

ESF Exploratory Multidisciplinary Workshop on
PAIN AND SUFFERING

WE might all agree that suffering is a real, universally experienced, ubiquitous phenomenon. Yet we do not have a shared understanding of what it is about or how it is real. There is no consensus, perhaps because suffering expresses itself in different ways in the body and the brain (where various forms of suffering have been identified), and pain, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively. There is no single universally accepted external reference point for the phenomenon. While scholars situated in single disciplines such as literature, clinical psychology, and anthropology have offered generalized accounts of human and also animal suffering, an inter- and multi-disciplinary effort is required to develop a more integrative account of the phenomenon. For example, recent studies in medicine, clinical psychology and neuroscience have given a more elaborated description of a state of suffering known as secondary amnesia, which is from the Greek meaning "no words for feelings". This state is observed in persons with cancer, diabetes or Parkinson's disease, and is detected directly among victims of rape, political violence, or other types of trauma. Yet quantitative studies do not provide enough insight into the nature of the phenomenon, and the gaps between external and objective assessments of suffering, and the felt experience. How do we know whether a person is experiencing real suffering if they cannot communicate that they are suffering? Quantitative disciplines alone cannot answer these questions. But if contemporary phenomenological theories of suffering are considered alongside medical and neuroscientific research - including theories regarding the inexperience of pain (cf. Seay, Body in Pain), their combined explanations would show that the ability to narrate or describe may be an essential attribute of what acute suffering is about. There are other divides related to the question of suffering that arise from divergences between the sciences and humanities, including their radically different tools for approaching the problem.

...even a divide between the science of medicine and the practice of medicine in seeking to relieve pain. The duality between experiencing and validating suffering, and the question of suffering. But the varied methods among different scholarly disciplines have actually made it difficult to bring into light this central problem because of the requirement of each discipline to choose between the internal vs. the external, the felt vs. the objective and the felt vs. the inferred. In the exploration of suffering, we will take on several of these divides, including those between the natural philosophy and science, between therapeutic practice and research, between Continental and Anglo-American views on the ethics of suffering. This multidisciplinary initiative seeks to integrate all aspects into a general framework and implications of the topic.

The workshop provides a basis for interactions among scientists and scholars that will lead to a long-term European multidisciplinary working group on suffering. The ESF Workshop and subsequent follow-up meetings will bring together literary scholars, sociologists, medical researchers, philosophers, and other scholars from various Universities and Institutes, while open to all interested parties. The workshop will bring together these disciplines for the first time, and will provide a unique meeting points and moments of agreement. We intend the outcome of the Workshop to be a shared understanding of the participants to broaden their understanding of suffering and to use their expertise approach the same subject. This is also necessary to identify future innovative work and breakthroughs.

CONVENED BY:

BUSTAN Smadar, and KERR Catherine.



UNIVERSITÉ DU
LUXEMBOURG

□ FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, HUMANITIES, ARTS AND EDUCATION

European Science Foundation Exploratory Multidisciplinary Workshop on

PAIN and SUFFERING

Luxembourg University, Campus Walferdange, 12-15 November 2009
Participation upon invitation by ESF only

Convener, Dr. Bustan Smadar, Department of Philosophy (IPSE), University of Luxembourg
Co-convener, Dr. Kerr Catherine, Osher Research Center, Harvard Medical School

This Workshop intends to set the ground for a long-term interdisciplinary and international working group on Pain and Suffering. It brings together figures from numerous fields, including humanities, biomedical, and natural sciences, for a constructive interaction on the topic. Suffering is an ubiquitous experience with no universally accepted theoretical framework for its understanding. Scholars working in single disciplines offer one-dimensional accounts. Instead, we would like to drive a multidisciplinary approach combining both theoretical and experimental work, to fill the gap that exists to date.

List of Participants :

Prof. Fernand Anton, Psychobiology, U. of Luxembourg

Prof. Gillian Bendelow, Sociology, Uni. of Sussex

Dr. Hillel Braude, Clinical Ethics, McGill Uni.

Dr. Smadar Bustan, Philosophy, Uni. of Luxembourg

Prof. Esther Cohen, History, Hebrew Uni.

Prof. Lambros Couloubaritsis, Philosophy, Uni. of Brussels

Dr. Nicolas Danziger, Neurophysiology, Hospital Pitié-Salpêtrière

Dr. Otniel E. Dror, History of Medicine, Hebrew Uni.

Prof. Isabel Fernandes, Narrative Medicine, Uni. of Lisbon

Prof. Albert Gjedde, ESF representative, Medicine, EMRC

Prof. Cindy Halpern, Political Science, Swarthmore College

Dr. Paul Harrison, Human Geography, Durham Uni

Prof. Dietmar Heidemann, Philosophy, Uni. of Luxembourg

Dr. Eva Hoogland, ESF representative, Humanities, SCH

Dr. Karin B. Jensen, Clinical Psychology, Karolinska Hospital

Dr. Sandra Kamping, Neuropsychology, Uni. of Heidelberg

Dr. Catherine Kerr, Neuroscience, Harvard Uni.

Cecilia Martins, Narrative Medicine, Uni. of Lisbon

Prof. Denis Mellier, Clinical Psychology, Uni. of Franche-Comté

Dr. Gilles Michaux, Psychobiology, Uni. of Luxembourg

Dr. Eric Myin, Philosophy, Uni. of Antwerpen

Dr. Yoshi Nakamura, Biomedical, Uni. of Utah

Dr. Kevin O'Regan, Psychology, CNRS, Uni. of Paris Descartes

Dr. Predrag Petrovic, Neuroscience, Karolinska Hospital

Dr. Charles Pull, Psychiatry, Centre Hospitalier Luxembourg

Dr. Claudia Wassmann, History of Medicine, Univ. of Aachen

Dr. Ian Wilkinson, Sociology, Uni. of Kent

Camila Valenzuela, Psychology, Uni. of Paris Descartes