

Suffering is Not Pain An Annotated English Translation

Paul Ricœur
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Abstract

In 1992, Ricœur delivered his lecture, "*Suffering is Not Pain*," at a psychiatry colloquium, addressing clinicians eager to explore this profound human experience, which is notably absent from the traditional psychiatric corpus. Ricœur examined the semiology of suffering through three moments: the specific relationship between oneself and the other, the characterization of a diminution in the power to act, and, finally, a hermeneutic reflection on suffering as an enigma that has something to teach—both at the level of self-reflection on one's own existence and in the context of relationships with others. It thus appears that suffering can open the way to a hermeneutic of the symbols of human existence, whose meaningful manifestations can also be clinical. However, this text does not belong to Ricœur's systematic work. To understand its significance this annotated translation accompanied by its explanatory introduction, allows for a detailed reading that considers the intertextual references and the meanings implied by Ricœur's expressions. By integrating clinical and philosophical language, this translation acknowledges the importance of multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of suffering.

Keywords: suffering; pain; Ricœur; psychiatry; philosophy; phenomenology

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Translator's introduction

Among the many different philosophical problems raised by suffering, its relation to pain was addressed by Paul Ricœur at a colloquium for psychiatrists in 1992.¹ For psychiatrists who work daily with people with mental disorders, suffering certainly has a particular meaning. Surprisingly, in contrast to pain, it was—and is still—not part of the medical classification of diseases and symptoms. The introduction to this colloquium by the psychiatrist Jean-Jacques Kress focused precisely on the necessity for clinicians to reflect on important human experiences beyond the psychiatric nosography, such as suffering, in order to reframe their clinical practice in human life.² Hence, the invitation to a philosopher to shed light on this relatively absent concept in psychiatry. Regarding philosophy, suffering has been a subject of interest at various points throughout its history.³ But it is, above all, the relationship between suffering and pain that philosophy could not avoid engaging in a dialogue with psychiatry. Suffering, as an affection of the psyche, brings together the psychiatrist and the philosopher in the possibility of a mutual enrichment of perspectives.

But for this to be possible, it is necessary to forge links and build bridges between these two disciplines. This was precisely Ricœur's interest in the lecture whose English translation we

¹ Paul Ricœur, "La souffrance n'est pas la douleur," *Psychiatrie française*, vol. 23 (1992), 9–18. The French version of the conference, with an introduction by Samuel Lelièvre, is available here: <https://bibnum.explore.psl.eu/s/psl/ark:/18469/3tcmb>

² Jean-Jacques Kress, "Le psychiatre devant la souffrance," *Psychiatrie française*, vol. 23 (1992), 19–32.

³ See Aristote, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931); Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics: Proved in Geometrical Order*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Matthew J. Kisner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); George Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

present here and which is accompanied by several research articles that allow for a deeper understanding.

Since the 1950s, Ricœur had a great interest in mental disorders, psychoanalysis and psychiatry.⁴ Working on hermeneutics, he published a book on Sigmund Freud,⁵ which had a controversial echo for Jacques Lacan and his followers in France, leading him to take some distance.⁶ However, he maintained close relations with various psychiatrists, Kress for instance, who invited him twice in 1986 and 1992 to give the keynote conference of the annual colloquium of the Association Française de Psychiatrie. This association was created in 1979 by Dr. Charles Brisset with the help of the French psychiatrists' union to promote scientific debates in psychiatry at a time when theoretical controversies endangered the unity of the profession.⁷ The contribution we translate here is the keynote lecture by Ricœur at the annual colloquium of 1992, which was followed by the clinical counterpart presentation of Kress. The philosopher and the psychiatrist sent the draft of their communications to each other shortly before the colloquium to allow for this original dialogue of philosophy and psychiatry.⁸

Given that Ricœur's presentation was intended for an audience of psychiatrists, it might be one of the reasons why it has been little studied by readers interested in philosophy in general or in Ricœurian philosophy, with the exception of the great work directed by Claire Marin and Nathalie Zaccai-Reyners.⁹ Further hypotheses are the relative originality of the topic of suffering in relation to pain regarding Ricœur's work, and the fact that, until recently, pain was not considered a major topic for philosophy.¹⁰ Furthermore, despite the importance of the topic, its interdisciplinary meaning, its further uses in medicine and psychiatry – and the fame of Ricœur – this text has not yet been translated into English. The works that are published in English use the

⁴ See the article by Astrid Chevance entitled "Ricoeur's Practical Philosophy of Suffering in Medicine: a Contextualization of 'Suffering Is Not Pain' with Other Peripheral Works", *ERRS*, Vol 15, No 2 (2024), 28-47.

⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁶ Dosse, *Paul Ricœur. Le sens d'une vie (1913-2005)*, 289-310.

⁷ See the website of Association Française de Psychiatrie (AFP): <https://psychiatrie-francaise.com/association/>

⁸ See the commentary by Astrid Chevance entitled "Ricoeur's Practical Philosophy of Suffering in Medicine: a Contextualization of "Suffering Is Not Pain" with Other Peripheral Works".

⁹ Claire Marin et Nathalie Zaccai-Reyners, *Souffrance et douleur. Autour de Paul Ricœur* (Paris: PUF, 2013).

¹⁰ The concept of pain and suffering has acquired a renewed attention in particular in analytical philosophy thanks to the efforts of the Pain Project and The Value of Suffering Project directed by David Bain, Michael Brady and Jennifer Corns (David Bain, *The Pain Project [2012-2013]*, presentation of the project available online: <https://www.davidbain.org/grants-projects/pain/>; David Bain, *Value of Suffering Project [2013-2016]*, presentation of the project available online: <https://www.davidbain.org/grants-projects/value-of-suffering-project/>).

French version and translate the required citations.¹¹ We therefore offer here an English translation of this publication, trying to take care of both clinical and philosophical language, in order to proliferate the use of the content and of Ricœur's thought in psychiatry and medicine, philosophy and humanities.

What is primarily at stake here is the universal experience of human suffering, which is not the exclusive object of psychiatry. Ricœur thus constructs a methodological distinction between pure physical pain and suffering that deeply touches the existential core of the human being. Hence, at this point, the clinical approach discovers its limits, and it is necessary to resort to phenomenology to illuminate depths that psychiatry does not intend to reach. In both cases, the psychiatrist and the phenomenologist deal with signs of suffering, but these are understood in different ways. Ricœur then goes on to present the signs of suffering in three moments that structure the publication. These three moments are presented as a constant deepening of the phenomenon of suffering. The first moment is constituted by the relation between oneself and the other, which is reminiscent of the descriptions made by Ricœur in his text *Oneself as an Other*.¹² In this book published in 1990, it is one of Ricœur's so-called masters of suspicion, Friedrich Nietzsche, who decenters the Cartesian cogito. But in "Suffering is Not Pain", a second master of suspicion, Freud, decenters the Cartesian structure of the experience of the self in the face of the suffering that opens my psyche to the other who cannot understand me, or who has produced my suffering, or to the other that I am when I am a spectator of my own affect. Freud undoubtedly has an important influence on Ricœur's phenomenology, as we see in his work on *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*.¹³ The second part is devoted to action in the face of suffering, which Ricœur understands as a diminution of the power to act. Here again, following the intuitions of *Oneself as an Other*, Ricœur distinguishes between four modes of action: discourse, doing, narration, and moral imputation. An important place is given to affects at each of these modes. The third part is devoted to a hermeneutic of suffering that treats suffering as an enigma that has something to teach, both at the level of self-reflection on one's own existence, and at the level of the relationship with others. In a way, this third part revives the reflections of Ricœur's early work on human fallibility¹⁴ and how this is seen in religious signs, which gives rise to his

¹¹ See Serge Daneault *et al.*, "Non-somatic Suffering in Palliative Care: A Qualitative Study on Patients' Perspectives," *Journal of Palliative Care*, vol. 37, n° 4 (2022), 518–525; Catarina Rebelo, "The Different Modalities of Suffering, from Paul Ricœur's Text 'Suffering Is not the Pain' and Its Relevance in Non-conventional Therapies," in Joaquim Braga and Mario Santiago de Carvalho eds., *Philosophy of Care. New Approaches to Vulnerability, Otherness and Therapy. Advancing Global Bioethics* (Cham: Springer, 2021); Stijn Vanheule and Ignaas Devisch, "Mental Suffering and the DSM-5: A Critical Review," *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice. International Journal of Public Health Policy and Health Services Research*, vol. 20 (2014), 975–980.

¹² Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹³ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*.

¹⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man: Philosophy of the Will*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993).

hermeneutics of symbols¹⁵. It would thus seem that suffering can open the way to a hermeneutic of the symbols of human existence, the meaningful manifestation of which can be clinical.

Ricœur's reflections on pain and suffering account for the necessary dialogue between psychiatrists and philosophers. The extreme cases of human experience are of interest to these two disciplines since they both manage to account for the particular configuration of the human being. Both psychiatry and philosophy shed light on the experience of pain and suffering. At the confluence of these two domains can these experiences be fully understood—provided that misunderstandings and semantic pitfalls are overcome. This is what we are betting on here by presenting this annotated English translation of Ricœur's reflections.

The translators are grateful to the Ricœur family and to the scientific committee of the Fonds Ricœur for granting us the rights to translate this publication into English. We extend our thanks to David Pellauer, Yue Wang, Chris Veal and George Taylor for their readings and advices on this translation. We would also like to thank Jean-Luc Amalric and Ernst Wolff for giving us the opportunity to publish the translation in the *ERRS* journal.

Suffering is Not Pain¹⁶

Allow me, first of all, to thank your president, Jean-Jacques Kress, for his invitation to share in this morning's discussion with him. My contribution differs from his in that it is not based on clinical experience and therefore on the nosography of mental disorders, but only on the most common and universal human experience of suffering. Nor is my contribution meant to guide the therapeutic act, but only to shed light on our understanding of human beings as beings capable of experiencing and enduring suffering. My presupposition is that clinical practice and phenomenology intersect in semiology, in the comprehension of the signs of suffering. The former instructs the latter through its competence, the latter instructs the former through the understanding of suffering that seems to underlie the therapeutic relationship itself. No doubt we'll discuss this mutual and intersecting instruction later.

I'll go straight to the difficulties of that matter. I'll pass very quickly over the first one. It has to do with the boundary between pain and suffering; the clinician¹⁷ has his reference points, namely, the link between mental disorders and the psyche, held to be the "locus" of these disorders; but what do "locus," types, instances, and so on, mean, and what does the psyche mean? By referring to signs, and thus to semiology, psychiatry and phenomenology agree upon the

¹⁵ Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

¹⁶ All the endnotes have been added by the translators. This a translation of Paul Ricœur, "La souffrance n'est pas la douleur," *Psychiatrie française*, vol. 23 (1992), 9–18. © Fonds Ricœur. The French version of the conference with an introduction by Samuel Lelièvre is available here: <https://bibnum.explore.psl.eu/s/psl/ark:/18469/3tcmb>

¹⁷ We translate here "homme de la clinique" as "clinician" and not as "the man of the clinic" in order to remove any gender preference, but we are aware that we lose the poetic formulation of Ricœur's original text echoing to the French expression "l'homme du monde".

justification for the use of pain and suffering as distinct. We will therefore agree to reserve the term pain for affects felt as localized in particular organs of the body or in the body as a whole, and the term suffering for affects that are open to reflexivity, to language, to the relationship to oneself, to the relationship to others, to the relationship to meaning, to questioning—all of which we will consider in a moment. But pure, purely physical, pain remains a limit case, as is perhaps suffering as supposedly purely psychological, which rarely occurs without some degree of bodily experience. This overlap explains the hesitations in ordinary language: we speak of pain at the loss of a friend, but we say we are suffering from a toothache. Hence, it is as ideal-types that we distinguish pain and suffering, based on the two semiologies just mentioned.

The second difficulty is more serious: if we are not guided by the nosographic markers of the clinic, how can we avoid getting lost in the endless litany of ills, in the bad infinity of moaning and groaning? To deal with this methodological stumbling block, I propose that we divide the phenomena of suffering—the signs of suffering—along two axes, which will later turn out to be orthogonal. The first axis is that of the *self-other* relation; which shows how with these signs, suffering is given as an altering of one's relation to oneself and of one's relation to others. The second axis is that of acting/being affected (*agir-pâtir*).¹⁸ Let me explain: we can adopt as our working hypothesis that suffering consists in the diminution of our power of acting. The Spinozist emphasis of this definition does not commit us to any exclusive philosophical allegiance. It emphasizes the fact that only those who can take action can also be those who suffer (I often say: *acting and suffering people...*), ...hence the "acting/being affected" ("*agir-pâtir*") axis. We will look successively for signs of this reduction in the registers of speech, in action properly speaking, in narrative, and in self-esteem,¹⁹ insofar as these registries can be regarded as levels of power and powerlessness.²⁰ As we shall see, the acting-being affected ("*agir-pâtir*") axis intersects perpendicularly with the *self-other* axis.

These two avenues will be explored in the first two parts of my remarks.

I will keep for the—too-brief—third part of these remarks the question of meaning that is inevitably raised by suffering. We could even speak of a third axis, like a cross-cutting one, where suffering is distended between mute astonishment and the most vehement questioning: Why? Why me? Why my child? On the horizon lies the difficult question of what suffering gives us to think

¹⁸ The French word that we translate here as "being affected" is "*pâtir*", which comes from the Greek "*pathos*" and includes both the senses of affection as feeling and as suffering.

¹⁹ See Ricœur, *Oneself as another*, 193. Following here the English translation of *Oneself as another*, we translate here "*estime de soi*" by "self-esteem". However, we are dealing here with the ethical concept of Ricœur describing the affective process in which one relates to oneself and which is different from value ("to the ethical aim will correspond what we shall henceforth call self-esteem, and to the deontological moment, self-respect" [Ricœur, *Oneself as another*, 171]; "Solicitude adds the dimension of value, whereby each person is irreplaceable in our affection and our esteem" [Ricœur, *Oneself as another*, 193]), and not with the psychological construct used by contemporary psychiatry and psychology.

²⁰ Ricœur probably take up these concepts from Spinozist ethics (see Spinoza, *Ethics: Proved in Geometrical Order*).

about,²¹ whether there is anything to be learned from suffering, as Aeschylus proposed when he ended his *Agamemnon* with the advice from the leader of the chorus: “*pathei mathos*”, learn by suffering. But learn what?

I. The Self-Other Axis

We seem, first of all, to be confronted with a paradox. On the one hand, the self seems to be intensified by the vivid feeling of existing, or better still, by the feeling of existing on the edge.²² “I suffer, I am”; no *ergo* as in the famous *cogito ergo sum*. Immediacy seems irremediable; there is no room for any Cartesian “methodical doubt.” “Reduced to my suffering self, I am a living wound.

This withdrawal is further amplified by a suspending of the representational dimension; while I think about “something,” I suffer absolutely. We could develop this point by drawing on the Freudian distinction between representation and affect. Remaining on the phenomenological level, we can say this: what is affected in suffering is the intentionality targeting something, something other than oneself; hence the erasure of the world as the horizon of representation; or in other words, the world no longer appears as habitable but as depopulated.²³ This is how the self appears to be thrown back upon itself.

On the other hand, it is not wrong to diagnose a special kind of intensification of the relationship with others. This happens in a negative mode, in the manner of a crisis otherness that we can sum up with the term separation. Let’s sketch out some figures of separation in suffering:

1. at the lowest level is the vivid experience of the irreplaceable; other than any other, the sufferer is unique;
2. at the next level is the vivid experience of the incommunicable; the other can neither understand me nor help me; the barrier between them and me is insurmountable, the solitude of the sufferer;
3. at a more intense level of stridency, the other person announces themselves as my enemy, the one who makes me suffer (insults, backbiting...); here, an excursus on the theme of the family as a concentrate of hostility would be required, in which the Oedipus complex would not take the entire space, the wound of suffering;

²¹ For clarity, we have decided to translate the sentence “*ce que la souffrance donne à penser*” by “what suffering gives us to think about”. However, we know that this translation does not reflect the fact that Ricœur wants to evoke the French title “*Le symbole donne à penser*” of the famous chapter where he makes the hermeneutic turn, since the official English translation is “the symbol gives rise to thought” (Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 347–357), so we make the link to his hermeneutics in this note.

²² We translate here “*sentiment vif d’exister*” and “à vif” by “vivid feeling of existing” and “on the edge” respectively, in order to gain clarity of meaning. Ricœur used here different meanings of the word “vif” which our translation is not able to reconstitute.

²³ Ricœur may here recall Lamartine’s popular lines “Sometimes, only one person is missing, and the whole world seems depopulated” (Alphonse de Lamartine, *Poetical Meditations*, trans. Gervase Hittle [Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1993]).

4. finally, at the most virulent level, comes unleashed the fantasized feeling of being chosen to suffer. We could speak of this curse as a reverse election; this is where the question arises: Why me? Why my child? The hell of suffering.

We can't leave the self-other axis without saying a word about the phenomenon of self-inflicted suffering. The semiology of the relationship to the self and the relationship to others ends up simultaneously enriched and blurred, to the extent that only the clinic can go further than phenomenology when it brings to light (and I quote Kress) "this capacity of the forces of the psyche to exert against itself and to work on producing its own suffering."²⁴ Immense is the empire of: making oneself suffering. We cannot fail to refer here to Sigmund Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*,²⁵ where we see the loss of the object of love giving rise to the self-loathing of a subject incapable of letting go. But while phenomenology remains in the background here because this play of forces is very hidden, it can, on the other hand, show, in the more enlightened zone of consciousness, the clear phenomena of "making oneself suffer": I'll show them later, on the second axis, at the level of self-esteem.

II. The "Acting/Being Affected" ("Agir-Pâtir") Axis

If we acknowledge the diminution of the power to act as the criterion of suffering, it is possible to develop a typology of suffering based on the one of acting. To do so, I propose the reading grid that I have already made use of in *Oneself as Another*.²⁶ In that work, I distinguish four levels of efficiency:²⁷ speaking out, acting in the limited sense of the term, narration, and finally moral imputation. As regard to suffering, these levels would correspond to all the wounds that affect one's power to say anything, to act, to recount something regarding oneself, and the power to esteem oneself as a moral agent. And since, at each of these levels, the previous paradox of the intensified self and the self separated from the other is replayed, we get a double-entry matrix, built on the two orthogonal axes I have mentioned.

I begin with the powerlessness to say anything, because, as I emphasized at the start regarding the semiology of suffering, while pain takes place in the whole body, suffering is somatized electively as a mimic and more particularly in the place of the face; in this way, it finds expression as moaning and crying. A rift opens between the will to say something and the powerlessness to say anything. Nevertheless, the will to say something forges the path of complaint in this rift (in this respect, I refer to Kress's fine text on "The Efficacy of Complaint").²⁸ The

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Kress, "Le psychiatre devant la souffrance," 19–32, 22.

²⁵ Ricœur has previously published a book on Freud in which he devotes long reflections to this work (Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*).

²⁶ See, e.g., Ricœur, *Oneself as another*, 106 ff.

²⁷ Ricœur refers here to Aristotle's efficient causality (Ricœur, *Oneself as another*, 77).

²⁸ Jean-Jacques Kress, "L'efficacité de la plainte," *Psychologie médicale*, vol. 21, n° 3 (1989), 305–307. This is the publication of an oral presentation at the twenty-first colloquium of the Society for Medical Psychology (of which Kress was the president), entitled *The physician faced with the patients'*

complaint is both exhaled from oneself, torn from the depths of the body, and addressed to the other as a request, a call for help. This distinguishes it from pain, which often remains locked away in the silence of the organs.

As for the powerlessness to act, the gap between the will and the power from which it arises is common to pain and suffering, which explains the partial overlap between their two fields. But, as the ancient meaning of the word suffering reminds us, to suffer means, first of all, to endure. So, a minimal degree of action is incorporated into the passivity of suffering.

Let's place this enduring back on the self-other axis. What we observe, first of all, is the redoubling of the extreme passivity of a subject thrown back upon themselves through the loss of the power-over...²⁹ It's important to remember that the one-acting is not only faced with other acting-ones, but also with patients who are subjected to his action. This relationship is inverted in the experience of being in power of, at the mercy of, in being handed over to the other. This feeling can even seep into aid and care relations. Suffering, then, is feeling victimized. This feeling is in turn exacerbated by the effects of the violence undergone, whether physical or symbolic, real or imagined. Suffering thus marks the most acute crisis in what Jürgen Habermas calls communicative action,³⁰ in the manner of an excommunication, in the strongest sense of the word, of an exclusion from both relations of force and those of symbolization.

Now we come to the third modality of suffering. It lies in the damages done to the narrative function, in the constituting of personal identity. Remember: a life is the story of this life, in search of narration. To understand oneself is to be able to narrate stories about oneself that are both intelligible and acceptable, above all, that are acceptable.

The disaster affecting storytelling stretches all along the self-other axis. Suffering appears there as a break in the narrative thread, at the end of an extreme concentration, a punctual focus, on the instant. It must be emphasized that the instant is something other than the present, so magnificently described by Augustine in the *Confessions*³¹: whereas the present is nourished by the dialectic between memory (which he calls "the present of the past"), expectation (or "the present

complaint, held in Brest (France) in October 1988. This conference gave Kress the idea to organize the colloquium on "the psychiatrist faced with suffering," to which he invited Ricœur. However, Kress reported to us that he had not mentioned this text to Ricœur before the conference but sent it to him after the conference. Ricœur added this to the published version. Kress used the word efficacy to mean the effects of complaint in the therapeutic relation. He also chose the word efficacy in its theological meaning, because he argues in this text that complaint opens to metaphysical questions.

²⁹ Ricœur seems to be familiar with the distinction in political and social philosophy between power over and power to as systematized by Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1–2, trans. Thomas A. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).

³¹ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Francis Joseph Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 246. Ricœur consecrates two chapters of his *Time and Narrative* to Augustin: Paul Ricœur, "The Apories of the Experience of Time: Book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions*", in Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 5–30; Paul Ricœur, "The Time of the Soul and the Time of the World. The dispute between Augustine and Aristotle", in Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 12–22.

of the future”), sight (or “the present of the present”), the instant is torn from this dialectic of the threefold present, and is nothing more than an interruption of time, a break in duration; it’s, in this way, that all narrative connections are altered. But our relationship with others is no less altered than our powerlessness to narrate and to narrate oneself, insofar as each one’s story is entangled in the story of others, as Reinhart Koselleck put it in a book entitled precisely *Entanglement in Stories*³²; it is, in this way, that our story becomes a segment of the story of others. This internarrative fabric, so to speak, is torn in suffering. One experiences this when one is confronted with certain forms of mental confusion, where all the landmarks of a shared temporality, with its horizons of past and future, are blurred. The suffering of the other person is no less than that of the patient. In this sense, one might venture to use the word “unnarratable” to mean this powerlessness to narrate.

Let me note in passing that this phenomenological analysis runs alongside some of Freud’s discoveries: at the beginning of his career, he described the neurotic as “suffering from reminiscences.” Much later, he contrasted this work of recollection with the resistance put up against it by the repetition of the symptom; whether or not we can attribute this resistance to the death drive, the inability to move from repetition to recollection highlights the seriousness of what has appeared to us as the disaster affecting narrative, and which also affects the personal and interpersonal levels.

I still need to say a few words about the powerlessness to esteem oneself. I regard self-esteem as the ethical threshold of human action. I esteem myself as a being capable of esteeming things, which is to say, preferring one thing to another, by virtue of reasons for acting, and on the basis of judgements about what is good and what is bad. We can speak here of a reflective movement going from the esteeming of something to the esteeming of oneself (here I join Kress in speaking of the “human person insofar as they are recognized for what is most proper to them: their dignity,”³³ “the ability to suffer is an integral part of this dignity,”³⁴ and, further on, he refers again to “the subject, their dignity and their suffering”).³⁵

If we project this first remark on the self-other axis, adding to it the theme of suffering inflicted on “oneself as another”, at the one side in the relationship to oneself, we find the tendency toward disesteem, toward guilt which takes center stage. It is particularly when we lose a loved one that we tend to say to ourselves: “I must be being punished for something”. Here the psychiatrist warns us against the temptation to enter this infernal labyrinth, to which the witness of this exorcism directed against oneself is exposed. The words of comfort that are needed here are: “No, you’re not guilty; in fact, you are suffering, and this is something else.” After all, when self-disesteem is taken to this extreme, it merely ratifies the torturer’s vision of humanity. What, after

³² Ricœur has got the wrong author here. It’s Wilhelm Schapp, whose French version of *Geschichten verstrickt* was published by Cerf under the title *Enchevêtré dans des histoires* in 1992. According to François Dosse (*Paul Ricœur. Les sens d’une vie [1913-2005]* [Paris: La Découverte, 2008], 259, 479, 480, 484–485) since the 1970s, Ricœur worked with Reinhart Koselleck’s concepts such as horizon of expectation (*Erwartungshorizont*) and space of experience (*Erfahrungsraum*) to develop a philosophy of time, temporality and historicity, achieved in the publication of *Time and Narrative* (1983–1985 for the French versions).

³³ Kress, “Le psychiatre devant la souffrance,” 25.

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³⁵ *Loc. cit.*

all, is the torturer's goal in torture? Doctors who have dealt with torture victims tell us that by inflicting pain, the torturer aims beyond the death of the person to humiliate them, through the condemnatory judgement that the victim is forced to pass on themselves. These same doctors tell us about the shame that clings, so to speak, to the soul of these humiliated people. Here we come back to what was said above about the difficulty of talking about, narrating, and integrating these episodes of violence into an acceptable story. A limit is reached when there is no longer room for self-condemnation; Kress evokes this extremity by referring to the psychic disorder of dissociation, and I share his embarrassment when faced with "the horror aroused by this thought: since these are humans who no longer are persons able to suffer their suffering, are they still human?"³⁶ Here we seem to have left the sphere where there can be esteem or disesteem, by crossing the threshold of powerlessness to esteem oneself.

On the other side, the one of otherness, the loss of self-esteem can be experienced as theft or rape committed by the other; the clinical description of delusions proposed by Kress³⁷ reveals the extent of interpretations grafted onto the theme of accusation. But, in the reality of a violent world, everyone can be brought to suffer by the making-suffer real or fantasized orchestrated by the "villains." At this point, the complaint mentioned above goes beyond a simple moan and becomes a complaint about, a complaint against (I recall the sense of scandal I used to feel when reading the *Psalms* of David, with the frequent exhaling complaint against "enemies" who scorn, slander, and ridicule you. I would be inclined today to do these texts justice, which are sometimes delusional, but which give a voice to the all too often repressed experience of victimization. There is perhaps something not only truthful, but liberating in the cry of these confessions: without expressed reproach, would there still be room for forgiveness?). The way the complaint is bordering on delusion testifies perhaps to the profound nature of recrimination, oscillating on the invisible threshold between the denunciation of evil and the delusion of persecution.

At the intersection of the relationship to oneself, intensified by guilt, along with the relationship to others, altered by delusions of persecution, takes shape the terrifying face of the suffering one is inflicting on him—or herself—at the very level of their self-esteem. The psychiatrist undoubtedly has much more to say here than the phenomenologist does. However, they do meet at the place of what used to be called the "passions of the soul," that in-between area where *pathos* borders on the pathological (we have learned from Georges Canguilhem the art of shedding light on the normal and the pathological³⁸ and how they relate to each other). It is true that we no longer write treatises on the passions as was the case with the ancients, the medieval, and the classics (René Descartes³⁹ and Baruch Spinoza⁴⁰ come to mind). This is why a cross-reading of the passions, in which psychiatrists and phenomenologists would pool their insights, might be likely to give new life to the topic. In this respect, the German expression "*Leidenschaft*" gives us much to think

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁸ George Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³⁹ See René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).

⁴⁰ See Spinoza, *Ethics: Prouved in Geometrical Order*.

about (I have often wondered in particular whether Freud⁴¹ had not avoided this term because of the great Romantic tradition which used it as we have come to know; his scientism advised him to keep the word “*Schmerz*”, even if it meant specifying it by “*Seelenschmerz*”). In any case, the passions offer a striking illustration of “making oneself suffer.” Unlike the emotions, which come and go, and the drives invested in variable objects of love and hate, the passions consist of the investment of desire in objects set up as absolutes; they thus have a character of excess, of *hybris*, completed by the process of crystallization well described by Stendhal.⁴² By putting their everything into an object, passionate individuals place themselves in a situation where the loss of that object becomes the total loss. The passionate person suffers twice: first, from aiming for something that is out of their reach, and for which the price to be paid with sacrificed pleasures, for the sake of a single desired thing, may be incalculable; second, from inevitably missing their goal. In this respect, they suffer no less from disillusion as much as illusion. The phenomenological description here overlaps with the whole psychoanalytical problem of the lost object, theorized by Freud in his famous essay *Mourning and Melancholia*.⁴³

I propose a rapid examination of two passions where the suffering inflicted on oneself still benefits, if I may put it this way, from a certain clarity or, better said, a certain lucidity: envy and revenge. Envy is an affect that was of great interest to the founders of political economy following Adam Smith, as well as to modern theorists of justice such as John Rawls. The *Robert Dictionary*⁴⁴ defines it in these terms: “a feeling of sadness [we find the *acedia* evoked by Kress], irritation and hatred against someone who possesses a good that one does not have”; and again: “to be tormented by the good fortune of one’s fellow man”.⁴⁵ It’s not just Smith we’re ‘thinking of, but René Girard⁴⁶ and his notion of mimetism: “I suffer from not having what the other has, because it’s the other who has it, and not me.” As for revenge, it consists in “compensating oneself for an offence (real or presumed) by punishing the person who committed it”;⁴⁷ this vigilante behavior taking the place of judges is eminently regressive, as the tragedy of the Atreides bears witness; the law, we learn in the tragedy of Orestes, only advances when the city deprives individuals of their claim to

⁴¹ Kress in his communication mentions that in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anguish*, and particularly in its Addenda C, Freud used the word “*Schmerz*” (pain) to mean indistinctively physical or psychological pain. Kress also report the use of “*Seelenschmerz*” (mental pain) by Freud to highlight the psychological nature of the pain, and identify that Freud never used “*Leiden*”. Kress, “Le psychiatre devant la souffrance,” 26. Freud, “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anguish” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Work of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XX, (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959), p169-172. https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_Inhibitions_Symptoms_Anxiety.pdf

⁴² Stendhal, *Love*, trans. Gilbert Sale and Suzanne Sale (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

⁴³ Sigmund Freud, “Trauer und Melancholie,” in Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke. Zehnter Band. Werke aus den Jahren 1913-1917* (London: Publishing Co., 1949), 427-446.

⁴⁴ It is the general reference dictionary in France. Paul Robert and Alain Rey, *Le grand Robert de la langue française : dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 1991).

⁴⁵ Kress, “Le psychiatre devant la souffrance,” 29.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory. Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953-2005*, ed. Robert Doran (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁷ Paul Robert and Alain Rey, *Le grand Robert de la langue française : dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris, Le Robert, 1991).

exercise punishment upon themselves. Revenge becomes therefore a reappropriating of individuals' punishment, as if they were the masters of self-reparation. Of course, the clinic encounters more disturbing, even terrifying, figures of those vigilantes who have become persecuted persecutors. So, we can see how phenomenology, reconnecting with the treatises of the passions,⁴⁸ can bring us to the doorstep of psychiatrists' clinical descriptions.

III. What Suffering Gives Us to Think About⁴⁹

The theme I place under this heading must be approached with the utmost caution. It is here that the pitfalls of moralism and dolorism await us, from the moment we attempt to set suffering up as a sacrifice held to be meritorious. One can adopt this path for oneself, but this is not a path to be taught. And yet, according to the Greek Tragics, suffering "teaches." What does it teach? We can only try to answer this with much humility and, foremost, with maintaining respect for suffering. I shall confine myself to two comments, one on the axis of self-reflection, the other on that of relationships with others.

Regarding the first aspect, I'll say this: "suffering raises questions or asks or interrogates." Questioning is indeed closely related to complaining about "How long?," "Why me?," "Why my child?" These questions are no longer part of an explanatory framework, even that of a libidinal economy, they're part of the perspective of a demand for justification (I'm not forgetting my teacher Jean Nabert and his *Essai sur le mal*.⁵⁰ I am also indebted to Jérôme Porée for his as yet unpublished work *La Philosophie à l'épreuve du mal*⁵¹).

The Time of Suffering

The question of suffering takes on an ethical and philosophical dimension when, in the same affect, the passivity of suffering, endured or even inflicted by others, meets a demand for meaning. This goes somewhat beyond the initial characterization of suffering as an absolute *cogito*, a *cogito* without *cogitatum*. I suffer, without there being a "something" that I suffer. If suffering in some way has no "object," it does have a "why." It is not only felt but judged as a figure of evil. What requires justification is, on the one hand, the feeling that suffering is not limited to existing,

⁴⁸ Ricœur referred previously to "passions of the soul" and "treatises of passions" citing Descartes and Spinoza considerations. He may think about Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, and Spinoza, *Ethics: Proved in Geometrical Order*.

⁴⁹ See the footnote 21 above.

⁵⁰ This book has not yet been translated into English. The French version is the following: Jean Nabert, *Essai sur le mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1970). The literal translation of the title of the book in English is "Essay on Evil."

⁵¹ This book has not yet been translated into English. The French version is the following: Jérôme Porée, *La philosophie à l'épreuve du mal : pour une phénoménologie de la souffrance* (Paris: Vrin, 1993). The literal translation of the title of the book in English is "Philosophy to the test of Evil: for a phenomenology of suffering." François Dosse (*Paul Ricœur. Les sens d'une vie [1913-2005]*) reports that Porée was one of the PhD students of Ricœur since 1980 working on suffering with an ontological aim. His PhD thesis was defended in 1990 but the book was published three years later (*Paul Ricœur. Les sens d'une vie [1913-2005]*, 421-422).

but that it is in excess: to suffer is to suffer too much. On the other hand, it is the feeling that all harm is not a fault, a “moral” harm (once again, we must help the suffering other engage on the path of this inquiry), but, in Gottfried W. Leibniz’s sense, it is a “physical” harm, that is, one existing by “nature,” without having its justification in the moral order; in other words, we must disentangle the being-a-victim from the being guilty. We cannot fail to mention here the discussion in the book of Job. If the cause of this biblical hero has acquired the paradigmatic value we know, it’s because he tears an entire system of thought into pieces—the well-known theory of retribution—which gave rise to the theodicies aimed at justifying all undergoing of suffering (“*souffrance*”) as punishment, *poena*;⁵² at the end of this dismantling, the harm suffered is revealed to be irreducible to the harm committed. “I am a victim, but not guilty,” Job proclaims. And yet, if we call suffering evil—evil suffered, but evil nonetheless—it is because it shares with guilt the fact of presenting itself as something that is but ought not to be. The philosophically significant moment lies in this conundrum of being and ought-to-be, at the very heart of the affect of suffering.⁵³ This is how suffering brings all pain to the doorstep of axiology: it exists but ought not to be. Hence the question: Why does what ought not to be exist? Here the moral question turns into a metaphysical one.

On the second side, I would say this: “suffering summons others.” The paradox of our relationship with others is laid bare. On the one hand, I am the one who is suffering and not the other: our roles cannot be substituted for each other; maybe I might have even been chosen to suffer, according to the fantasy of personal hell. On the other hand, despite everything, despite the separation, the suffering exhaled in the complaint is a call to the other, a request for help—a request that is perhaps impossible to fully satisfy through an unreserved suffering-with, such compassion is undoubtedly what cannot be given. Here, I agree with Kress’s comments on the requirement for “parsimony.”⁵⁴ Parsimony may be a rule we imposed on ourselves as caregivers, but it is also a limit from which we ourselves suffer, through our feeling that we cannot indeed respond to what I have just called unreserved suffering-with. Here, suffering marks the limit of giving-receiving. Nevertheless, like a faint hope, the risky and perhaps foolish conviction remains that the world could be improved by what Jan Patočka called in his last writings the “solidarity of the shaken.”⁵⁵

Whatever the solution to these enigmas may be, one mood is forbidden to both phenomenologists and psychiatrists, namely, optimism, which someone once defined as the caricature of a hope that would have never known tears.

⁵² “Suffer” is in fact composed of Latin expressions *suf* (sub) and *ferre* (to bear) (Charles Talbot Onions ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* [Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1994], 883) which seems to be related to the Latin *poena* meaning pain and which is at the etymological origin of “punish” (Onions ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 723).

⁵³ Porée, *La philosophie à l’épreuve du mal : pour une phénoménologie de la souffrance*.

⁵⁴ Kress, “Le psychiatre devant la souffrance,” 25.

⁵⁵ Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1996), 134. Paul Ricœur wrote a preface for the French version of this book, which has been translated and included in the English version (Paul Ricœur, “Preface to Jan Patočka,” in Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, vii-xvi).

Finally, we come back to the first meaning of suffering, namely, enduring, which is to say, persevering in the desire to be⁵⁶ and in the effort to exist “in spite of...” This “in spite of...” draws the final border between pain and suffering, even though they inhabit the same body.

⁵⁶ It is Spinoza’s formulation of the conatus (see Spinoza, *Ethics: Prouved in Geometrical Order*).