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A fully nonlinear Dirichlet principle

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Abstract

The k-Hessian operator σ_k is the k-th elementary symmetric function of the eigenvalues of the Hessian. It is known that the k-Hessian equation $\sigma_k(D^2u) = f$ with Dirichlet boundary condition $u = 0$ is variational; indeed, this problem can be studied by means of the k-Hessian energy $\int -u\sigma_k(D^2u)$. We construct a natural boundary functional which, when added to the k-Hessian energy, yields as its critical points solutions of k-Hessian equations with general non-vanishing boundary data. As a consequence, we prove a sharp Sobolev trace inequality for k-admissible functions u which estimates the k-Hessian energy in terms of the boundary values of u. This is joint work with Jeffrey Case.