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The Imperative View of Pain

Abstract: *Pain, crucially, is unpleasant and motivational. It can be awful; and it drives us to action, e.g. to take our weight off a sprained ankle. But what is the relationship between pain and those two features? And in virtue of what does pain have them? Addressing these questions, Colin Klein and Richard J. Hall have recently developed the idea that pains are, at least partly, experiential commands — to stop placing your weight on your ankle, for example. In this paper, I reject their accounts. Against Klein, I use dissociation cases to argue that possession of ‘imperative content’ cannot wholly constitute pain. Against them both, I further claim that possession of such content cannot constitute even pain’s unpleasant, motivational aspect. For, even if it were possible to specify the relevant imperative content — which is far from clear — the idea of a command cannot bear the explanatory weight Klein and Hall place on it.*

Two obvious truths can seem to be neglected by the ‘perceptualist’ view that pains are perceptual experiences: first, that pains are typically unpleasant; second, that they drive us to act, e.g. to remove our fingers from a flame.¹ Call this pair of features pain’s ‘hedomotive aspect’.² Colin Klein and Richard J. Hall have recently argued that making sense of this aspect of pain requires embracing a conception of pains as commands, episodes in which we are told, for example, not to leave our fingers in the flame (Klein, 2007; Hall, 2008). This ‘imperativist’ conception must, they think, either displace or be

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- [1] For perceptualist views, see Bain (2003; 2007; 2009), Armstrong (1962; 1968), Pitcher (1970b), Lycan (1996), and Tye (1995b).
- [2] ‘Hedomotive aspect’ is a useful term for the hedonic tone and motivational force of other experiences too, including pleasant experiences, but in this paper I am using it to refer specifically to the unpleasant, motivating character of pains.

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incorporated by perceptualism. I disagree. For while I now concede that perceptualism needs either to be jettisoned or fixed, I think this ‘imperativist’ conception is not the way to go, since the idea of a command fails to illuminate pain’s hedomotive aspect.

I start in §I with the idea that pains possess representational content. In §§II–III, I construct a taxonomy of approaches to pain’s hedomotive aspect. I locate within that structure two forms of imperativism in §IV, one that I associate with Klein, the other with Hall. In §V, I raise serious doubts about the former; and in §§VI–VII, I argue against both. My central point, on which §VII focuses, is that the notion of a command cannot do the explanatory work Klein and Hall need it to.

I. Pain and Representational Content

Perceptualists say that pains have representational content. To see what they mean, it is worth comparing philosophical approaches to pain and vision, which have taken similar paths over the last century.³

Philosophers, impressed by illusion and hallucination, used to hold that a coin’s looking round to you involves a relation of awareness obtaining between you and not a coin, but a ‘round-like’ sense-datum. (Sense-data were supposed to be awareness-dependent objects. Being round-like, as I have put it, was supposed to be a property standing in some relation — call it R — to the physical-object property, *being round*. Different versions of the theory explain R differently.) Today, this approach is largely rejected, often for the content view, which says that its looking to you as though there is something round before you rather consists in your undergoing a visual experience with a representational content, e.g. *that there is something round before you*. On the content view, when things look the way they really are, that consists not in R obtaining between the properties of your sense-data and the properties of the physical objects before you, but simply in those objects before you making your experience’s content *true*. The idea, again, is that visual experiences have truth conditions, like beliefs. This is not to say they *are* beliefs, which is usually denied, since, for example, the Müller-Lyer lines can *look* different lengths even to someone who *believes* they are not. But visual experiences are nonetheless episodes in which (as it were) you are *told* truly or falsely that the world is such and such a way, leaving it up to you to decide whether or not it really is.

[3] ‘Pain’ is both a mass noun (‘less pain’) and a count noun (‘fewer pains’). Here I shall use it to refer to what I elsewhere call pain experiences, namely experiences in virtue of which subjects are *in* pain. In Bain (2007) I argue that the count noun also has another sense.

Now, the sense-datum theory has a parallel in the pain case, the mental object view, which says that being in pain consists in an awareness relation obtaining between you and a pain. While this approach faces serious difficulties, it is less obvious here than in the visual case why we should prefer a content view, not least because specifying plausible contents for pain experiences is more difficult than specifying plausible contents for visual experiences. Consequently, some philosophers think pains are both objectless and representationally blank.⁴

Others of us, nevertheless, have argued that a content view even of pain can and should be adopted. Your being in pain, we claim, consists not in there obtaining an awareness relation between you and a pain, but in your undergoing a perceptual experience (specifically a somatosensory experience) with the content that a body part of yours is ϕ , where ϕ is some objective condition, such as being disordered (according to the view on which I'll focus) or undergoing nociceptor activity (according to a variant).⁵ So, having a pain in your left foot consists in your undergoing a somatosensory experience representing your left foot as disordered. Of course your left foot might not *be* disordered — as, for example, in a case of referred pain. But, in undergoing the experience, you are (as it were) *told* that it is, whether or not it really is, and whether or not you believe it is. In this way perceptualists extend the content view to pain, making possible the widespread representationalist idea that, in general, an experience's phenomenal character (what undergoing the experience is like for the subject) at least supervenes on its content: in other words, two representationally identical experiences must be phenomenally identical.

II. The Hedomotive Challenge

But what about pain's unpleasantness and motivational force? Again, how does perceptualism speak to pain's hedomotive aspect? Consider, for example, the following claims about pain's unpleasantness:

PUT Typically, pains are unpleasant.

PUN Necessarily, pains are unpleasant.

Virtually everyone will endorse the first, and many the second. But how, one might wonder, does the idea that pains represent objective states illuminate these putative truths? Arguably, after all, ordinary

[4] See, for example, McGinn (1982, p. 8), Searle (1992, p. 2), and for more references Bain (2003, p. 502, n. 2).

[5] Armstrong opts for nociceptor activity (1968, pp. 315, 319), Pitcher for disorder (1970b, p. 371).

visual experiences are not rendered unpleasant (or pleasant) by the objective representational content ascribed to them by the content view. So what is it about *pain* experiences that makes them different? Is it some distinctive feature of their content, or their involvement of some other state, such as desire, or what?

Now consider pain's motivational character:

PM Necessarily, pains inherently — hence independently of further beliefs and desires — motivate certain behaviour, not in the sense that those in pain will always perform such behaviour, but in the sense that those in pain will always have at least an *urge* to.

UM Necessarily, *unpleasant* pains inherently motivate certain behaviour, in the sense just specified.

UR Unpleasant pains inherently *rationalize* certain behaviour.

Many will accept PM and yet more will accept UM. And UM explains why humans are such that unpleasant pains tend to be caused in us by harmful events. Given a necessary connection between unpleasantness and injury-avoiding motivation, our being that way is a selective advantage.⁶ But again, many ordinary visual experiences seem to differ in this respect. Admittedly, if it looks to you as though there's a large cube in front of you, you might act on that experience *if* you believe what it tells you and have a suitable desire, for example to walk around the cube. But the experience *by itself* is, many will argue, un motivating, in stark contrast to the horrible pain you feel when your finger is in a flame, which motivates you rapidly to remove your finger and arguably (as UR claims) gives you a very good *reason* for so doing.

Consider finally this claim:

UA Specific forms of behaviour have an *a priori* appropriateness to unpleasant pain.

Just as it is an *a priori* matter that scratching is somehow appropriate to itching, the idea goes, it is an *a priori* matter that certain behaviour — for example such avoidance behaviour as pulling one's finger from the flame — is appropriate to pain, or at least to *unpleasant* pain, in a way in which (say) laughter is not. Yet again, many ordinary visual experiences seem different in this respect; they seem not to stand, at least absent suitable beliefs and desires, in relations of *a priori* fit to any given types of behaviour.

[6] See Pitcher (1970b).

It might of course be replied that at least some visual experiences are less ‘neutral’ than people think; that some indeed are inherently hedonic and motivational. Perhaps that is right. But even if so, the challenge remains: namely, to say something more — beyond merely that pains represent disorder or nociceptor activity — to illuminate those of the above ‘hedomotive claims’ that are truly compelling. Call this the hedomotive challenge. Now, perceptualism, on the minimal formulation I have provided, needs either to be augmented or replaced if this challenge is to be met. In the present paper, I focus on Hall and Klein’s idea that what it needs to be augmented or replaced *with* is a view invoking experiential commands. Before turning to that idea, though, let us bring some organization to the myriad ways in which this challenge might be approached.

III. Taxonomy

Attempts to illuminate the hedomotive claims above might be categorized in terms of two central questions. Let pain’s hedomotive *element* be that in virtue of which pain experiences have their hedomotive *aspect*. The first question is:

Nature What is the *nature* of pain’s hedomotive element?

As we shall see, some think pain’s hedomotive element is a certain kind of desire; Klein and Hall think it’s the possession of a certain kind of ‘imperative content’. The second question is:

Relation What is the *relationship* between being in pain and pain’s hedomotive element?

Here there are three options:

Constitutive views Pain’s hedomotive element *constitutes* pain, in this sense: there is a hedomotive element which, necessarily, is necessary and sufficient for a person to be in pain. So no ‘neutral’ experience (that is, an experience that is not in itself unpleasant or motivating) is necessary or sufficient.

Component views Pain’s hedomotive element is a *component* of pain, in this sense: there is a kind of hedomotive element and a kind of neutral experience, each of which, necessarily, is necessary for being in pain.

Add-on views Pain’s hedomotive element is *contingently associated* with pain, in this sense: there is a kind of neutral experience which, necessarily, is necessary and

sufficient for being in pain. So no hedomotive element is either necessary or sufficient.

To illustrate, consider a view which perceptualists often adopt: the e-desire view, as I call it, or EDV for short.⁷ This answers Nature by invoking desires. When in pain, EDV says, you undergo an inherently neutral nociceptive experience, which is unpleasant and motivating *in virtue of* your disliking it in the sense that you have a non-instrumental, *pro tanto* desire for it immediately to cease (an e-desire).⁸ Turning to Relation, EDV can be either an add-on view or a component view. The former says that e-desires are *contingently associated* with pain; so one can be in pain without an e-desire, hence without the pain being hedomotive. The latter says that the hedomotive-constituting e-desire is more than that; it is a *necessary component* of pain. (Notice, incidentally, that since on this view the pain is the whole compound, component theorists should not call the neutral component a pain. They might instead call it a ‘nain’.)⁹ Either way, EDV faces an obvious worry, as is often pointed out. Surely you want your experience to end because it is unpleasant, rather than its being unpleasant because you want it to end; so EDV can seem to get the explanatory direction backwards. If that is right, then the standard way of getting perceptualism to accommodate pain’s hedomotive character is wrong. Suppose it is. What, then, does the hedomotive challenge require, if not e-desires? Klein and Hall’s answer is straightforward: pain-commands.

IV. Imperativism

Let us look in more detail at Klein and Hall’s suggestion. They agree with perceptualists that pains have content, but they think the content is at least partly imperative. So, like visual experiences (at least according to the content view) pains are *about* something; they stand in semantic relations to the world. But whereas visual experiences *describe*, telling us how the world is, pains *command*, telling us what to do (Klein, 2007, p. 518). In particular, pains are *negative* commands, commanding us to ‘stop doing what [we’re] doing’, to ‘cease

- [7] See Armstrong (1962, pp. 93–4, 107–9; 1968, pp. 212–3); Tye (1995a, p. 228; 1995b, p. 116); Pitcher (1970b, p. 380); Hall (1989 — a paper written before Hall embraced imperativism).
- [8] I don’t myself think *dislike* is best unpacked in terms of *e-desires*, but adherents of EDV often slide between the two notions.
- [9] Armstrong equivocates, on the one hand speaking of *pain* as a ‘portmanteau-concept’ and of e-desires as being of the ‘essence’ of pain (1962, p. 93), suggesting a component view; but on other hand calling the neutral, nociceptive experience itself a pain, rather suggesting an add-on view (*ibid.*, p. 94; 1968, p. 311).

acting in a way that would cause more injury' (*ibid.*, pp. 520–1, 526; Hall, 2008, p. 534). A pain in a broken ankle tells you not to put weight on it, for example; and when you run too strenuously, the pain in your thighs tells you to stop running (Klein, 2007, p. 520; Hall, 2008, p. 534). Who or what issues these commands? Hall and Klein (and I) sometimes speak as if *pains* do, but I take it the official view is that we are commanded by subpersonal modules (Hall, 2008, p. 534). Whereas our visual modules tell us how things are, the idea goes, our pain modules tell us what to do — or, rather, what to stop doing.¹⁰

Now, I take it the view is that such commands *constitute* pain's hedonistic aspect. Certainly, Klein is clear that they constitute behavioural urges, the *command* not to leave your finger in the flame constituting an *urge* not to leave it there. And, while neither he nor Hall says much about pain's unpleasantness, it clearly would make sense for them to claim that it too is constituted by the relevant imperative content, since that would explain the putatively necessary connection between unpleasantness and motivation (UM). So I shall take imperativism to be the idea that the receipt of an experiential command to (say) not leave your finger in the flame *constitutes* both the unpleasantness of the experience and your powerful urge to withdraw the finger.¹¹

So much for Nature. Regarding Relation, Klein and Hall's accounts diverge. Klein advances imperativism as a constitutive view. He thinks command-constituted motivation 'is not just necessarily connected to pain but actually constitutive of it'. Again: 'The phenomenal properties of pains are *exhausted* by their imperative content' (2007, pp. 528, 522; my emphasis).¹² On this view, then, there is a type of imperative, hedonistic content whose possession is necessary and sufficient for pain.

So construed, imperativism seems to explain the necessary connections between pain, unpleasantness, and motivation (PUN and PM). And Klein thinks it also explains how pains are equipped to play their evolutionary role of protecting us from — rather than informing us of

[10] Some might think that such subpersonal modules must be construed as homunculi which communicate with persons, and find this idea objectionable. While not entirely sanguine about the imperativist's use of the idea of subpersonal modules, I shall not press this complaint here, not least since if an objectionable conception of subpersonal modules issuing commands needs to be invoked to explain the *imperative* force of pains, then arguably an objectionable conception of such modules issuing testimony needs to be invoked in order to explain what you might call the *presentational* force of visual experiences. (Others, of course, give up the idea of experiential content altogether. See, for example, Brewer, 2006; 2008; and Travis, 2004.)

[11] For brevity, I often say simply 'command' for 'receipt of a command'.

[12] See also (2007, p. 526).

— injury. They can do this, he thinks, only because they are essentially motivating, only because they *drive* us to *specific* forms of behaviour that are appropriate in the circumstances. This, he thinks, is what imperativism illuminates, and it's one reason he rejects perceptualism (*ibid.*, pp. 525–7).¹³

But whereas Klein adopts a constitutive version of imperativism, Hall seems to endorse either a component or add-on version, and to advance it as way of fixing rather than jettisoning perceptualism (Hall, 2008, p. 534, n. 2). He agrees with perceptualists that pains have non-imperative, nociceptive content, but he thinks such content is sometimes only one component of a compound content whose other component is imperative (*ibid.*, p. 534). And Hall's argument for invoking imperative content is different from Klein's. He thinks imperativism explains UA, the putative *a priori* connection between pain and certain kinds of behaviour (*ibid.*, pp. 526–7). If imperativism is right, he thinks, the connection comes to this: the relevant kinds of behaviour are actually *specified* by the contents of pains; they are what pains are telling us to perform (*ibid.*, p. 527).¹⁴

Klein and Hall's papers are interesting and persuasive. They make it very tempting to think that imperativism is required to explain how pains play their evolutionary role, and that imperativism meets the hedomotive challenge, vindicating and illuminating our intuitions about the relationships amongst pain, unpleasantness, and behavioural motivation. Adding to imperativism's allure, we might add, is the fact that some pain talk is rather suggestive of commands. We speak of *urges* that we have when in pain, for example, and that term, 'urge', can also be used for a speech act akin to commanding, as when one is urged to leave the party.

But however tempting imperativism is, I shall argue that it should be resisted. In the next section, focusing on Relation, I argue against Klein that possession of imperative, hedomotive content cannot exhaustively constitute pains. In the final two sections, turning to Nature, I argue that possession of such content cannot even constitute the hedomotive aspect of pain. For, not only are there difficulties in saying what the imperative content of pain-commands should be (§VI), the notion of a command is incapable of discharging its explanatory role (§VII).

[13] He remains a representationalist: pains' phenomenology still supervenes on their content; it's just that that content is imperative.

[14] Hall (2008, p. 527) is talking mainly about itches rather than pains, but it is clear he thinks imperativism has the same rationale in the pain case (see 2008, p. 534).

V. Against Constitutive Imperativism: Dissociation Cases

So let's begin with Klein's constitutive view that the command-constituted hedomotive element of pain is both necessary and sufficient for pain. An immediate worry concerns putative dissociation cases, of course — that is, cases in which pain apparently occurs without its hedomotive aspect, or in which its hedomotive aspect occurs without pain. Can Klein's view meet this dissociation challenge?

(i) *Masochism and Morphine*

Consider first the following cases: masochists can seem to find their pain pleasant; and sufferers of chronic pain who receive morphine (or, in the past, lobotomies) sometimes say that their pain remains but no longer bothers them. If these are genuine dissociation cases, in which pain occurs without its hedomotive aspect, then that hedomotive aspect can neither constitute nor be a component of pain. So both constitutive views and component views are threatened. Hence Klein must deny that these are genuine dissociation cases, arguing either that *both* pain and its hedomotive aspect are present or that *neither* is. Call these the Both and Neither strategies.

Start with the Neither strategy. Drawing on Melzack and Wall's gate-control theory of pain processing,¹⁵ George Pitcher (1970a) speculates that morphine, in the one case, and the masochist's arousal, in the other, closes the 'gate' between nociceptors and the brain, preventing any pain signals from getting through, thereby preventing pain. But this is surely implausible. While a closed Melzack-Wall gate makes good sense of soldiers who in the heat of battle deny they are in pain even when badly wounded, the masochist and morphine cases are different precisely because their subjects *don't* deny they are in pain. They say they are in pain, and Pitcher must therefore insist they're wrong.

Hence it is worth trying the Both strategy instead. This says that, although pain is indeed present in these cases, so is its hedomotive aspect. We're apt to miss that aspect in the masochist case because the unpleasantness is outweighed by other pleasures, but it's there nonetheless. Arguably, indeed, what masochists enjoy is precisely the infliction of *unpleasant* experiences by sexual partners in the right context. Their experience is unpleasant, then, and it's motivational too, even if masochists' urges to flinch are often suppressed — by

[15] See Melzack and Wall (1965).

ropes and chains, if not by the masochists themselves. In the morphine case, the strategy is similar: we're apt to miss pain's hedomotive aspect, this time because the hedomotive aspect can be mistaken for something the morphine certainly does eliminate — what Klein calls 'secondary affect', that is the anxiety and depression caused by chronic pain (Klein, 2007, pp. 529–30).¹⁶ The subject worries less about what the pain means, in other words, but the pain is unpleasant nonetheless; and it's motivational too, as shown by the fact that those taking morphine for chronic pain still flinch and wince when pinpricked.

(ii) *Asymbolia and Ploner Case*

So Klein can adopt the Both strategy in the masochism and morphine cases. But he crucially neglects another case which looks more challenging: pain asymbolia. This is a rare condition caused by strokes.¹⁷ When burnt or pinpricked, asymbolics deny that their experience is unpleasant; and they exhibit no sign even of suppressed urges to withdraw or grimace or cry out. On the contrary, they often smile and laugh. Hence it looks as though their experience is at worst neutral, and therefore as though they are not in pain. Except, crucially, they say they are.

Here the Both strategy looks unpromising. It is quite unclear what greater enjoyment we might suppose is outweighing the putative unpleasantness of the asymbolic's experience. And it also doesn't look like secondary affect is all that's missing. Asymbolics are indeed not anxious or depressed about their pain, but they seem to lack something else too: the urge to flinch or wince, and the unpleasantness. Nor is it just that they cannot *exhibit* these urges, as when a person is given curare; for they *tell* us that their pains are not unpleasant.¹⁸

So if the Both strategy doesn't work, what about the Neither strategy? Might we take Pitcher's lead and claim that asymbolics' strokes have closed their Melzack-Wall gates, preventing pain signals from reaching the brain? Well, as in the masochism and morphine cases, this again fails to make sense of why asymbolics *say* they are in pain. And we should, surely, take their testimony seriously. These, after all, are people who had — and reported — perfectly normal pains before their strokes. Hence Nikola Grahek, Murat Aydede, and many who study pain asymbolia think it is absolutely clear that asymbolics do

[16] See also Trigg (1970, pp. 12–4). Dennett misses this explanation in his chapter (1978).

[17] See Grahek (2007) and Trigg (1970).

[18] On curare, see Grahek (2007).

feel pain.¹⁹ If this is right, constitutive and component views seem to be in trouble, since those views deny there could be pains which lacked a hedomotive aspect, whereas such pains now look not just possible, but actual.

The constitutive view is, moreover, threatened by a putative case of reverse dissociation, in which pain's hedomotive aspect occurs without pain. Markus Ploner describes a stroke victim who was given electric shocks on the side of his body affected by his stroke at a level that would cause pain if inflicted on his other side (Ploner *et al.*, 1999, p. 213). The subject described the resulting feelings as 'clearly unpleasant', and strongly wanted to avoid them. But he denied they were even slight pains. So is this the final nail in the coffin of the constitutive view?

(iii) *Wiggle Room*

To my mind, pain asymbolia does tell against the constitutive view. But the argument, I concede, is not absolutely conclusive. Consider for a moment not the constitutive view, but the component view, which is also threatened by asymbolia. The component theorist might concede that if asymbolics are missing *both* the hedomotive *and* neutral components of pain — perhaps because of closure of their Melzack-Wall gates — then the Neither strategy couldn't do justice to their testimony. But if asymbolics are missing *only* pain's hedomotive component, then the component theorist might be able to deny that asymbolics are in pain (precisely because they lack pain's hedomotive component) *while nevertheless making sense of asymbolics' saying that they are*. Their testimony is understandable, the idea goes, because if asymbolics are still undergoing pain's neutral component, then they are in states very much *like* pains (that is, nains), states which will have occurred in their pre-stroke experience *only* as components of pain. They are, in short, having a bizarre and unprecedented experience which it is easy — though wrong — for them to think the concept of pain extends to. That they are appropriately unsure whether the concept can really be stretched that far is suggested, moreover, by their sometimes saying things like, 'It hurts

[19] While saying asymbolics *feel* pain, and taking asymbolia to be a case of 'pain without painfulness', Grahek curiously denies they are *in* pain and at one point denies that the sensory (neutral) component of pain is sufficient for 'pain' (Grahek, 2007, p. 111). This is odd since 'feels pain' and 'in pain' are, I take it, not used differently in ordinary English. Grahek must be using at least one of those phrases in a technical sense, hence it is simply unclear whether he thinks asymbolics are *in pain* in the *ordinary* sense. Aydede, though, is happy to say that asymbolics are indeed in pain, and that they undergo pain experiences; see Aydede (2005, §6.1; 2008).

indeed, *but I don't really know what that is*' (Grahek, 2007, p. 45; my emphasis).²⁰

Given this strategy's availability to the component view, notice how finely balanced the choice between the component view and the add-on view has become. On the one hand, add-on theorists but not component theorists can straightforwardly accept asymbolics' testimony. But component theorists can still *explain* such testimony. On the other hand, component theorists but not add-on theorists can explain two putative connections between pain, on the one hand, and unpleasantness and motivation, on the other: namely, PUN and PM. But add-on theorists might take asymbolia precisely to discredit these connections, and they can also point out that their view (like the component view) can at least accept the yet more compelling connection between unpleasantness and motivation (UM). It seems to me, indeed, that to the extent that the choice between these views rests on cases as bizarre as pain asymbolia, our ordinary concept of pain might simply fail to determine which choice is right.

But even if, faced with pain asymbolia, the component view has wiggle room, what about Klein's constitutive view? He *can't* say, with component theorists, that asymbolics confuse what is in fact a necessary neutral component of pain (a *nain*) for pain itself, since his constitutive view denies that pain *has* such a necessary, neutral component. But perhaps he could *stretch* the strategy yet further and say that asymbolics confuse a neutral *correlate* of pain for pain itself. In the Ploner case, similarly, he might claim that the subject really is in pain but says otherwise because he mistakes such a correlate — which his stroke now prevents him from feeling alongside his pain — to be a necessary condition for pain.²¹ So, to this extent, even Klein might have a little wiggle room.

(iv) Why Wiggle that Much?

But, if Klein has to go to these lengths, one might wonder why he would bother. Explaining away asymbolic testimony in the proposed way requires Klein to concede a type of neutral (hence non-imperative) experience which at least tightly correlates with pain. Why not make this a *component* (at least) of pain?

[20] Grahek, who wants to insist that asymbolics feel pain, ignores the equivocation.

[21] In the Ploner case, Klein might also point out that it is but one study, and he might distinguish different kinds of unpleasantness and claim that Ploner's subject is experiencing the wrong one for pain.

Doing so allows a more straightforward handling of the asymbolia and Ploner cases. And it makes as good sense as Klein's constitutive view does of the connections between pain, unpleasantness, and motivation (PUN and PM). Moreover, consider for a moment the pain-related neutral experience that I am suggesting Klein must concede. It looks as though this neutral experience needs to be invoked anyway to account for some core distinctions we draw *amongst pains*. Consider, for example, the distinction between dull aches and sharp pains, and between pains at different locations. It's quite unclear how imperative content could account for these distinctions. Regarding pain location, I suppose Klein might claim that a body part's being the location of a pain consists in its being the part one is commanded to stop using. But this surely won't individuate pain locations sufficiently finely. As for the dull/sharp distinction, Klein considers invoking differences amongst the actions which different pains proscribe (2007, p. 531). But it is not clear how this account is supposed to go, which is particularly significant given there are plausible, competing accounts invoking non-imperative content.²² Arguably, these are the best accounts we've got. Interestingly, moreover, their reliance on non-imperative content fits nicely with the intriguing fact that Ploner's subject, who arguably lacks the neutral, non-imperative experience distinctive of pain, denied his experience fell under any of the pain descriptors he was offered — for example 'burning' and 'pinprick-like' — and could locate his sensation only very imprecisely as 'somewhere between fingertips and shoulder' (Ploner, 1999, p. 213). Again, then, it is unclear why Klein would deny that the type of neutral experience which is associated with pain is a component (at least) of pain. Klein's constitutive account, in short, appears unmotivated.

VI. Against Imperativism: Which Commands?

Let us now turn from Relation to Nature. For if all sides must agree that there is a neutral experience distinctive of pain, which in all normal cases occurs alongside pain's hedomotive element, the more interesting question is not which of those things is necessary for pain — a dispute which, we have seen, can degenerate into trading intuitions about bizarre cases — but rather what the nature of the hedomotive element is. And notice nothing I have said so far threatens

[22] It is particularly unclear how the account would go if pain-commands say simply, 'Stop doing whatever you're doing!' (See §VI). For competing accounts of the location of pain, see Bain (2007), or of stabbing pains, see Tye (1995b, p. 113).

Klein's answer to that question. For one might combine an imperativist answer to Nature with a component or add-on view of Relation. This is just what Hall does. But I shall now argue that Hall's view fails too. In the present section, I raise some preliminary concerns about the content of the relevant commands; and in the final section I focus on my main point: that the notion of a command cannot explain pain's hedonistic character.

Imperativism says that commands issued by one's pain module constitute the unpleasantness and motivational character of pains. But what do pain-commands tell us to do? Keep in mind that imperativists must identify a type of imperative content which *all* hedonistic pains have; and *constitutive* imperativists must further ensure it's a type which *only* pains have. So what is the relevant type of imperative content?

Klein and Hall, we have seen, say that pains command you to *stop* doing what you're doing (Klein, 2007, pp. 520–1; Hall, 2008, p. 534). An ache in your ankle, they think, might tell you to stop putting weight on it. But suppose the ache continues, qualitatively unchanged, even once you take your weight off your ankle. If its content hasn't changed, it must now be telling you to stop doing something *that you're not doing*.²³ Of course, imperatives — for example, 'Keep an eye out for wolves!' — can remain in force even as one complies with them, but my worry is not that pain-commands remain in force, but that they very often presuppose something false, namely that you're doing something you're not.²⁴ Indeed a qualitatively identical pain might have developed *while* you were resting your ankle. So, again, why would pains routinely tell you to stop doing something you either *have* stopped or never were doing?²⁵

The simplest fix is for imperativists to construe pains as telling us not what to *stop* doing, but what *not* to do. Indeed, Klein sometimes

[23] Klein and Hall might reply that the content *does* change. Perhaps it tells you to stop doing *this*, where 'this' first picks out your putting weight on your ankle and then picks out your resting the ankle. But some representationalists will resist the idea of a change in content without a change in phenomenal character. Moreover, if there has been no change in the pain's cause, it is unclear that we have a satisfactory explanation of the change in content. An alternative approach would be to claim that the pain, before and after you take your weight off your ankle, tells you simply that there is *something* you must not do. I reply to this sort of move below.

[24] Klein makes the point about imperatives remaining in force in his reply to Tumulty (Klein, 2010, pp. 554–5). But my point, which concerns presuppositions, differs from Tumulty's. Klein elsewhere (draft) discusses false presuppositions, but he tries to restrict them to special cases (e.g. phantom and chronic pains), which I am in effect suggesting won't work.

[25] I am not making any assumptions about what it is better, or less bad, to do with a hurting ankle.

formulates his examples in just this way: an ache in an ankle commands us *not* to put weight on it, and the pain in our burning fingers tells us *not* to position our fingers in the flame (Klein, 2007, p. 521; 2010, p. 1).²⁶

But do *only* pains have such contents? Constitutive imperativists must say so. But suppose you're on a cliff edge and have the urge not to step forward. If some urges are constituted by experiential commands, why not this one? And if this one is, why isn't it a pain? Imperativists might reply that pains are (or involve) commands not to do something *specifically on pain of causing injury* (as Klein almost puts it: 2007, pp. 521, 526). But, on its face, that too might be part of the content of the cliff top urge. So the worry that not only pains possess such contents remains.

It is also doubtful that *all* pains — even all *unpleasant* pains — have such contents. What about headaches, angina, menstrual cramps, the contractions of child birth, or pains deep within one's torso (Tumulty, 2009)? What avoidance behaviour do these command? Klein suggests they proscribe large movements of the head or torso; but do the pains of childbirth really command the mother to *avoid* contractions? Alternatively, Klein thinks, they might proscribe *unspecified* actions (2007, p. 530), saying, I take it, 'On pain of causing injury, there is *something* you must not do', or perhaps, 'Don't do *whatever* you're doing now (even if that is nothing)!'²⁷ But these suggestions are problematic too. They provide even less scope than there already was for accounting for differences amongst pains (e.g. in quality or location) in terms of differences in their imperative content; and they pull against Hall and Klein's motivations for imperativism, which, recall, emphasize connections between pains and *specific* types of behaviour (see §IV).

A final question is why imperativists take imperative content to concern avoidance behaviour and not expressive or tending behaviour. When your shin is knocked, you don't *only* pull your leg back from the point of impact. You also yelp and grimace, and vigorously rub the shin. Is it clear that the relevant connections between pain's unpleasantness and avoidance behaviour don't *also* obtain between its unpleasantness and these other sorts of behaviour? If they do obtain in these other cases, and if we capture the links to avoidance behaviour by taking pains to be commands whose contents actually *specify* that

[26] Such 'negative behaviour' is what I am calling avoidance behaviour.

[27] This is how I understand a recent suggestion of Klein's (2010, p. 556). Klein also wonders if such pains proscribe 'unintelligible actions', but that seems even less promising (2007, p. 530).

behaviour, then there will be parallel arguments that expressive and tending behaviour must also be so specified. Neither Klein nor Hall countenance this, and difficulties might arise if they did. After all, is it really plausible that, when you bang you shin, your experience tells you to withdraw it, grimace, yelp, and rub it? And, even if it were, is there a non-circular account of the unity of such contents, of what all and only they share? For there had better be if pain's hedomotive character is to consist in an experience's having a content of that type. If Klein and Hall instead deny that these other sorts of behaviour bear the connections imperativism is supposed to capture, that needs argument.

VII. Against Imperativism: The Explanatory Impotence of Commands

There are, then, serious worries about which commands pains would be. But, rather than pursue them, let's turn to the deeper question of whether pains are commands at all. Can the notion of a command do the philosophical work that imperativists want it to? I shall argue that it cannot.

Problem 1: The Hedomotive Claims

Let us start with the hedomotive claims that imperativism is supposed to capture. Hall, remember, is impressed by UA, the putative *a priori* connection between unpleasant pain and avoidance behaviour. His idea seems to be that this *a priori* fit is at bottom representational. It is a matter of pains being episodes whose contents *specify* such behaviour. For my part, I find it implausible that such experiential specification is the way such links must be accounted for — and it would become still more implausible if, in addition to avoidance behaviour, we had also to pack into pain's content expressive and tending behaviour.²⁸ But notice too that, even if the idea of experiences *specifying* types of behaviour were the right one, it would not entail that pains are commands. It might alternatively be, for example, that pain experiences simply *inform* us of what behaviour is such that, if it is not performed, injury will ensue. (A model might be the idea that visual experiences represent such 'affordances' as the 'jumpability' of a gap.) So the idea of pains as commands needs motivation.

And it is doubtful that the motivation can be found in the other hedomotive claims. Suppose you think that pains are necessarily unpleasant (PUN) or motivational (PM), and that this needs to be

[28] Notice that imperative content must be personal-level content if it is to account for pain's phenomenal character.

explained by claiming that unpleasantness or motivation is at least a component of pain. Perhaps so. But this doesn't require us to think of either the unpleasantness or motivation as a *command*. Suppose, alternatively, that you think that a necessary relationship holds between *unpleasantness* and motivation (UM), and that that needs to be explained by holding that a certain kind of urge *constitutes* the unpleasantness. Again, perhaps so. But, again, this doesn't require us to think of the urge as a command.

So until it is made clear what work the idea of a command is doing, what theoretical need it is meeting, imperativism looks unmotivated.

Problem 2: Urges

What the idea of a command is doing, imperativists might reply, is illuminating the very notion of a certain kind of urge, since the idea is that pain-commands *constitute* avoidance urges. But it is hard to see how this could be. Urges are surely *never* constituted by commands. Of course, someone's commanding you to stand, say, could *cause* — even rationalize — your urge to stand. But by that very token, it doesn't *constitute* your urge. It is precisely because commands *don't* constitute urges that you can receive commands you have absolutely no urge to obey, e.g. a retaliatory command from your five-year-old that *you* go to bed without *your* dinner. If the speaker were not five but more authoritative or threatening, perhaps then you would have an urge to comply — but *not* because adding authority or threats would turn the command into an urge.

Imperativists might protest that pain-commands are *special* commands precisely in that they *do* constitute urges. But such *ad hoc*ery renders imperativism unilluminating. We're supposing that the aim of transplanting the notion of a command from its natural home of interpersonal speech acts to the mind is to illuminate the relationship between pains and urges. The aim is to say that it is *as if* (or perhaps even *the case that*) pains are commands received from the pain module. But such a story fails to illuminate *if* even in the home context commands lack the very feature supposed to do the explanatory work in the transplanted context, namely being such as to constitute an urge. It is as if I were to explain Brownian motion to you *not* on the model of a huge balloon being surrounded by people punching it — which might be illuminating — but on the model of a huge balloon being surrounded by *abstract objects* punching it, and then added when you

looked perplexed: ‘You see, at the molecular level, abstract objects can punch.’²⁹

Problem 3: Unpleasantness

Imperativists, I suggested above, are committed to saying that pain-commands also constitute the other side of pain’s hedomotive aspect: its unpleasantness. But here too, I suggest, there is an explanatory gap. Why should a command *constitute* unpleasantness? Certainly being commanded can *cause* unpleasant feelings, as when you feel belittled on having a command shouted at you. But this does not involve a command *constituting* its own unpleasantness, which is the idea the imperativist needs.

Problem 4: Reasons

Does imperativism at least illuminate the way in which pain’s unpleasantness *rationalizes* avoidance behaviour? It can seem as though it does. Much pain behaviour, the idea goes, is neither brute reflex nor fully deliberate action rationalized by beliefs and desires. It is rather behaviour that is rationalized by the unpleasantness itself. Asked what justified removing your finger from the flame, you might reply simply that the experience was very unpleasant. Why does that unpleasantness have the status of a reason? Because, the idea goes, it consists in a command issued by the pain module which (independently of your beliefs and desires) you have a *pro tanto* reason to obey.

But does the status of unpleasantness as a reason really come down to your having a reason to obey your pain module? *What* reason, after all, have you to obey? One possible answer cites the pain module’s *authority*. Since a module surely has nothing akin to political authority, the idea might be that it nonetheless has epistemic authority. The pain module knows best. It tends to issue its commands when there is a risk of injury; and obeying them tends to reduce that risk. So on this account the reason-giving force of pain’s command-constituted unpleasantness is grounded in a correlation between that unpleasantness and the risk of injury. Now, perhaps this captures one sort of reason your pain’s unpleasantness gives you to withdraw your finger from the flame. But it surely misses another. Let’s allow that a practical reason constituted by the authority of a command-giver is not best parsed

[29] The point, of course, is not to object to *all* models. (Arguably, the testimony model for visual experience is far more promising than the command model for pain.) And, needless to say, modelled phenomena never resemble the home case in *all* respects. My point is only that we lose our grip on the model when the phenomenon fails to resemble the home case in the target respect.

in belief-desire terms. Even so, such a reason can surely be *defeated* by the subject's knowledge that the command-giver's authority has lapsed. But this is not true of one reason that pain's unpleasantness gives us. Suppose, for example, you knew your pain module was malfunctioning, that it was issuing commands inappropriately. Suppose you knew that the light caress causing agony to the back of your hand did not even slightly risk injuring it. Even so, the experience's unpleasantness would give you an excellent reason to pull away. And this, I suggest, is a reason which the notion of pain-commands fails to illuminate.

Another option for the imperativist is to say that your reason to obey your pain module resides in the fact that, if you don't, you risk not further injury, but further unpleasantness. But imperativists must construe this as your risking being given more pain-commands. And what reason have you to avoid that? It is tempting to reply that your reason is that such commands are unpleasant; but that begs the question. The imperativist claim is that the receipt of a certain kind of command constitutes the unpleasantness of pain, to which we are objecting that *commands* don't provide the kind of reason for action that unpleasantness does. So it won't do for the imperativist to reply by invoking the very claim at issue: that pain-commands constitute pain's unpleasantness.

Problem 5: Intensity

There remains a final idea which the notion of a pain-command might appear to illuminate nicely: the *intensity* of pains' unpleasantness. Some pains are not too bad, some are awful; and imperativism accounts for the difference in terms of the differing *strengths* of pain-commands (Klein, 2007, p. 522; Hall, 2008, p. 532). But, although this can seem promising, I fear its promise is illusory, for we have been given no appropriate way in which to understand the notion of a command's strength.

One might understand the differing strengths of commands in terms of the differing seriousness of appended warnings. Whereas a mild pain might say, 'Don't put weight on your ankle because something *quite bad* might happen', an intense pain might say, 'Don't do it because something *terrible* might happen'. But what is the 'something terrible'? If it is more intense unpleasantness — if, that is, the intense pain's greater intensity consists in its warning of *more intense unpleasantness* than the mild pain does — then the account is using the very notion of intensity that it is supposed to be explaining.

Perhaps, then, the ‘something terrible’ should be taken to be *more severe injury*: the intense pain’s greater intensity consists in its warning of worse injury than the mild pain. But notice that a pain’s greater unpleasantness gives one a greater *reason* to withdraw one’s finger from the flames, so the preceding account of greater intensity should illuminate this greater reason. But, as we might anticipate, given the discussion above, it doesn’t.³⁰ If we know the warning of greater injury is unreliable, then the warning doesn’t give us greater reason to act — but a more intense pain still does.

The imperativist might alternatively say that a pain-command’s strength consists in how attention-grabbing it is.³¹ But then it is the idea of the occupation of attention, not of a command, that is doing the work. We might just as well leave the notion of a command aside and say that the intensity of the unpleasantness of a pain consists in how attention-grabbing the *unpleasantness* is. Perhaps at this point the imperativist will reverse the direction of explanation and speculate that there is a feature of pain-commands, related specifically to their being commands, which *explains* why some are more attention-grabbing than others, and then claim that command strength consists in that feature. But what feature? In the case of spoken commands, being shouted rather than whispered is one such feature. But pain-commands are not shouted or whispered, and until we’re told what in their case the relevant feature is, this imperativist proposal is but a promissory note.³²

VIII. Conclusion

We started with the worry that conceiving of pains as perceptual experiences representing either states of disorder or nociceptor activity fails to accommodate — and certainly fails to illuminate — pain’s hedonistic aspect. The standard perceptualist move is to throw e-desires into the mix, but this has struck many as getting the explanatory direction backwards. So what is needed? According to this paper: not commands. I have argued that even if imperativists could adequately specify what

[30] Moreover, again the idea does not seem to require the notion of commands. Being warned in the sense of being informed what will happen if one doesn’t do something does not entail being commanded.

[31] Klein talks about the relation between pains and the attention (2007, p. 531).

[32] I also have a worry about self-knowledge, although I shall not pursue it here. Contemporary philosophers tend to favour non-observational accounts of our knowledge of, say, our visual experience. But it is not clear how this would go in the pain case if imperativism were true. It is not clear, for example, how we might extend Gareth Evans’ plausible account of the self-ascription of visual experiences (Evans, 1982). It begins, rather, to look as though we would have to find out whether we were in pain in something like the way we find out about our actions or intentions, and that, I suggest, doesn’t ring true.

content the relevant commands should have, which is far from clear, the notion of a command does nothing to illuminate its explanandum.

At this point, the imperativist might try a final strategy: to retreat to the more modest claim that pains involve commands which *cause* rather than *constitute* avoidance urges and unpleasant experiences. That will indeed overcome problems 2 and 3 above. But it leaves imperativism looking ever more unmotivated, for the point remains that the notion of a command neither is required to explain the hedomotive claims (problem 1) nor yields the right account of the rational role, or the intensity, of unpleasantness (problems 4 and 5).³³ Indeed, what makes this final proposal more modest is precisely that it doesn't even aspire to illuminate the nature of pain's hedomotive aspect, yet the promise of just such illumination was surely imperativism's greatest appeal.³⁴

Here, of course, I have not presented a better way of illuminating pain's hedomotive aspect. That is a task I will pursue elsewhere. My aim has rather been to make two negative points: that the possession of imperative content does not constitute pain's hedomotive character; and that even if it did, the possession of such content wouldn't *wholly* constitute pain.³⁵

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- [33] Even if the relevant commands cause rather than constitute avoidance urges, we might still ask whether the notion of a command illuminates the way in which the unpleasantness of pain rationalizes avoidance behaviour (and, for that matter, avoidance urges themselves). And here the points made under problem 4 will all remain.
- [34] Another partial retreat would be to say only the following. To illuminate pain's hedomotive character, we must invoke not just the idea of content, but the idea of the mood or force with which contents are entertained or issued, and in particular the idea of a mood or force other than the purely descriptive or representational (thanks to Darragh Byrne for putting this point to me). But until something more is said, this risks collapsing into nothing more than the claim that pains are *urges to X*, which — apart from the problems with specifying X satisfactorily — surely falls short of what imperativism seemed to promise; namely a way of illuminating the nature of the urges that pains involve, and indeed the nature of their unpleasantness. Hall and Klein's papers are, I take it, attempts to say more. But, for the reasons I have given, I think they fail.
- [35] For comments and discussion, I am particularly grateful to Bill Brewer, and also to Michael Brady, Darragh Byrne, Ruth Dick, Rose Drew, Neil Manson, Neil McDonnell, Dermot O'Keefe, Adam Rieger, Sebastian Sanhueza, Carolin Schulze, Barry Smith, Alan Weir, and two anonymous referees. Thanks also to audiences at the University of Lancaster; the Pain Workshop at the University of Birmingham, organized by Andrew Wright, Lisa Bortolotti, Stuart Derbyshire, and Alex Cameron; and the Perception and Emotion Workshop at the University of Glasgow, organized by Michael Brady.

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