

ESF Exploratory Multidisciplinary Workshop on

PAIN & SUFFERING

Luxembourg (Luxembourg), 12-15 November 2009

Convened by:

BUSTAN Smadar and KERR Catherine

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Co-sponsored by

**Final ESF Scientific Report of exploratory Workshop
on Pain and Suffering
12-14 of November University of Luxembourg
Convener – Dr. BUSTAN Smadar**

<http://www.suffering-pain.net>

1. Executive summary

The ESF exploratory workshop on Suffering and Pain brought together scholars from a large spectrum of disciplines, in view of creating a long-term interdisciplinary working group. It was held at the Walferdange Campus of the University of Luxembourg over 2 days (13-14 November 2009). It was preceded by a reception the previous evening, with a total of **26 participants**, coming from **10 countries**. The opening reception was an ice breaker that permitted very good firsthand and direct interactions between participants who did not know each other beforehand, coming from completely different research fields.

For the two days of the Workshop, the participants attended talks followed by ample time for discussion, which were divided in a series of successive themes on the subject:

- 1) The phenomena of Suffering and Pain
- 2) The lived Suffering and Pain - Establishing lines of communication
- 3) Suffering in the social, political and cultural dimensions - moving beyond the individual

These were followed by a plenary session that allowed us to discuss the path to follow, and the modes of future cooperation.

To set the example and initiate the multidisciplinary approach, the first session included talks from small collaborative groups, each followed a discussion of at least half an hour. This was perceived as a good model to expand and build upon. The other sessions followed more classical format, with individual researchers exposing their work, and allowing the rest of participants to familiarize themselves with and acquire the necessary background from fields outside their expertise. This interaction allowed for lively, open and constructive discussions during the meeting. The nature of these exchanged allowed for them to be pursued further and informally during the dinners, which turned into additional working sessions.

The two-day workshop and the ambitious scientific program resulted in intense and long days. We choose this format as many participants could not attend a longer meeting, and had requested for it to take place over the weekend due to professional commitments (such as their duties in receiving patients at clinics and hospitals). For a future meeting, however, I would plan beforehand to consult with participants whether to add an additional workshop day.

All participants considered that the workshop was successful, interesting, and motivating intellectually. From a practical point of view, participants were very happy with the organization and felt both welcome and adequately taken care of in Luxembourg, indicating that the choice of venue was appropriate. As the convener, I was very pleased to see that things took place as expected and to the last detail. This is greatly thanks to the efficient and devoted effort of Mme Christine Basello, the secretary of IPSE unit who was my pillar while organizing this meeting.

The **scientific objectives** of the Workshop were attained beyond our expectations. The outcome was very satisfactory for the following reasons:

1. The talks, even though in different domains, kept a level of excellence within their specialty while being clear and enriching for all the listeners. It was repeatedly noticed that people learnt a lot from each other.
2. Participants felt very comfortable to express themselves during the discussions, which yielded great ideas and exchanges.
3. All participants were enthusiastic and expressed commitment about a future collaboration. There is a consensus on the need to move forward and begin our long-term research plan, without waiting for a future meeting.
4. The synergies created by the Workshop are demonstrated by the involvement of different participants immediately after its end, as they contacted other partners that can provide input and assistance for the project in the future.

2. Scientific content of the event

Presentation 1 “Pain, suffering and hurt – A multidimensional psychobiological perspective”.

Fernand ANTON & Gilles MICHAUX (Research Unit INSIDE, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg)

On the definition of Pain as unpleasant and emotional experience associated with actual and potential tissue damage. On the different dimensions of pain and its consequent multidimensional assessment. Relieving mechanisms and the role of the environment (placebo effect).

Discussion on pain as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and how it can be seen by parallel and serial connections. Debate on the question of a universal parameter when trying to relieve pain (placebo).

Presentation 2 “Pain and suffering from a sensorimotor perspective”

Yoshi NAKAMURA (Utah Center for Exploring Mind-Body Interactions, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, USA), **Kevin O’REGAN** (Laboratory of Psychology of Perception, University of Paris Descartes, Paris, France) & **Eric MYIN** (Department of Philosophy, University of Antwerpen, Belgium)

On how can the sensory motor view be applied to pain and whether pain be considered as a kind of perception (internal perception).

Debate on the view that considers pain according to a motivational structure. Asking whether pain can be seen from a functionalist view only. Discussing the question: What do pain and suffering share from the perspective of the sensory-motor (SM) theory?

Presentation 3 “Feeling without awareness: converging neuroscientific and phenomenological approaches to acute Suffering”

Smadar BUSTAN (Philosophy Department, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg) & **Catherine KERR** (Osher Research Center, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA)

Defending the collapse of the pain-suffering dichotomy by presenting the three major components of the two phenomena. Demonstrating the resulting acute model through a parallelism between the brain activity and the felt experience.

Discussing the model and difficulty to find a consensus about what constitutes suffering and pain.

Presentation 4 “Pain and Suffering - insights from the brain” Predrag PETROVIC

(Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden)

On how unpleasant emotions (including suffering) and pain may be anatomically, functionally and evolutionary related in the brain. Showing that pain processing, pain anticipation, social pain and empathy for pain activate similar regions in the insula and the caudal anterior cingulate cortex, suggesting some mechanisms for how these states may be induced.

Open discussion on brain evidence in cases of pain and suffering.

Presentation 5 “The effect of the Other on the Sufferer – The positive role (therapy)”

Hillel BRAUDE (Biomedical Ethics Unit, McGill University, Montreal, Canada)

On the paradox of suffering and medicine, in the sense that we have an obligation to treat what can never become a matter of objective considerations.

Debating on the subjective and objective measurements of the sufferer.

Presentation 6 “Babies, the unvoiced cases of suffering and the consequence for practitioners”

Denis MELLIER (Department of Psychology, University of France-Compté, Besancon, France)

On the question of primitive suffering and how does it expresses itself in babies where there is no delimitation between the inner and the outer world.

Extensive discussion on how to identify silent suffering. Determining if there is a substance for such “primitive suffering” considering that it is pre-affective and pre-linguistic.

Presentation 7 “Social Suffering: A new understanding and emergent form of social practice”

Ian WILLKINSON (School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK)

The concept of social science as an analytical category and its role in the understanding of social suffering. Showing cross-disciplinary tensions and how do we need to concentrate on the experience.

What is brought with force to our attention, is the fact that pain and suffering is a profoundly moral matter, giving a moral sense to life.

Presentation 8 “Moral Suffering: variations of suffering in light of different contextual pressures”

Lambros COULOUBARITSIS (Department of Philosophy & Religion Sciences, Free University of Brussels, Brussels, Belgium)

On the physical, psychological and moral structure of Suffering and why major problems of humanity come from ignoring the different levels of moral suffering.

Discussing the given examples as basis for a model of moral suffering and what is the nature of this type of moral approach.

Presentation 9 “Political View: on Suffering, Memory and Time”

Cindy HALPERN (Department of Political Science, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, USA)

On the diverse causes for human suffering, and how do we carry suffering in our cultural and political heritage.

Discussing how the multiple layers of time and memory of pain and suffering shape our present-day life (for example: Shoa, slavery).

3. Assessment of the results

Being an exploratory Workshop, it was intended at the outset as a meeting point of different disciplines and approaches on the subject of Pain and Suffering, with the ultimate goal of initiating a truly multidisciplinary working group. Out of this rich exchange of knowledge and approaches came out numerous ideas that require further discussion and maturing. In time we hope to direct this initiative into a united effort that will decipher the outstanding open questions on the topic and in view of presenting a theoretical puzzle of pain and suffering. Issues regarding the relation between the two phenomena, debating on the collapse or enhancement of the pain-suffering dichotomy; inquiring into the true quantifiability of these phenomena; investigating whether pain and suffering are indeed special cases of conscious experience, are all points that were addressed during talks and subsequent discussions. The different papers presented have also shown that such fundamental points do not have definite answers within a single discipline.

The Workshop has seen as necessary to pursue the engaged dialogue among the different disciplines, articulating and coordinating the research program and projects through further discussions and collaborations.

As a first and immediate step, we plan to put online the talks on our project website (www.suffering-pain.net). These pages will also serve as a communication and exchange tool for all participants.

We also plan to publish the presentations in a future thematic volume of the journal *Anglo-Saxonica*.

During the plenary session we have planned our collaboration for the book project. Our work aims at demonstrating how an interdisciplinary work could alleviate pain and suffering and how blanks in one field when treated from a single approach, could be answered by complementary views from other fields. We consider that the phenomena of suffering and pain, when treated as a whole, may help us embody science and culture.

In the longer run, we will identify how our work could be translated into concrete actions (for example: extend the use of the website to the medical corps and education). Our plan is to set a research agenda for the next 5 years and establish a scientific network of experiments that would serve as a reference for further interpretation by humanities.

As the convener, I will apply for different proposals in order to assure funding for the group for the next 5 years, including:

- Submission of an ERC Starting independent Research Grant.
- Seek financial support within Luxembourg.
- Plan for the submission to the ESF Research Networking Program.
- Consolidate the scientific network between several participating institutions.

4. FINAL PROGRAMME

Please note:

- The time length of group talks varies between 1h and 1h30 followed by a 30 minutes discussion
- The time length of individual talks is 35 min, followed by a 25 min discussion.
- All talks will be delivered in English. One talk is programmed for a delivery in French and a translated version of the talk's text will be handed to the participants at the meeting. All discussions and questions will be carried out in English.

Thursday, 12 November 2009

Evening *Arrival*

19:30 **Welcome**

Reception Dinner, Hotel Novotel Center (mezzanine)

Friday, 13 November 2009

08.50 **Train**

09.10–09.20 **Welcome by the convenors**

09.20–09.40 **Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)**
Eva HOOGLAND (ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities - SCH)

09.40-10.20 Two min. introduction of each participant by him or herself

10.20-17.00 First Session: On The Phenomena of Suffering and Pain (7 speakers). Chair: Nicolas DANZIGER

A dialogue between Neuroscience, Phenomenology and Psychology

Underlying thread: is there a continuum between pain and suffering and how do we identify it?

10.20-10.35 *Coffee / Tea Break*

10.35-11.35 **Presentation 1 “Pain, suffering and hurt – A multidimensional psychobiological perspective”.**

Fernand ANTON & Gilles MICHAUX (Research Unit INSIDE, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg)

Followed by 30 min **Discussion**

12.05-13.30 **Presentation 2 “Pain and suffering from a sensorimotor perspective”**

Yoshi NAKAMURA (Utah Center for Exploring Mind-Body Interactions, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, USA), **Kevin O'REGAN** (Laboratory of Psychology of Perception, University of Paris Descartes, Paris, France) & **Eric MYIN** (Department of Philosophy, University of Antwerpen, Belgium)

Followed by 30 min **Discussion**

14.00-14.45 *Lunch*

- 14.45-15.45 **Presentation 3 “Feeling without awareness: converging neuroscientific and phenomenological approaches to acute Suffering”**
Smadar BUSTAN (Philosophy Department, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg) &
Catherine KERR (Osher Research Center, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA)
 Followed by 30 min **Discussion**
- 16.15-16.30 *Coffee / tea break*
- 16.30-18.45** **Second Session: The lived suffering and Pain - Establishing lines of communication.**
Chair: Otniel DROR
 A dialogue between Biomedicine, Psychology and Philosophy

Underlying thread: When the social and cultural context is no longer eliminated and we no longer think on the phenomena on their own, in an almost “hermetically sealed” manner, how do we conceive of pain and suffering? Furthermore, how do we relate to the pain and suffering of the other?
- 16.30-17.05 **Presentation 1 “Pain and Suffering - insights from the brain” Predrag PETROVIC**
 (Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden)
 Followed by 25 min **Discussion**
- 17.30-18.05 **Presentation 2 “The effect of the Other on the Sufferer – The positive role (therapy)”**
Hillel BRAUDE (Biomedical Ethics Unit, McGill University, Montreal, Canada)
 Followed by 25 min **Discussion**
- 19.01** **Train**
- 20.00 *Dinner* at the Novotel Center

Saturday, 14 November 2009

- 09.20** **Train**
- 09.40-10.15 **Presentation 3 “Babies, the unvoiced cases of suffering and the consequence for practitioners”**
Denis MELLIER (Department of Psychology, University of France-Compté, Besancon, France)
 Followed by 25 min **Discussion**
- 10.40-11.00 *Coffee / Tea Break*
- 11.00-13.50** **Third Session: Suffering in the social, political and cultural dimensions - moving beyond the individual. Chair: Gilles BENDELOW**
 A dialogue between Sociology, Political and Moral Philosophy

Underlying thread: How the aspiration for objectivity and quantification is integrated in the collective sphere? Can we find parallel expressions linking the social and political realm to the mind and body experience?

- 11.00-11.35 **Presentation 1 “Social Suffering: A new understanding and emergent form of social practice”**
Ian WILLKINSON (School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK)
 Followed by 25 min **Discussion**
- 12.00-12.35 **Presentation 2 “Moral Suffering: variations of suffering in light of different contextual pressures”**
Lambros COULOUBARITSIS (Department of Philosophy & Religion Sciences, Free University of Brussels, Brussels, Belgium)
 Followed by 25 min **Discussion**
- 13.00-13.35 **Presentation 3 “Political View: on Suffering, Memory and Time”**
Cindy HALPERN (Department of Political Science, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, USA)
 Followed by 25 min **Discussion**
- 14.00-15.00 *Lunch*
- 15.00-18.00** **Fourth Session: Chairs: Smadar BUSTAN & Catherine KERR**
Plenary session on follow-up activities/networking/collaboration
1. **What did the scientists learn from the humanities/social sciences and vice versa? (1 hour)**
 2. **Break up into sub-groups of scientists/humanities to determine future research according to the necessities of each field (1 hour)**
 3. **Merging: decide together on an overview of future collaboration and working plan (1 hour)**
- 16.00-16.30 *Coffee / Tea Available during the session*
- 18.00 *End of Workshop*
- 18.31** **Train**
- 19.00 *Dinner at the Grand Hotel Mercure Alfa Luxembourg*

Sunday, 15 November 2009

Morning *Departure*

5. Final list of participants

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6. Statistical information on participants

Age Bracket

- 3 participants under 30
- 16 participants between 30 to 50
- 7 participants over 50

Countries of Origin

- 2 Belgium
- 1 Canada
- 5 France
- 2 Germany
- 3 Great Britain
- 2 Israel
- 4 Luxembourg
- 2 Portugal
- 2 Sweden
- 3 USA

M/F repartition

- 13 men
- 13 women