

Feeling and Experiencing Pain

A Comparison Between Different Conceptual Models

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the complex phenomenon of pain is discussed and analysed along different theoretical paths: cognitivism, hermeneutics, phenomenology. The neuro-cognitive approach is exemplified through Paul and Patricia Churchland's writings; then H.-G. Gadamer's hermeneutical approach is evaluated. While apparently opposite, they share a common assumption, namely that the body is basically to be conceived of as not really different from the Cartesian *Res extensa*. Some problems thus arise: in particular, the aspect of reflexivity implied in any experience of pain is overlooked. Accordingly, an adequate approach to feeling pain must take the phenomenological path. This means to discuss Husserl's but also Scheler's and Heidegger's contributions, in order to bring to the fore the complexity of the phenomenon of pain, which shows a particular and paradoxical structure: exposing the subject feeling pain to its own internal exteriority.

1. Introduction

Pain is certainly a subjective experience, perhaps “the” most subjective experience. No one else but me can feel the pain I am feeling at a certain moment. Yet does this mean that pain cannot be objectified? There is at least one argument pleading in favour of objectivation: pain needs to be communicated. The patient feeling pain is indeed hoping to let his/her physician understand what he/she is enduring, in order to stop the suffering or at least to cure it. Whether the task of communicating what kind of pain is one enduring be easy or difficult (and many a physician tell us it is quite difficult indeed), this does not

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imply that the task be negligible; hence the need to find ways to share one's own private feelings in the best possible way.

In this case, at the very least, a subjective experience must therefore be communicable and thus made objectified. Yet the problem is how to do it. Is objectification equivalent to quantification? And is there something getting lost in this equation? Is it then possible to imagine a path leading to the objectivation of the perhaps most subjective experience while preserving its qualitative aspects? Different approaches face this challenge: some authors think that objectivation of subjective experiences must take the form of reducing feelings to neural correlates, while others think that pain should rather be told, that is, narrated. These two approaches represent the two extremes of a range that contains several intermediate positions. In particular, a phenomenological perspective should be able to account for quality in an objective, that is, intersubjective, light: thus preserving the need to make communicable what is most private while avoiding a reductionist approach that eliminates what is precisely to be accounted for.

In order to show the claim that a phenomenological account of the experience of pain seems to be the better candidate for the task, I will first briefly discuss the two other approaches, championed respectively through the works of Paul and Patricia Churchland and of Hans Georg Gadamer. The Churchlands are well known for their so-called "eliminativist" approach, and the question concerning pain is actually one of the most important ones they discuss in order to make their point. Gadamer, on the other hand, discussed several times this issue for the sake of showing the limits and insufficiencies of an approach based on the elimination of the subjective side. Yet his account of the whole question is somewhat flawed by the implicit acceptance of one aspect pertaining to the very position he is criticizing: namely, the conception of bodily experience. I will try to show in what sense I am comparing and equating the two apparently *toto coelo* opposite approaches by discussing the relationship between pain and body in the two perspectives. The need for a different conception of bodily experience should accordingly emerge and lead us towards the phenomenological horizon.

2. Pain in the Eliminativist Approach

I have chosen to discuss the eliminativist approach through the writings of Paul and Patricia Churchland mainly for two reasons: one is that their approach is

perhaps the clearest one, at least as far as the question concerning pain is concerned. Others might as well be discussed: for example, D. Dennett's several remarks on the theme. But there is another reason for the choice: what the Churchlands write concerning pain is very aptly synthesized in a paper entitled "Neurophilosophy" (Churchland P. S. & Churchland P. M., 2007). At the start they claim that

the reductionist approach, based on elimination, maintains that the explanation of a macro-phenomenon in terms of its dynamics at the micro-structural level does not mean that the macro-phenomenon itself, *like pain for example*, is not real, nor that it represents something redundant, which is not worth a scientific explanation. The reductionist strategy does not imply a direct explanation of the phenomena occurring at the higher levels in terms of phenomena occurring at the lower organizational levels, but rather progressive reductive explanations that in any case entail that research proceed simultaneously at all levels.¹

What is most salient of this passage is the claim that what they call "macro-phenomena", such as pain, are at once respected (at least in principle) in their peculiarity and yet to be reduced to underlying, "lower" levels. The use of the metaphor of the stratification of layers should be remarked. It is by no means obvious and in particular it entails that experiences such as pain are not "original", that is, they depend, in a logical, epistemological and even ontological sense, on something else. Pain in itself "is" almost nothing. It is explained in terms of an "emerging" property, but the notion of emergence is adopted in a weak sense.²

The Churchlands admit that what they say is more a desideratum than an actual acquisition. In particular, they acknowledge the importance of the anti-reductionist request that the realm of subjective experience, and in particular what is called the field of qualia (a notion that I will challenge in what follows below), should not be overlooked. At the same time, they are confident that this problem will be overcome by the development of the neuro-sciences.

But what is most important, is to examine the notion of sensation adopted by the Churchlands. Following a tradition prevalent in the English-speaking philosophical world, they characterize sensations in terms of "entities intrinsically and absolutely simple". Pain in particular shows to possess "no

¹ My italics.

² For a discussion of the notion of emergence see Kim (1993, 1998). The Churchlands basically adopt Kim's approach and reject a stronger use of the notion. An excellent critical discussion of Kim's weak conception of emergence pleading in favour of a stronger approach can be found in Zhok (2011).

constitutive elements or a structural relationship". Thus, they say, pain can indeed be distinguished in a spontaneous, certain and unequivocal way, and yet we are not able to say why this is so. In this respect, therefore, pain cannot be analyzable in terms of a physical approach.

Thus physics is the science that must discriminate what is real and what is not. Physics, in the perspective here outlined, is obviously integrated by the neuro-computational approach. They suggest therefore that in a more or less near future the neural networks will become able to learn from experience, and thus will afford a materialist explanation of self-consciousness. In particular, they claim that pain will be understood in terms of representations, similar to other classes of representations such as colours, smells and so on, and in this way pain will be "explained away" by means of finding a causal explanation relating what happens at the lower levels and what "appears" to consciousness but is not real in itself.

Clearly there are many assumptions in this approach that should be challenged that I cannot discuss here for lack of space. As will be shown below, the notion of pain in terms of representation is present in Husserl's early work, but was then rejected by the founder of phenomenology. Before discussing his position, I will however briefly examine Gadamer's remarks concerning pain and suffering. This examination should provide us with further clues with respect to the aim of conceiving of pain in a different way.

3. Gadamer's Hermeneutical Approach to Pain

In a short text published in 2003, Gadamer (2003) addresses a non-philosophical public composed by physicians and biologists gathering to discuss the topic of physical pain. Gadamer speaks starting from his own personal experience and the polio infection that afflicted him in his youth, causing persistent although not crippling pain for many years, until it stopped at the threshold of old age. In his short speech, followed by an intense discussion, Gadamer stands up against the medicalization of pain, and in particular against the therapies revolving around the practically exclusive use of drugs. He claims that pain possesses a sort of meaning, insofar as it must be faced and overcome. He then hints at the possibility, and indeed the opportunity, to develop alternative forms of medicine, by referring his suggestion to the doctrines worked out by his friend Paul Vogler, a physician working in Heidelberg, who advocates an approach to pain that can exploit the latent energies of the aching

organism, provided the body is not treated like a machine subjected to mechanical laws.

The benefits deriving from such an alternative approach are then compared by Gadamer to the hermeneutical philosophical perspective, for pain is in this sense something that must be understood in its meaning and its existential value. Pain is related to experience, and only in this light can it be comprehended, and not simply eliminated, more or less temporarily, thanks to sedative painkillers.

The fundamental theme thus evoked by Gadamer consists in posing the question of the meaning of pain, that is, of the necessity of “understanding”, and not only “explaining”, pain. This can be done by finding its roots in human existence as such, and by avoiding conceiving of it simply in terms of organic errors or malfunctions. In the debate that followed Gadamer’s speech, some physicians agreed with him in stressing the utility of recognizing the patient’s whole personality in order to cure him or her. Others however objected that, while this is desirable, often it can prove quite difficult or even impossible, and claimed that a pharmacological treatment is in any case necessary.

Gadamer agreed, while at the same time insisting on the opportunity of not neglecting the natural resources present in human beings. In answering a final question, asking what in the end pain is according to him, Gadamer answered suggesting that pain is a warning and an admonishment: therefore, in the last analysis, a meaningful resource, even though its meaning appears only in fighting it.

In another text, published in 1994 and entitled *The Enigma of Health* (the German original title being “the concealedness of health”), Gadamer (1994) claimed that health basically consists in being able to forget one’s own body. The body is thus a latent being, and it manifests itself only when something does not function, like a tool, whose meaning, following Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, shows its meaningful context when it disappears, or it is interrupted, or interferes. The sick body, on the contrary, brings within itself, that is, it “interiorizes”, what usually remains in the exteriority of our experience of things. Yet in this doing it runs the risk of being overwhelmed. Through a dialogue with V. von Weizsäcker, Gadamer then asks whether the very questioning about the meaning of pain, and in particular the investigation of what it communicates to the patient, could grant some benefit for the suffering person, precisely in allowing him or her to avoid seeing in his or her body only a silent and enigmatic piece of matter, an absence of meaning that is its only form of brutal presence.

One could then say that for Gadamer the issue consists in introducing subjectivity in the medical praxis, whereas usually physicians tend to conceive of their own practice only in terms of acting on objective bodies. Therefore the physician must learn to see the *Leib*, and not only the *Körper*, of the patient, with a clear reference to Husserl's notions. Yet the theoretical problem resides precisely in clarifying the mode of this distinction.

In my view, this is a problem for those who, like Gadamer, essentially oppose the causal approach to corporeity, proper to natural sciences, and hermeneutics, understood as the interpretation of meaning, and therefore seen as an interpretive science based on language, irreducible to the methods of the natural sciences. In other words, Gadamer inherits the opposition between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* inaugurated by Dilthey. It seems possible to suggest that this very opposition in turn derives from the Cartesian split between matter and mind, *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, which then produces the need to overcome this very split.

In a way for Gadamer there are two types of body: the one proper to natural sciences and to medicine insofar as the latter is conceived in terms of a biological science, and the other, pertaining to "natural" medicine, which is rather based on the powers of self-healing and most of all of linguistic exchange. While it is undeniable that the intersubjective exchange between patients and doctors is very important for the sake of curing pain (and this is shown by the growing importance received by narrative medicine in particular in the U.S.), it is as if for Gadamer these two approaches cannot be integrated, for the body of the former is irreducible to the body of the latter. The mechanical and organic body of the natural sciences is therefore, for Gadamer as well as for the Churchlands, an undisputed truth.

From the comparison between Gadamer's standpoint and the one exemplified by the Churchlands it seems legitimate to claim that the issue emerging here concerns the statute of corporeality. On the one hand there is the position of those who admit only a strictly materialist position, quite often openly vindicated as the only way to overcome a metaphysical conception of consciousness. Yet this claim is in itself biased by a narrow conception of science. On the other hand, however, there is the position of those who, like Gadamer, do not accept the materialist position only to ratify it, involuntarily, by opposing the standpoint of the natural sciences to that of the "sciences of Spirit", instead of trying to find a possible middle way. The body is "the neglected" of philosophy, it is usually passed by in silence, as Sartre once said (Sartre 1956).

In other words, the philosophical crucial issue here consists in finding a way to let the body speak for itself, without interpreting it in advance through philosophical categories, which are inadequate for the task. The notion of body and of corporeity should be conceived in a different way when it comes to the living body of the human (suffering) being.

The fundamental question, rightly posed by Gadamer to the neuro-sciences, concerns the technicalization of the body, as it is implied by the medicalization of cure, and in particular by a conception of pain in terms of malfunctioning body, with respect to which the proper attitude should consist in fixing the broken piece. As a matter of fact, often the therapists involved in the pain therapy units think that their duty consists in eliminating pain, in particular chronic pain, through the help of painkillers. In this respect, pain is seen only in terms of pure deficit, and the experiential side of pain is totally neglected. Gadamer insists, on the contrary, on the virtues of natural medicine, insofar as the latter allows the therapists to take the patient's experience of his/her pain into account. The patient does not see his/her body as a broken tool to be fixed, but as him- or herself in need to be cured.

Thus the philosophical issue emerging from this confrontation concerns the exigency to properly understand the event of the experience of the body, in the double genitive, that is, in terms of the body experiencing *itself*. The reflexive capacity of the body is what escapes both from the materialist and eliminativist approach, and from the hermeneutical approach as well, insofar as the latter does not clearly address this particular problem, limiting itself to challenge the naturalist approach.

4. The Experiencing Body According to Husserl

The phenomenological approach to corporeity seems to be able to avoid the sterile contrast above sketched in a fruitful way. This approach offers a different categorial perspective on the notion of body, which seems to be more adequate in order to grasp the meaning of pain, while at the same time avoiding understanding it only in terms of disembodied subjectivity, as the hermeneutical standpoint in the end tends to claim.

Yet to speak of a phenomenological approach to corporeity is still too vague. Already within the works of the founder of phenomenology, E. Husserl, different approaches can be found. The issue is decidedly too wide to be discussed here. I will accordingly examine it under the perspectival angle of the

concepts of feeling and emotion, for this theme will provide some clues concerning the question whether pain is a representation or something else. As it was shown above, this is the main presupposition of the eliminativist approach.

In his early works, the *Logical Investigations* in particular, Husserl follows a rather common train of thought with respect to the notion of emotion. He tends to stick with one of his masters, C. Stumpf. The latter had already deeply renovated the old empiricist and positivist approach to emotions, but conceived of emotions in terms of structures grounded on underlying cognitive representations. Husserl states the same position when claiming that “emotional intentions are built upon presentative or judging intentions” (Husserl 2001, p. 96).

The argument underlying this position is quite simple: in order to be able to feel emotions with respect to something, it is first necessary to perceive or represent that something in advance. Yet it is also true that according to the early Husserl pain is not, properly speaking, something “intentional”, but rather something related to what he calls the “sensible matter”, or *hyle* according to the terminology of his *Ideas*, which is a real but not meaningful element of consciousness. Thus pain is, in this perspective, something affecting the subject, but only as a sensory element, which calls for interpretation. This interpretation is double: in the first place the subject’s consciousness must identify that which is the cause of pain, and then feel it in an emotional way.

This description is rather odd, but it is coherent with the general framework that Husserl sets up for his first analysis of consciousness in terms of intentionality. Pain is not a specific topic of investigation. Rather, Husserl tends to discuss emotional intentions within the particular framework of his discussion of consciousness in terms of cognitive acts, in turn distinguished between intuitive and signitive acts. Accordingly emotions are acts devoid of a direct reference to an object. This reference is provided by the intuitive acts (perception or imagination) underlying them.

Progressively, however, Husserl began to revise this first, structural description of the acts of consciousness. Already in the first volume of *Ideas*, Husserl brings about a relevant innovation, by considering emotions in terms of acts able to produce the manifestation of “objects of a new type” (Husserl 1983, p. 282). Emotions, in other words, are no longer thought of in terms of mere colorings of preceding cognitive acts, but quite to the contrary are now seen in their capacity of showing aspects of Being to which cognitive acts have no access. The emotional acts are now conceived as structured along two lines: they allow

the subject to affectively “take position” (*Stellungnehmen*) with respect to its own world, independently from propositional attitudes; and they allow the subject to encounter *itself* according to determined possibilities. This does not mean that Husserl is then led to consider affectivity in terms of emotive fusion. On the contrary, this new trend of analysis leads Husserl to assign an objectifying capability to the emotional acts themselves, provided these new objectivities are grasped as objects of new species, differing from the more usual objectivities grasped by cognitive acts.

Husserl further distinguishes between intentional acts and emotional tonalities, a term which usually is rather linked to Heidegger, for he claims that what appears through the latter mode is not just a determinate affection, related to a determinate object, but rather a certain sense of totality. A different emotional tonality does not change the affective relation to this or that entity, but rather produces a different mode of manifestation of a world in totality, thus in the end it manifests a different world. The emotional tonalities therefore constitute the emotive background of the appearance of the *meaning* or sense of a world (the notion of world here being understood in the phenomenological sense of the term). Clearly, this meaning is not cognitive but affective. In a manuscript written in the early Twenties, Husserl stresses that the affective background does not constitute any particular object, thus not even the objects of a new kind spoken of in the *Ideas*, but rather it represents an “unclear unitary element, a being in a confused tension, and yet devoid of direction. Maybe it can be meant as ‘mood’.” (*ein unklarer Eines, ein in verworrener Spannung sein und doch nicht in einer Richtung. Vielleicht meint man das mit unter “Stimmung.”*) (Ms. A VI 26/3). We must here retain in particular the remark on the tension, seen as a fundamental structural aspect.

The emotional tonality, or mood, in Husserl’s analysis presides over the affective configuration of the world, and as such it conditions the affective apprehensions of particular objects as well. Accordingly, it is possible to say that each sense of being (*Seinssinn*) manifested in a determined emotion is placed within the world horizon made possible by a peculiar mood. This in turn does not mean that a mood can take place or not, for on the contrary a certain specific mood is always given, at times eventually in the form of absence of affective relevance, which is not sheer absence, but something like a deadened mode, or a zero degree, hence not pure nothingness.

It is the mood that, properly speaking, “hits” the subject, which at that point is awakened, becomes awake to the content afforded by the emotional mood in

its characters (Ms. B III 9/18b). Thus the affections themselves are encountered within a, every time particular, mood, which in turn conditions each single affection and propagates through all of them. At times it can happen that a peculiar affection, which would belong to a determined affective register, for example joy as related to playful events, fails to break in according to its “objective” sense, for the subject is conditioned by a different mood, for ex. a depressive or melancholic state. Such a remark suggests two orders of considerations. In the first place, we can observe that emotional life is essentially constituted by general structures, the moods, which determine its level of receptivity. Here Husserl is both close and removed with respect to Kant, for receptivity is not mere inert mouldability, so to speak, but on the contrary it constitutes a field of possibility, and therefore there is an activity of passivity, as Husserl at times remarks, in particular in his fundamental analyses on passive synthesis.

Secondly, and most properly, it becomes then possible to pose the question concerning the experience of pain in terms of a first, structural, fundamental determination. Pain does not happen in and to a mechanical body, which as such knows nothing of its own suffering. Rather, it can take place only to a structure characterized by a form of general receptivity, determined according to its own emotional “attunement”, which is a transcendental structure but of an affective and not cognitive kind, insofar as it constitutes the condition of possibility of experience in general and of affective experience in particular. For Husserl, at this point, experience is in the first place a matter of “affectability”, and this in turn depends on having a body that is subject to, and at the same time subject of, feelings. The very sharp division between sensations and emotions, which is usually claimed by philosophers of different schools, now becomes weaker, in favor of a different conception based on the two basic notions of passivity and activity and their relationships.

These remarks permit to develop a different approach to pain, by stressing the need to understand it in dynamic terms. In other words, pain “is” not, purely and simply, but it always happens and intervenes on a previously already emotionally attuned bodily subject. In this respect, the event of a new painful experience possesses a temporal status right from the start, for it was not (usually) foreseen but irrupts like a trauma. In fact, pain is the paradigm for the notion of trauma. But pain is not a mechanical event for another reason: it may, but it may not, propagate on the bodily subject’s course of experience. One can learn how to endure pain. One can even take pleasure from pain. As we have seen,

Husserl takes into consideration the possibility that a certain emotional condition might deaden feelings that in other circumstances would have had a different course.

In any case, pain possesses a rather non-linear temporal structure, for it forces itself upon the subject who does not look for it (even in the case of pleasure from pain, what is searched is not pain *per se* but the pleasure deriving from it). Pain thus is not instantaneous in the sense of being without temporal thickness. There is a deep correlation between pain and temporality, perhaps the deepest form of temporal structure is the one related to pain and suffering. I cannot dwell here on this topic, but can only hint at this theme by stressing the importance of pain in order to understand life. Pain is in fact related to the traumatic interruption of a previous state, and hence it can be said to represent the first irruption of alterity within the subject, even when this alterity is related to bodily states of the subject itself. The body is living insofar as it can undergo such a disequilibrium.

5. The Forms of Givenness of Pain According to Scheler

Husserl is certainly the philosopher who inaugurated a new perspective in philosophy by conceiving of phenomena in a radical way, but Scheler is the thinker who deepened in the most fruitful way Husserl's approach in the direction of a phenomenological conception of affectivity in general and of pain in particular. While it is true that Scheler criticized Husserl for his earlier conception of emotions, a conception that Husserl himself, as we have seen, abandoned in the development of his thought, it remains nonetheless true that Scheler advanced on the path that Husserl opened.

Scheler discusses the theme of emotions, pain and suffering in many works. In an essay entitled *Love and Knowledge*, and then more widely in his *Ethics*, Scheler claims that the emotive acts are not simply activities of the knowing subject who penetrates an already accomplished object, but are also “an answering reaction of the object *itself*: a ‘giving of itself’, or a ‘self-revealing’ of the object” (Scheler 1992, 163-164). Emotions, accordingly, should not be understood in a subjectivist sense, even though they are given to a (bodily) subject. In and through them, something “is *being* given and ‘manifests itself’” (Scheler 1973, 258, translation modified).

Thus according to Scheler emotions disclose a world and the world reveals itself through that particular questioning which is implicit in the emotive feeling.

Scheler devoted most of his analyses to the theme of love, but his position can be generalized to encompass emotions in general, and in particular those related to painful experience. Scheler points to the event of the disclosure of value, understood as a particular form of objectivity which cannot be cognitively experienced but is nonetheless endowed with a material consistency which cannot be relegated to conventions or, at the other side of the scale, to a formal sphere of a Kantian transcendental kind.

Yet what Scheler's approach permits to clarify, in particular for the question concerning the experience of pain, is its relational nature. In other words, not only the subject is affected by painful experiences only insofar it is able to pre-delineate a world in which such experiences are possible (the "world" of a computer being *toto coelo* different in this respect), as was seen thanks to Husserl's approach; Scheler shows that, in the emotively connoted experiencing, peculiar modes of manifestation are given, which refer to the world and the entities included in it. Scheler therefore provides with further clues in order to clarify the conditions of possibility for understanding the manifestation of pain: subject and object are co-implicated in the manifestation of pain, not in the sense that they coincide, but rather due to the fact that each of the two is provided with mutual determinations that are usually separated. Each of the two is what it is only insofar as it is related to the other.

Only a relationist approach can therefore be adequate to grasp the peculiar logic of emotions and affections. The object given through affective intentions gives itself, manifests itself, and does not depend on a subjective interpretation. At the same time, this givenness itself is possible only insofar as it is given to a bodily, feeling and aching subject, who receives it and is not its author, but certainly is not just an epiphenomenon either. This means that, in the last analysis, what manifests itself in the manifestation of the emotive experience is the subject itself, showing itself as reversed and coming "from" the object. What kind of manifestation is this?

In the experience of pain, the subject manifesting itself in the painful affectivity of suffering is inverted and alienated. This is the only meaningful mode to inquire about the "causes" of pain. In other words, pain is intrinsically related to the experience of extraneousness, which constitutes one of its defining traits. An objectifying causalist approach to pain, which programmatically excludes the subjective side of suffering in the name of truth, fails to grasp the actual articulation of the phenomenon. Only by respecting the intimacy of the experience of pain, which is at once reflexive and estranging, can

it be adequately accounted for, both in what it brings to manifestation and in the modes with which it manifests itself.

This is clearly a strange form of manifestation, something that is both intimate and extraneous, and something like that which J. Lacan once called “extimity” or “extimacy” (*extimité*) (Lacan 1992, p. 139). Yet only this kind of intimate extraneousness can properly be given as pain, and symmetrically pain can manifest itself only in this way. Pain cannot be registered as an event taking place in a geometrical space-time, but cannot be “understood” in terms of a text to be interpreted, as the hermeneutical paradigm claims, either. If one still wants to talk about interpretation, – and this is certainly necessary insofar as, as was said above, cure is implied in the treatment of pain, and cure requires communication – the kind of interpretation here at play is that which works through the deciphering of symptoms. Pain, even the corporeal and apparently most mechanical one, means something, but its mode of signifying is that proper to the riddle, which cannot be solved like a mathematical equation, but rather by answering in a vital and existential manner.

Only on this condition can the experience of pain and suffering be subtracted to its destinal reification, medicalization, pharmaceuticalization, and in the end its technicalization, in the sense that Gadamer, and Heidegger before him, have discussed. At the same time, it is necessary to respect its corporeal rooting, for the logic that presides over the manifestation of pain is a corporeal and “aesthetic” logic. Clearly this form of logic is not based on the principle of non-contradiction, for the aching body “is and is not” the same body experiencing its own pain. This in turn poses the question of what is “proper” and what is “extraneous” when the bodily subjectivity is concerned, a question that the later Husserl, and then more widely Merleau-Ponty (and some remarks made by Derrida) never stopped to investigate.

6. The Painful Situatedness According to Heidegger and Henry

On these conditions then it becomes plausible and opportune indeed to recover what Heidegger says in his *Being and Time* on the notion of *Befindlichkeit*, understood in terms of emotional and non-cognitive comprehension. Only if experience is conceived as being affectively determined it is possible to actually realize that experience is given to a “subject” which is not an organic or mechanical body, but a being for which its own being is what matters, and which is characterized by its “having-to-be” its own being. Only on these conditions,

in particular, can the painful experience be correctly understood as possibility, or better still, as im-possibility, for pain is the interruption of one's own usual possibilities.

As a matter of fact, pain shines forth on the horizon of possibilities of *Dasein* as an interruption of its own potentiality for being (*seinkönnen*) (Heidegger, 2010, pp. 279, 244). Yet it does not do so in the manner of the interwordly entities become unusable. One of the most intrinsic features of painful experience is in fact its being given in terms of a "no longer", which can be temporary or, in the severest cases, permanent, of the system configuring each *Dasein* as being-in-the-world. Far from subtracting *Dasein* from its entanglement (*Verfallen*), in order to awaken it to its own most proper possibility, that is, its being-for-death, pain delivers *Dasein* to a deeper entanglement: to an ontological decline which does not hint at that particular future always future represented by the event of one's own death (which according to Heidegger brings about the transformation from improper to proper life), but rather at a kind of death in life, which can be more or less serious depending on the severity of illness, but which can at times (for ex. in some cases of chronic pain) lead to suicide, preferred to a form of existence which can only last indefinitely amid unbearable and meaningless suffering.

Pain manifests the body to itself, in an unsurpassable intimacy that Michel Henry's investigations can approach but do not exhaust. (see in particular Henry 2008, 2015) The self-affection proper to pain is such that it does indeed produce the self-revelation or self-manifestation of the incarnated subject, but at the same time its self-distancing. Here coincidence and distance are not opposed but somehow coincide. One could even say that life, understood in terms of self-affection (as M. Henry claims), manifests itself to itself in the first place in painful experience, which as such precedes any other form of self-manifestation, and therefore exposes from the start the subject to its own alterity.

7. In Order not to Conclude

Quite clearly, the topic of the experience of pain, in the double genitive, cannot be exhausted in one paper. Some temporarily conclusive remarks are nevertheless in order. The phenomenological analysis of pain shows that language, which according to Gadamer constitutes the turning point leading

from phenomenology itself to hermeneutics,³ remains indeed a central question, which however must be displaced. Pain “speaks”, in its own enigmatic way, but through the enigmatic language of the body, which cannot be adequately grasped when language is investigated, as Gadamer does, in terms of the house of Being. Pain speaks the language of symptoms and requires a peculiar hermeneutics closer to psychoanalysis. At the same time pain cannot be treated in terms of a representation, or even worse as a signal for a processing unit, as is the case in the prevalent model adopted by the neurosciences, for it does not only consist of information, but in opening a space of meaning, in which only the painful feeling can take its own peculiar meaning. Pain thus proves to be an ontological, and not only ontic, phenomenon. In this respect, pain poses a problem to phenomenology itself, insofar as its “manifestativity”, that is, the transcendental field of manifestation of phenomena related to pain, requires a phenomenology of the body that can face the challenge of that which manifests the subject to itself only in depriving the subject of its own subjectivity.

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³ See for example Gadamer (1963).

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