

Pain as the Scaffold of the Lifeworld: Some Reflections on Indian Buddhist Philosophy

Introduction

In this paper, I explore how our experience of pain and suffering structures our salience map of the world. That is, I am interested in the ways in which experiences of bodily pain, and the psychological suffering that they create condition the way the world seems to the embodied subject. The Indian Buddhist philosophers have strong views on this issue. According to them, it is our collective and suffering (*dukkha*)-afflicted intentions (*cetanā*) that prop-up the boundaries of conditioned existence (*saṃsāra*). From a contemporary standpoint, I analyze how these kinds of transcendental views on pain and suffering – as constructing the boundaries of the human lifeworld – might interact with more recent views on pain, in particular Klein's (2015) homeodynamic imperativism about pain. I argue that pain and suffering are not as easily dissociable, in living and in our conceptualizing, as philosophers have tended to think.

I am deeply sympathetic to the view that pain is a homeodynamic affect (rather than a sensory or emotional affect), but am skeptical of the view that the content of the pain imperative tells us nothing about what the world is like, this latter claim being one of the entailments of the *pure* imperativism about pain defended by Klein. The argument I will defend in this paper has 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.

I begin, in §1, with a brief analysis of the conceptual, phenomenological, and empirical motivations for the claim that pain is a homeodynamic affect with imperative content. This section constitutes my argument for the first premise of my main argument. In §2, I begin to 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 particular, I note the fluid way in which these concepts seem to shade into each other and how this conceptual blending is philosophically

informative rather than a case of sloppy thinking. This work will set up my arguments for the second and third premises of my main argument. In §§3-4, I argue that that pain's intentional structure is informative, it tells us something about the world (§3). This argument will substantiate the second premise of my main argument. I then claim that it is very difficult indeed to distinguish between pain and suffering when we understand pain as a homeodynamic feeling and take seriously the larger role that Buddhist philosophers think homeodynamic feeling plays in making us suffer (§4). This work constitutes my reasoning in support of the third premise of my argument. I conclude with some brief comments on the philosophical boons of a cross-cultural philosophy of pain and suffering.

1. Motivations for Imperativism About Pain

The purpose of this section is to provide some reasons in support of the first premise of my main argument. I should begin by noting that I am largely sympathetic with Klein's (2015) approach to pain. My reconstruction of the basic motivations for the view in this section will reflect that sympathy. I save my critical comments for later on.

1.1 Conceptual Motivations

A homeodynamic affect is one that lets you know something is out of balance in the body. As Klein rightfully 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).¹ When our homeodynamic equilibrium is disturbed by

¹ A note on the differences between these two terms '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. There are always minor fluctuations in the internal milieu of the organism. 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.

perturbations from the environment, then episodic, local homeodynamic affects arise that inform of an imbalance by commanding us to act so as to restore equilibrium.

Here are some relevant examples. If there is a rise in the concentration of salt in the bloodstream, the organism experiences thirst. 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 the last feeding, then it feels 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” (2015, 30). Pain is an imperative that tells you to protect some part of the body in order to allow it to heal so that homeodynamic equilibrium can be re-established.

An imperative is a command like ‘Close the door!’ According to imperativism, pains are commands given by the living body. 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 with *you* and that you should fix it by protecting the local area of your body that is signaling to you that homeodynamic equilibrium has been breached (because of excess or deficiency).² This connection between the motivating quality of pain experience and action is important. Klein explains: “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

² I will argue against this claim in §3

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.

The evaluation of the cause of the pain is secondary to the fact of its immediate recognition. The existence of pain constitutes a reason for the system to stop what it is doing regardless of what the world happens to be like. This is why aversive actions accompany pain so readily. We are very good at listening to the reasons the body gives us through our painful feelings. Consider the example of a pang of hunger: “Hunger motivates you to eat. It does so directly and immediately. To be motivated to eat, you don’t need to engage in any deliberation about what hunger means, what it’s telling you to do, or what the proper response to hunger might be. You get hungry. In virtue of that sensation, you gain motivation to eat. The strength of your motivation lies more or less in proportion to the intensity of your hunger” (Klein 2015, 15). Once some degree of felt equilibrium has been returned, then the organism will be in a better position to evaluate its previous behaviour and take possible futures into account in orienting itself in light of what it knows about how certain affects feel. But in the first instance, it is the felt departure from homeodynamic equilibrium that provides the first affective notice to the organism that something is amiss.

1.2 Phenomenological Motivations

Pains motivate the organism to correct for the 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 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 ‘the feeling of being alive’ (Thompson 2007).

This more hedonically neutral homeodynamic affect is a holistic felt bodily sense of being alive and this feeling is the basis for our sense of being an embodied subject. Without a feeling of homeodynamic equilibrium, there would be a chasm between an unconscious sense of balance and a conscious sense of imbalance that seems hard to cross. 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, 'of course not'. We need to have some 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.

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. The feeling is experienced as a command to protect that part of the body. The content of the experience just is the command to protect. The local feeling is experienced in this way on account of its arising 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.

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 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. 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.³

The main point that needs to be kept in mind moving forward is the following. 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. The Buddhists will argue 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 merely specific and obvious instances of a more general existential predicament, one that situates the embodied subject in a world of suffering.

1.4 Why Homeodynamic Imperativism About Pain is a Strong View

In addition to the tripartite motivations I have sketched thus far, it is worth noting that this view of pain has many explanatory boons that make it quite attractive. To begin, 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.

³ This extended network of nerve fibers that innervate the entire body sends afferent signals of many sorts to the brain, pain being only one.

First, we often feel pains that aren't indexed to occurrent bodily damage but only potential damage. 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 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.

Obviously more can be said here. However, for those not convinced of the truth of homeodynamic imperativism about pain, it is possible to simply bracket commitment to the first premise of my main argument and proceed conditionally in order to see what might fall out as a consequence of this position *if* it were true. I for one, find the view highly plausible and will move on concluding that the first premise of my main argument is true: pains are homeodynamic affects. I should note though, that there are two main components to Klein's (2015) version of the view: the first is that pains are homeodynamic affects, the second is that the content of these affective states is purely imperative content. One might embrace the first component of the view while taking issue with the second. In what follows, I am only committed to the first component of the view. Therefore, my endorsement of the first premise of the main argument of this paper and of Klein's view more widely, is friendly to those views of pain that think its content is thicker than purely imperative content.

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.

2.1 Etymology and Some Basics

The term *dukkha* is a Pāli word that can be broken down into two component parts: *du* is a negative prefix that denotes badness of some kind. The term *kha* in its most basic usage refers to the space of the sky. However, in its particular Buddhist usage, *kha* refers to the space in the middle of a wheel that allows it to turn. If the wheel's *kha* is *du*, then the axel hole will not be well-fitted to the axel and the wheel will not turn. Thus, the core image of *dukkha* is a wheel not turning properly. The solution to this problem is for the Buddha to start turning the Wheel of the Dharma which helps being overcome this predicament, an approach reflected in the title of the first discourse given by the Buddha: The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of the Dhamma (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*), to which we now turn.

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 has 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 unpack 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 sutta 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” (Bodhi 2000, 1561/SN V, 56). 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 for understanding *dukkha*. In order to unpack the relationship between all these different sorts of *dukkha*, we need to dig a little deeper into the different strata of meaning embedded in this concept. For this we must turn to Buddhaghosa’s commentarial gloss on the various sorts of *dukkha*.

2.2 Three Levels of Dukkha

As the suttas have explained, *dukkha* can be classed into three sorts. Of these, Buddhaghosa has the following to say: “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). 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 (CS-t §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. This is an important connection between pain and suffering. Second, physical pain and psychological pain instantiate a kind, they are both forms of *dukkha*. What makes them two species of a single genus is that they both afflict those who undergo them. 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 because everything you love will eventually be taken from you. 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 form of *dukkha* is called *saṅkhāra-dukkha*, the *dukkha* of constant 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* translated variously as ‘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 not simply inertly present to us. They are situated before us in a hodological space (Ganeri 2017) which gives the objects of experience a *feel* of being either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Third is *saṃjñā/saññā* which is often translated as ‘perception’. However, this is misleading for modern use of ‘perception’ does 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 that allow us to apprehend perceptual particulars *as the kind of particulars they are*. The fourth aggregate is *saṃskāra/saṅkhāra* which is certainly the hardest 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/viññāṇa* which is often translated as ‘consciousness,’ though ‘discernment,’ and ‘discrimination’ are also apt for they capture the *vi-* prefix as dividing and making distinctions and the *ñāṇa* component which roughly means knowledge. Together, these five aggregates function cooperatively to constitute the temporal flow our mental life. 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. There is a level at which we are constantly subjected to *dukkha* because the very fabric of the mental continuum is fraught with certain habits of appropriation (*upadana*) and craving (*taṇhā*) that create cognitive dissonance and subtle forms of agitation that pervade experience with a kind of background 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. "The ear is burning...The mind is burning...and whatever feeling arises with mind-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).

The basic schema of burning at work in this passage looks like this: Forms → Sensory receptor (e.g. eye) → Consciousness → Contact → Feelings. 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 *virarinama 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. 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.

In a brief passage on the three forms of *dukkha* Vasubandhu says: "By reason of these three, all impure conditioned things, without exception, are suffering: agreeable things are suffering because they are subject to transformation; disagreeable things are suffering in and of themselves; and neither-disagreeable-nor-agreeable things are suffering because they are conditioned" (*Akb* IV 3, Pruden 1991, 899). As I already mentioned, the Buddhist claim is that the experience of physical pain is always had through an existential lens of psychological suffering. 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. 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 indeed, 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.

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. What this distinction between types of intentional relations amounts to will become clear as we proceed.

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. Here he notes that (2015, 2):

...pains are remarkably uninformative. 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. Pains are uninformative partly because their potential causes are so diverse. Some pains are caused by actual tissue damage: I feel a pain when, and because, the hot grease hits my arm. Other pains are caused by merely potential damage: the hand as it approaches the fire, the needle pressed just shy of puncture, the muscle stretched to its limit. Note that potential damage need not be imminent damage. Sitting in an odd posture causes pain, but I'd have to do that repeatedly and for a long time before I did any harm.

Klein then contrasts this analysis of pains with ordinary sensations like vision claiming that: "Ordinary sensations inform but don't necessarily motivate. Pains motivate without informing. That is why pain is unusual" (Klein 2015, 3). The interesting point to note here is that what makes a pain informative

or uninformative is whether or not the content of the pain tells us anything about its causes. Pains don't inform us about their causes, therefore pains are uninformative.

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. Pain does not enter phenomenal awareness only as an object of our attention. This way of thinking about how pains enter awareness is too restrictive and distorts the intentional structure of pain experience.

I will have more to say about this in the next sub-section. For now, it's important to note that as a homeodynamic sensation, pain arises as a local perturbation of a truly complex milieu of bodily affects. Since that is the case, we might ask the following question: why conceive of the intentional structure of pain only in terms of the pain being an object of awareness? As a starting point for an answer to this question, consider that 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. 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 more narrow 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. Following Uriah Kriegel (2009), I distinguish between the subjective character of a phenomenally conscious experience and its qualitative character. 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 phenomenally conscious experience is that aspect of experience that makes its content manifest to me from a first-personal perspective. It is what makes my experiences *for me* and your experiences *for you*.

Homeodynamic affects can contribute to the phenomenal character of an experience as qualitative character *and* as subjective character. When a pain arises, it distresses us and this tends to draw our attention to it. One is aware *of* the pain as having a location in the body; the pain is an example of qualitative character and thus an intentional object of consciousness. However, 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).

We quite naturally carve up the world in terms of the mind and the body as well as in terms of a perceptual subject and a world of objects. This is part of what we are trying to capture with the notions of the qualitative and subjective character of phenomenally conscious experience. There is nothing wrong with these distinctions, they are helpful and illuminating. However, in the case of homeodynamic affect these distinctions begin to break down. Homeodynamic affects are different from other forms of phenomenal consciousness, such as distal perception. In perception, the content of the experience does not count as an aspect of *me* in the same way that a bodily feeling does. Both types of experience have a subjective character and are thus experienced as being *for me*, but in the case of embodied affect, the feelings in the body can be both a qualitative character of a phenomenally conscious experience, or be a part of the subjective character by contributing to the affected sense of 'me-ishness' that partially constitutes phenomenally conscious experience.

Let's contextualize these general remarks about homeodynamic feelings around a pain-based example. While running I develop a powerful cramping pain in my side. The pain is severe enough that I need to slow down and drink some water. As I probe the body with my attention in and around the pain, I discover other sensations that are not painful but are just as present. I realize that my entire living body is a kind of organic furnace whose constant interoceptive processing yields a churning mass

of such sensations. I use the metaphor of the furnace intentionally. It is meant to denote the fact that the organism is constantly transforming parts of its environment into energy that it then uses to construct and maintain itself in the face of a changing milieu (Thompson 2007). This change in me often consists in a disturbance of my homeodynamic equilibrium, an episodic incursion from without that impacts and alters my holistic affectively neutral feeling of being alive. Holistic bodily feelings are not just physical events on a body that I carry with me as a mental subject; they are also a feature of my subjectivity in virtue of which I am able to intelligently perceive and navigate the world. When local disturbances arise, they are disturbances of this holistically embodied subjectivity.

This point about the potential dual role that homeodynamic affects play in structuring our phenomenally conscious states has consequences for our understanding of the intentional structure of pain experience. To make this plain, consider the distinction between two forms of intentionality utilized by Phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012): that is, between object intentionality and horizontal intentionality or act intentionality and operative intentionality (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, lxxxii). Act intentionality is “...the intentionality of our judgments and of our voluntary decisions...” 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” (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, 104). Act intentionality has an explicit object which is the articulate content of the intentional attitude that has it in view. Operative intentionality is our holistically embodied openness to the world that allows us to entertain act intentions. 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. 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 itself shows up for us as altered as our action-possibilities are limited by our pain. 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. Thus, even granting that the particular content of a pain doesn't tell us anything about what might have caused it, pains are still powerfully informative about our relation to the world. 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. In the following section, I think about how this more holistic sense of self-world relationality should impact our understanding of the relationship between pain and suffering.

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 Mahāyāna 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. Klein and the Buddhist philosophers are no exception. But as we shall see, there are subtleties here that matter. For example, Klein argues for strong distinction this while acknowledging that we have good reason to think that hurt or suffering might be constitutive of pain. First, and most obviously, "Most pains feel bad. They feel bad in a particular way: they hurt. They are painful. They cause you to suffer." Furthermore, "Because hurt is an extremely salient feature of most pains, many have assumed that it must be a constitutive, intrinsic, or necessary property of pain" (Klein 2015, 48). In spite of this plausible set of claims, Klein maintains a strong distinction between pain and suffering. By contrast, while Buddhist philosophers think that it is possible to completely overcome the existential problem of *dukkha* through proper understanding and cultivation, they also believe that a living body will continue to experience pain (also *dukkha*) in the absence of all other forms of existential suffering (I will have more to say about this in the conclusion). Even so, my reconstruction of a version of the

Buddhist position will show that the clean dissociation that seems to be happening at a conceptual level with Klein is not so clean.

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 that part of the body. Anything else is secondary and thus extrinsic to pain (Klein 2015, 45). This includes suffering, which is not part of pain at all. Klein claims that “...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). 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 suffering (*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.

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 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. In this way, pain is very much like other homeodynamic sensations. This speaks to the motivation for imperativism about pain: “Imperativism, recall, was motivated by a specific view about pain’s biological role and its similarity to other states. Those other states are obviously only contingently connected to suffering—one can be so hungry that it hurts, but no one thinks that hunger feels bad intrinsically. I claim that

suffering and pain, while more frequently connected, are similarly only contingently related” (Klein 2015, 47). I have two responses to this set of claims.

First, regarding the claim that hunger doesn’t feel bad intrinsically. I think this is false. My reasoning for why falls out of the second issue, which has to do with the mortality claim made in the first passage I cited in the previous paragraph. The problem with this view is that it remains unheeded of the entailments of a truth it already acknowledges. In particular, I am referring to the relation between ordinary homeodynamic sensations and life-threatening ones. When we feel pangs of hunger, we don’t just experience a command to eat. We experience a command to eat, *or else...* Klein is quite right to note that the motivational primes of homeodynamic feelings command *on pain of death*. 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. 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 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.

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” (CŚ II.6cd, 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 (CŚ-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.⁴ These attitudes are inseparable from our experience of pain. For this reason, Gomez rightly 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 who is situated in a cultural and historical context that proves a hermeneutical architecture for how pain is felt when it arises. Our habit of transforming pain into suffering is deeply entrenched. Thus, the question of differentiating them becomes more complicated in light of the psychological dynamics that go into our capacity to feel in the first place.

Āryadeva and Candrakīrti continue this meditation on the temporal structure of pain experience and its psychological dynamics. 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, over the course of a lifetime, the prevalence of pain becomes increasingly central. This inevitable increased prevalence is a kind of suffering. As Candrakīrti notes in his commentary on this verse, "As the body matures during childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and

⁴ 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 (CŚ II.8 and CŚ-ṭ §135, Lang 2003, 139).

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” (CS-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” (CS-ṭ §144, Lang 2003, 141). I interpret these passage as 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.

One final consideration about the relation of pain to time before moving on to think again about the imperative view of pain with which we began. This last point returns to a consideration of the subtlest and most pervasive form of suffering, *sankhāra dukkha*, the suffering born of the constant conditionality that sustains the stream of sentience across a lifetime. 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 claim 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. I find Āryadeva’s response here unconvincing with respect to the objection that motivated it. However, as a way of thinking about the subtle and pervasive form of *dukkha*, I think this is an important characterization worth reflecting on. Candrakīrti continues (CS-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 relevant point here is the idea that 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. Pain gives us information about some manner of imbalance that occurs in a local part of the body. But from a Buddhist point of view, the very process of self-regulation, and indeed, self-construction, is 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. Therefore, it follows that pain cannot be understood apart from the role it plays in our suffering as finite embodied beings drawn out in time and eventually extinguished.

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.

The argument is clearly valid. I briefly argued for the first premise in §1. I argued for premises two and three in §§3 and 4, respectively. If my arguments for each of its premises hold, then the conclusion follows. Feeling pain provides us with a meaningful, robust, and holistic intentional relation to the 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 explore 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. A full answer to this objection will have to wait. But 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. Consider the following 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 a human being!’ When he asks the Buddha about what he and what he might become in the next life, the Buddha denies that is any number 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.

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