter of Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*. This chapter constitutes a prolonged philosophical meditation on the relation between pleasure and pain and the way this relation instantiates a kind of pervasive suffering proper to all sentient beings.

Like many Buddhist texts, this chapter takes a rather negative attitude towards the body: "These two – valuing the body and valuing an enemy – are seen to be similar" (CS II.6 cd, Lang, 2003, 138). While the verse is terse, and not entirely helpful, Candrakīrti's commentarial gloss is much more fruitful. Candrakīrti unpacks the verse with the example of the man who once slept in a chariot and was then rescued and given a life of luxury. Candrakīrti notes (CS-ṭ §129, Lang, 2003, 138):

During the hot season, in the middle of the day, a man slept comfortably in a chariot. The king saw him by chance and took pity on him. Later, when this man was reclining on soft cushions, he could not sleep because a single mustard seed had touched him. It is just like this when someone is brought up with the greatest comforts. The more the body is indulged with pleasures' prerequisites, the more it becomes a vessel for pain.

The example asks us to consider the kinds of attitudes that we adopt in interpreting and reacting to unpleasant sensations that arise at different stages of life.<sup>19</sup> These attitudes are inseparable from our experience of pain. For this reason, Gomez notes that: "One may be tempted to dismiss some of the Buddhist reflections on pain as overlooking the apparently fundamental difference between pain and suffering, but one may also propose that the averred confusion is in fact a statement regarding the role of suffering in the processing of pain" (Gomez, 2007, 115). The salient point here is that our capacity to feel pain does not arise simply as a matter of biological facts about how the body self-regulates. The body is a living subject situated in a cultural and historical context that proves a hermeneutical architecture for how pain is felt when it arises (Miglio & Stanier, 2022; Miyahara, 2021). Here,

<sup>18</sup> These points are orthogonal to another important line of argument for decreasing the conceptual distance between pain and suffering. By distinguishing between transient, acute, and chronic pain, we can see how feeling pain in a chronic case would entail that feeling pain is a mode of suffering. However, my aim here is to illustrate the implicit way in which existential suffering is present as a background condition of the biological facts of even ordinary non-acute and non-chronic pains. My thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this line of argument. For more on this, see Leder (1990, Ch. 3) and Geniusas (2020, Ch. 4). Also, see de Haro (2016) for an astute analysis of how different forms and intensities of pain shape the structure of attention.

<sup>19</sup> This argument builds on the one we explored earlier in §2 on the physical suffering of the poor and the mental suffering of the privileged (CS II.8 and CS-ṭ §135, Lang 2003, 139).

I am in agreement with Russon when he claims: “In whatever domain a range of possible meanings opens up, possibilities for pain open up and the character of the pain will vary with the character of the domain of meaning ranging from unpleasant sensations felt in my body, through the emotional agony of existential longings and torments, to the depths of an unmasterable anxiety that challenges my very ability to maintain a coherent relationship to meaning in general” (Russon, 2016, 189).<sup>20</sup> Our habit of transforming pain into suffering is deeply entrenched and ramifies at multiple levels of description in our lives. Thus, the question of differentiating them conceptually becomes more complicated in light of the psychological dynamics that go into our capacity to feel in the first place.

This point comes out nicely in some recent work on chronic pain. Svenaeus, (2015) argues that, “First and foremost, pain appears to be a kind of signal of distress: It hurts, do something about it, stop moving, go to the doctor, etc. But pain can, nevertheless, in its more penetrating and chronic forms, develop into something which permeates our entire experience. Pain, in these forms, determines what can possibly appear for us in the world around us, and in what ways it does so” (111). When pain starts to restructure our world, it can become negatively transformative (Paul, 2015). The contingencies of pain can have a profound re-shaping effect on our sense of possibility (Carel & Kidd, 2020, 175):

The structure of one’s experience – of time, social spaces, one’s body – all are transformed in fundamental and irreversible ways: one now suffers chronic back pain; one’s mobility is restricted; one’s sole focus is getting rid of the pain – and so on. The attentional focus demands that one give cognitive and emotional as well as practical attention to the accident and its consequences, thinking about it during one’s time in hospital, then again during rehab, then coping with an emerging realisation that the pain will become a permanent feature of one’s life.

This kind of ‘sensory suffering’ shapes the course of one’s life when it comes on (Kauppinen, 2020). But it is also inevitable. This inevitability makes pain a central part of the narrative of life. And this leads to suffering and paradox.

Pain is on the one hand something vital for keeping us robust in the face of a world that will eventually kill us. But it is also the way in which the world ends up killing us. As Adams points out (2020, 285):

[...] pain is both a plot complicator and a plot stopper. Pain and suffering may be a condition of the possibility of having an interesting rather than a trivial life. And too much of the wrong kind of pain in the wrong conditions can seemingly destroy any possibility of positive meaning [...] The ambivalence of pain is treacherous insofar as the same pain can bring on our finest hour or become the occasion of our deepest ruin. Paradoxically, the very worst pain and suffering is what most cries out to be made sense of, and the very worst

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<sup>20</sup> Though, I think Buddhist philosophers – and here I am inclined to agree with them – would argue that this anxiety is precisely masterable. More on this briefly in the conclusion.

pain and suffering is what stumps, stalemates, and/or destroys our capacity to make positive sense of anything at all.

Pain will and does complicate the plot of the story of our lives, so much so, that it is a central guiding element to the plot of life's story.<sup>21</sup> Further, it is the oscillation between reacting in different ways to the different meanings of pain in our life that is the root of existential misery for Buddhist philosophers. Pain isn't just a piece of the plot; it shapes the very ways in which events unfold and helps provide the meaning of those events. Our Buddhist philosophers take this point even further in their emphasis on the structure of our time-consciousness.

In the following verse, we see the time-scale for interpretation expand to a lifetime. Āryadeva says: "As time passes, pain increases. Consequently, pleasure is experienced as alien to the body" (CŚ II.10, Lang, 2003, 141). The point here is about the way the aging process works and how, in the time of life, the prevalence of pain becomes increasingly central. This inevitable increase in prevalence is a kind of suffering. As Candrakīrti notes in his commentary, "As the body matures during childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age, we see an increase of pain but not of pleasure. Pleasure retreats into the background as the body matures and pain comes to the foreground. Consequently, we see that pain alone belongs to the body and pleasure is alien" (CŚ-ṭ §143, Lang, 2003, 141). Candrakīrti further expands this gloss with a poignant example of travelling down a long road with dwindling provisions: "Day after day, the pain of exhaustion and the anxiety over the journey's diminishing provisions become more acute for the traveler on a long road. Similarly, the longer foolish ordinary people live, the more they acquire the pains of old age and move closer to the death" (CŚ-ṭ §144, Lang, 2003, 141). These passages are making the argument that physical pain has long-term psychological consequences that structure (or ought to structure) our conception of what pain is and how it conditions our experience. Pain is not just something that commands us to protect a part of the body. Pain is an irreducible component of the phenomenology of time consciousness. Pain's increased prevalence over the course of a lifetime is a core component of the aging process. These wide-scope points about the prevalence of pain to the psychological and existential predicaments of aging and death suggest that the relationship between pain and suffering is not merely contingent. This relation structures the narrative flow of life.

It may be helpful to transpose an argument recently offered by Chris Mole, (2022) in the context of a discussion of the moral psychology of attention into our current considerations. Mole argues that, "Attention and salience are distinct:

<sup>21</sup> Here my view should be contrasted with Geniusas's (2020). I disagree that "pain isolates the sufferer within the field of presence, which the sufferer experiences as disconnected from the past and the future" (98). On the contrary, what I am arguing is that our experience of pain marks out the articulation of time in the course of a life narrative not only at the end, thus motivating the paradox pointed out by Adams (2020) but that temporal features of the phenomenology of chronic pain conditions are also implicitly present in the way that ordinary pains represent the inevitable march of time in the course of a fragile life. Pain marks the passage of biological time (cf. Miglio and Stainer 2022 for some remarks in this direction couched at the socio-cultural – rather than, biological – level).

we can pay attention to that which is not salient, and can experience a thing as salient whilst withholding our attention from it, but the connection between these two phenomena is not merely contingent. There cannot be a propensity without there being something to which one is prone, and so—since salience essentially involves a propensity for the receipt of attention—there cannot be salience without there being such a thing as attention" (140). I am arguing for something similar regarding pain and suffering. Pain and suffering are distinct: we can feel physical pain and not suffer for it (more on this possibility from a Buddhist perspective, below) and we can suffer in ways that are not physically painful (cf. Kachru, 2021). But the connection between pain and suffering is not merely contingent. If Mole is right that 'there cannot be a propensity without there being something to which one is prone – and surely, he is right about this – then, since pain essentially involves a propensity for the generation of suffering (not even the cases of pain asymbolia speak against this), there cannot be pain without there being such a thing as suffering.

For Buddhist philosophers, the subtlest and most pervasive form of suffering, *samskāra duḥkha*, is the suffering born of the constant conditionality that sustains the stream of sentience across a lifetime. It is the fact that life itself is a relentless process of self-regulation, which we have already seen, is the biological basis for pain. In the following verse, Āryadeva characterizes this continuity in terms of the various daily activities that animate daily life and the constant exertion that it takes to sustain them. He claims: "When there is no activity on earth that does not involve exertion, it is entirely unreasonable to say that working is pleasant!" (C2 II.18, Lang, 2003, 147). The worry here comes in response to an objection that alleges that when we work hard for things that their accomplishment constitutes a kind of pleasure worth wanting. Āryadeva's response is unconvincing with respect to the objection that motivated it. However, as a way of thinking about the subtle and pervasive form of *duḥkha*, I think this is an important characterization worth reflecting on. Candrakīrti continues (CŚ-ṭ §173, Lang, 2003, 147):

Here on earth we do not see any activity, sleeping, etc., that does not involve exertion. When someone becomes weak, he cannot lift even his own arms and legs without effort and someone else must carry him. When someone is able-bodied, he does not understand the pain involved in such activities as sleeping, stretching out, and contracting arms and legs. Consequently, he imagines that such activities are pleasant. After getting up every day, many activities are done to keep the body alive but not for pleasure. For this reason, working is not pleasant.

The very facts of living and acting in this world constitute a kind of exertion, a constant process of upkeep and toil to maintain the basic conditions of life. Biologically speaking, this is the task of homeodynamic self-regulation. This is the embodied process of interoceptive feedback that undergirds and motivates all the activities that Candrakīrti lists in his commentary. Physical pain is one type of sensation that we can feel as a result of this self-regulation process. But from a Buddhist point of view, the very process of self-regulation, and indeed, self-construction (*ahaṃkāra*), is itself a subtle and pervasive form of suffering.

When we suffer, it is not always explicit and obvious to us that we are doing so. But we suffer nonetheless. If the genus is suffering, then the species is also suffering. Since the incessant toil of homeodynamic self-regulation is suffering, it follows that pain is also suffering. Pain cannot be understood apart from the role it plays in our suffering as finite embodied beings drawn out in time and eventually extinguished.

## 5 Conclusions: a solution to the problem of suffering?

I began by laying out an argument about the nature of pain and its intentional structure and relation to suffering. That argument took the following form:

1. Pains are homeodynamic affects
  2. Homeodynamic affects have horizontal and not just object intentionality.
  3. Homeodynamic affects are partially constitutive of existential suffering.
- C. Pains have horizontal intentionality and are partially constitutive of existential suffering.

Feeling pain provides us with a meaningful, robust, and holistic intentional relation to our world. Further, through being intentionally directed to the world in a painful way, we endure existential suffering.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that I have said nothing about the solution to this problem, though certainly the Buddhist philosophers we have explored here have many important things to say about it. As I noted earlier (cf. SN V 56), Buddhist philosophers are of the view that *dukkha* can be ‘utterly destroyed’. Yet they also maintain that physical pain remains for such a liberated being. Does this mean that there is in fact that Buddhists must hold, *pace* my view, that pain is not constitutive of suffering? I do not think so. As Gomez notes, for Buddhist philosophers: “The possibility of overcoming physical pain is usually considered in mythical and philosophical terms and dependent on (1) control of the awareness of pain and (2) liberation from the cycle of rebirth” (2007, 104). This can make the goal seem somewhat asymptotic from a pragmatic perspective and also indicates that what life is, always and for the most part, is a life of suffering. That should not deter us, however, from making steps to further what the Buddhist tradition offers in helping us understand the predicaments of pain and suffering and the possibility of their eradication.

When we understand the Buddhist project on its own terms, it becomes clear that what it takes to disentangle suffering from physical pain is something transformative (Carel & Kidd, 2020; Paul, 2015). Consider an exchange from the *Doṇa Sutta* (AN II 37–39). Here the Buddha is questioned by the Brahmin Doṇa about his visage. Doṇa, having seen the Buddha’s footprints and noticing that there are thousand-spoke wheel icons in the footprints surmises that “Surely could not be the footprints of a human being!” When he asks the Buddha about what he is and what he might become in the next life, the Buddha denies that he is any number of beings, including a human being. He instead claims that he should be remembered simply as a Buddha. This remark is sometimes translated as the claim that: “I should be remembered only as awakened.” The relevant point here is that what it takes to achieve existential

freedom from misery is to transform oneself into another kind of being. This makes the dissociation of physical pain and suffering not so much an issue of conceptual differentiation but radical existential transformation. The reason this distinction matters is that in the ordinary human case, physical pain is a constitutive part of what it is to suffer. To escape this, so claims the Buddha, is to become something else, something so free that one is no longer quite human. Whether this is form of liberation is something worth wanting is a question I cannot answer here.

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