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Pain and Suffering: In Conversation with Paul Ricœur

Jennifer Corns
University of Glasgow

Abstract

In this contribution, I focus on three key questions that arise when engaging with Ricœur's lecture, "Suffering is Not Pain." The first is the methodological issue concerning the philosopher's role, particularly in taxonomizing. I will examine mental taxonomy, as well as taxonomy more broadly, before turning to pain and suffering more specifically. I then move to Ricœur's characterization and contrast of suffering and pain throughout the lecture. Following this, I expand on Ricœur's definition of suffering as a diminution of the power to act by incorporating my own account of suffering as a significant disruption to agency. I explore how this expanded view can contribute to a deeper investigation of Ricœur's agentive hypothesis of suffering within each of his three identified "moments" of suffering, thus enhancing our understanding of the specific agentive challenge that suffering represents.

Keywords: Ricœur; suffering; pain; differences between pain and suffering; agency

Résumé

Dans cette contribution, je me concentre sur trois questions clés qui émergent de l'analyse de la conférence de Ricœur, « La souffrance n'est pas la douleur ». La première concerne la méthodologie et le rôle du philosophe, notamment en ce qui a trait à la taxonomie. J'examinerai la taxonomie mentale ainsi que la taxonomie en général, avant de me pencher plus spécifiquement sur les notions de douleur et de souffrance. J'aborderai ensuite la caractérisation et le contraste que Ricœur établit entre souffrance et douleur au cours de sa conférence. Enfin, je développerai la définition de la souffrance selon Ricœur, comprise comme une diminution du pouvoir d'agir, en y intégrant ma propre description de la souffrance comme une perturbation significative de l'« *agency* ». J'explorerai comment cette vision élargie peut enrichir l'examen de l'hypothèse agentive de la souffrance chez Ricœur dans chacun des trois « moments » de souffrance qu'il identifie, approfondissant ainsi notre compréhension du défi agentif particulier que représente la souffrance.

Mots-clés : Ricœur ; souffrance ; douleur ; différences entre douleur et souffrance ; agency

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Jennifer Corns
University of Glasgow

I. Introduction

I had not heard of Paul Ricœur's views on either suffering or pain until I was invited to contribute to this new English translation of his lecture on the topic. In reading the translated lecture, I have found rich and profound points of agreement, along with some central points of disagreement. Above all, to my delight, I have found Ricœur to be an unexpected fellow traveller in taking suffering to be a problem of agency. Suffering, we both think, is most centrally about what an individual is rendered less able to do. Given this, I am confident that this piece of mine, however critical, has the same aim as Ricœur's lecture: to play our part, as philosophers, in advancing our understanding of how agency is undermined through suffering—and, as he may emphasize, what we can learn from this undermining.

In what follows, I focus on three key questions arising in engaging Ricœur's lecture. The first, addressed in the next section, is the methodological issue of the role of the philosopher, especially in taxonomizing. I'll be interested in mental taxonomy, but also taxonomy more generally, before considering pain and suffering most specifically. Section III then focuses on suffering and pain as characterized and contrasted by Ricœur throughout the lecture. From these first sections, it may seem as if Ricœur and I are far apart. Section IV brings us closer together. I there aim to enrich Ricœur's definition of suffering as the dimunition of the power to act with the account of agency I deploy in my own account of suffering as the significant disruption to agency.[1] I consider the ways in which this enrichment can contribute to the exploration of Ricœur's agentive hypothesis of suffering across each of his three identified "moments" of suffering, allowing us to better understand the type of agentive problem which suffering constitutes. I briefly conclude in section V, returning briefly to the titular distinction between pain and suffering and their place in philosophy, everyday life, the clinic, and scientific inquiry.

II. What is the Role of the Philosopher?

The role of the philosopher is a live and animating issue in the target lecture of Ricœur. This is especially appropriate, as the lecture was delivered to psychiatrists and, indeed, was offered as a complement to a lecture by psychiatrist Jean-Jacques Kress addressing the same topic and with whom Ricœur exchanged drafts of his material.

[1] Jennifer Corns, "Suffering as significantly disrupted agency," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 105, nº 3 (2022a), 706–729.

Ricœur begins his lecture framing his contribution, as a philosopher, to the interdisciplinary discussion. In his opening remarks, he says:

> "My contribution differs from his [Kress's] 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."[2]

As I understand him, here and throughout the lecture, Ricœur identifies the philosopher as being concerned with the experience of suffering and, moreover, he holds that this experience of suffering is universal. Everyone is taken to have had a suffering experience of this same universal type. On his model of interdisciplinary collaboration: this contribution from the philosopher, concerning a universal feature of human existence, can allow us to understand the very nature of suffering which underlies the more specific truths about suffering which may be appropriately discovered through empirical inquiry and particular clinical experiences revealed to the psychiatrist. To fully comprehend suffering, as presented and targeted for treatment in the clinic, Ricœur maintains that we must combine the philosopher's general understanding of the nature of suffering gleaned through its universal human experience, with particular empirical truths gleaned through scientific and clinical investigation.

It seems to me that there are a number of important things that Ricœur here gets right, along with a few key points where he goes wrong.

Let's begin with what Ricœur gets right! For one thing, I think he is right that a key problem which must be faced by the clinician is to use signs of suffering to identify treatment targets. In this way, semiology is perhaps useful in the clinic above all. Crucially, I think he is also right that philosophers do have something to bring to the discussion of the nature of suffering and its identification and treatment in the clinic. This is worth emphasizing as one might wonder what in the world a philosopher is doing when contributing to taxonomic discussions in either science or the clinic. In philosophy today, many think that ontological questions should all ultimately be settled through empirical inquiry.[3] From this contemporary scientistic perspective, it is especially important to have a clear answer to the question of what, if anything, the philosopher can appropriately contribute to questions of taxonomy. I think Ricœur is right that there is an important place for philosophy here. But what is that place?

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[2] Paul Ricœur, "Suffering is Not Pain," trad. Luz Ascarate and Astrid Chevance, *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 15, nº 2, 17.

[3] For one among many potential references, close to my own heart, see William Van Orman Quine, "Natural kinds," in *Essays in honor of Carl G. Hempel: A tribute on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday*, ed. Nicholas Rescher (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1969), 5–23.

According to Ricœur, the philosopher is (at least, most centrally) a phenomenologist and their appropriate purview is human experience. This is taken to give the philosopher a role in understanding suffering since suffering, likewise, is taken to be an experience. Indeed, an experience which he thinks is universally shared by all humans. Philosophy identifies the features of this universal experience which serve as the foundation of our understanding, whereas those who scientifically study the mind can provide the informed and expert classificatory structure built from this foundation. Here, the philosopher gives us our starting places—namely, conscious experiences—and the scientist gives us our specific ontological classifications and treatment targets.

As an analytic philosopher, it is perhaps not surprising that I disagree with Ricœur about this limited focus of the philosopher. In my view, following Wilfrid Sellars,[4] philosophy aims to figure out how things, in the broadest possible sense, hang together, in the broadest possible sense. This includes conscious experience, and it includes making sense of our perspective on the world from the first person, but it isn't at all limited to this. Indeed, what is arguably distinctive about philosophy is its lack of any such limitation. Each scientific domain has its own focus—its own target for explanation and predication and its own limited domain over which its generalizations are appropriately tested. A psychiatrist does not, *qua* psychiatrist, contribute to molecular biology, nor *vice versa*. The philosopher has no such limitation—not to conscious experience and not to any (other) particular domain. Instead, on my view, philosophers take input from any and every relevant inquiry, building a kaleidoscopic overarching view of the world which can harmonize and incorporate first-personal experiences along with the deliverances of the sciences. It is in this sense that we may still understand philosophy to appropriately hold the traditional honorific: the "queen" of the sciences.

At this point, however, further agreement with Ricœur is revealed, since on this approach it is our everyday lives from which our initial understanding of any phenomenon begins. Like Ricœur, I think that all ontological theorizing begins in the everyday. Where else? This is, again, not limited to conscious experience, but neither is it limited to any particular scientific inquiry or, indeed, even to scientific inquiries taken altogether. In this view, we begin our theorizing in everyday life investigating those phenomena which we usefully reference when going about the everyday business of living, working, loving, marrying, dying, and so on. Certain specialized scientific inquiries focus on particular domains and subsets of those predicates which are usefully projected for explanation and prediction for their more particular area of inquiry. If we make philosophy into merely phenomenology then philosophy, too, is limited in this way. To limit philosophy to phenomenology is to take conscious experience as the sole domain of inquiry across which any predicates must earn their explanatory and predictive keep when projected. On my more expansive view of philosophy, however, it is the attempt to build an overall worldview which respects the predicates, and related ontologies, useful for explaining and predicting conscious experience—yes—but also scientific inquiry and every other domain of human activity. On this view, our full ontology outruns not only phenomenology, but science too.

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[4] Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1, eds. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 253–329.

These are the key points of agreement and disagreement with Ricœur's methodology, important in their own right, but which I take to further provide a helpful frame for addressing the questions of the natures of pain and suffering in particular. Like Ricœur, I think that our understanding of suffering, and pain, begin in everyday life. I think the success of our everyday theory in referring to these is sufficient proof of their reality, such that our philosophical theories should incorporate them into their overarching theories of the world. *Pace* Ricœur, however, I think our philosophical ontology, that is a full ontology, will outrun our scientific or clinical taxonomies. The fact that our everyday lives reveal the existence of pain and suffering does not yet tell us whether they are appropriate objects of scientific inquiry or, indeed, appropriate targets for treatment in the clinic. These are further questions, the answers to which depends not on whether they are, but on what they are. These are the questions to which we now turn.

III. What Is the Difference Between Pain and Suffering?

Ricœur's lecture is structured through his identification of several difficulties, the first being the distinction between pain and suffering. He takes this first difficulty to be the easiest. According to Ricœur:

> "By referring to signs, and thus to semiology, psychiatry and phenomenology agree upon the justification for the use of pain and suffering as distinct. We will therefore agree to reserve the term pain ['pain'] for affects felt as localized in particular organs of the body or in the body as a whole, and the term suffering ["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."[5]

One can see Ricœur's general methodology here at work. In everyday experience, he thinks we may find it difficult to separate pain and suffering which are both negative affective experiences, but the distinction is justified by its role in the scientific inquiries which appropriately provide us with the more specific taxonomy. The key difference, quoted above and initially introduced as fundamentally answering the question of what makes pain and suffering distinct, is that pain is felt as located in the body, but suffering is not. Suffering is, instead, open in various ways. To this, however, he offers the important following qualification:

> "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."[6]

[5] Ricœur, "Suffering is Not Pain," 18

[6] *Id*.

The emerging view, as I take it, is that in everyday life, and so everyday language, the boundary between pain and suffering is blurred, but the strict taxonomy which separates them is justified through the utility of distinguishing them in clinical and scientific practice.

In this initial resolving of the first difficulty, then, we get the following first two and most central claims about the nature of pain and suffering:

1. Pain and suffering are types of experiences with negative affect, *i.e.* unpleasant experiences.
2. Pain is experienced as located in the body, but suffering is not.

Throughout the lecture, Ricœur offers three further key claims comparing and contrasting pain and suffering, which build on these initial two. These include:

3. Suffering is strictly inexpressible, but nonetheless causes imperfect expressions, and this "distinguishes it [suffering] from pain, which often remains locked away in the silence of the organs."[7]
4. Both pain and suffering involve some powerlessness to act, *i.e.* some unpleasantness to which one is subjected, but suffering must always ultimately be endured, while pain seems to apparently involve no such requirement of endurance.
5. In enduring suffering, we reveal something about our ability and willingness to continue to persist "in spite of" the forces against which we are otherwise powerless. Pain is explicitly taken to be, in this further way, distinct from suffering. This is the "final border" between pain and suffering, identified in the closing line of the lecture.

I disagree with all five of these key points of comparison between pain and suffering.

Ricœur takes claim 1 to be obvious, and while it should be admitted that many contemporary philosophers working on the nature of pain and suffering agree,[8] it nonetheless seems to me that this is false. Pain and suffering are both, admittedly, paradigmatically consciously experienced and paradigmatically associated with negative affect, *i.e.* they paradigmatically consciously feel unpleasant. The suffering and pain that we would all most easily recognize as pain and suffering feel bad to undergo from the first-person perspective. I have argued elsewhere, however, that conscious negative affect is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of either pain or suffering.[9] On my view, pains are a diverse class. As cases of pain asymbolia make most vivid, pains do not always hurt. As considerations of mental architecture and reporting most clearly support, they are not always conscious. Concerning suffering, like Ricœur and as discussed further below, I advocate an agentive account. Suffering is primarily a problem of agency. Of

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[7] *Ibid*., 21.

[8] For discussion of a range of contemporary views of the nature of pain, see Jennifer Corns ed., *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of pain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 1. For a recent and influential affective account of suffering, see Michael S. Brady, *Suffering and virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[9] For arguments concerning suffering see again Corns, "Suffering as significantly disrupted agency," 706–729, and for pain see Jennifer Corns, "Pain, the body, and awareness," in *The Routledge Handbook of Bodily Awareness*, ed. Adrian J. T. Alsmith and Matthew R. Longo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022b), 355–365.

action. On such a view, it is not always consciously experienced—as unpleasant feeling or, even, at all. I here lack the space to make these arguments in compelling detail, and we turn to the nature of suffering below, but for now I invite the reader who may be unreflectively tempted by Ricœur's first point to consider why they ought to accept it. For purposes here, I encourage us to at least be open to the idea that, while often having associated negative affect, this is no part of the nature of pain and suffering. Indeed, if Ricœur is right about the agentive nature of suffering, as discussed below, then he is wrong in his easy acceptance of claim 1.

Claim 2 is where Ricœur takes himself to solve his first identified difficulty, but he is here on even shakier ground. While claim 1 has seemed intuitive to many, claim 2 seems much more obviously false upon reflection.

One may first take issue with the claim that pain is always associated with a felt bodily location. It is not at all obvious to me that this is a truth derived from everyday theory. In everyday life, many are willing to refer to "mental" or "social" pains entirely lacking in bodily location, *e.g.* the pain of rejection, heartbreak, or depression. We might ask: Are these really pains? On my own view, they may sometimes be. As above, I take pains to be a diverse class, the extension of which is fixed—in the first instance—by our everyday theory. Paradigmatically, pains have a bodily location, but I see no compelling reason to take this paradigmatic feature to be a necessary one. Everyday theory rejects any such necessity.[10]

The clearest problem with claim 2, however, which in turn infects claims 3 to 5, is that pain is sometimes a type of suffering. Pain is something not only from which, but with which, we suffer. This includes some of those pain episodes which are experienced as having a felt location. It seems to me to do great violence to our everyday theory to deny that *e.g.* a raging headache, an unbearable toothache, or a searing laceration, can constitute suffering. Pains are one of the ways, indeed one of the most obvious and paradigmatic ways, that we suffer. Any adequate theory of suffering must accommodate them or deliver some very strong reasons to exclude them.

As pain is sometimes a type of suffering, claims 3 to 5 are all likewise problematic: if suffering causes expressions, so too does pain—at least, even Ricœur should grant, when it is a form of suffering. So too, concerning claim 3 more specifically, even if we grant that affect is strictly inexpressible, it is not at all clear why pain should be taken to be lacking in some causal power which suffering possesses. Being felt at a bodily ocation, as Ricœur requires in claim 1, would, if anything, seem to place pain more squarely in the causal order than the suffering which he takes to be lacking any physical location. Both claims 4 and 5 are similarly undermined when we recognize that pain is sometimes a way of suffering. Some pains must be endured. Against some pains we are powerless. In short and in general, again, some pains are suffered. This seems to me a central plank of our everyday theory of pain and suffering which we should want some compelling reasons to resist. None are offered.

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[10] For more on the diversity of pain see Jennifer Corns, *The complex reality of pain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). For a rich discussion of our everyday use of pain language, see Emma Borg *et al.*, "Is the folk concept of pain polyeidic?," *Mind & Language*, vol. 35, n° 1 (2020), 29–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12227

This is not to say that there is no distinguishing pain and suffering! There are a great many pains with which we do not suffer. It is clearly an exaggeration to say that I suffer when *e.g.* I undergo a twinge of pain from bumping my elbow on a door frame. Even as theories of suffering should include the pain of a serious gunshot wound, so (barring special circumstances) they should exclude the pain of a bumped elbow. So too, of course, pains are not the only things we suffer. Though one may deny that the "mental" and "social" pains mentioned above are pain, it should not be denied that they sometimes constitute suffering. We should, again, want some very compelling reasons to reject that heartbreak or grief, for example, are ever suffered. Suffering and pain should indeed be distinguished, but Ricœur's claim 2 does not adequately accomplish this. The first difficulty is not solved, much less easily solved, in this way.

In adhering to an agentive account of suffering, however, I think that Ricœur has the resources to better distinguish pain and suffering than he does in claim 2 and the infected claims 3 to 5. Like Ricœur, I think that suffering is always an agentive problem. Pain sometimes is, but it need not be. On any agentive account, this may be captured by recognizing that some but not all pains are agentive problems. Using his particular agentive account, Ricœur could thus have granted that pains are sometimes diminutions of the power to act and granted that, whenever they are, they thereby constitute suffering. This, I think, is what he should have said. This would allow him to capture the seemingly obvious claims problematizing claim 2 as above, *i.e.* that pains are one of the ways we suffer, that not all pains are suffered, and that there are many ways besides pain to suffer. It is, in short, simply the application of his own account of suffering to the case of pain!

Before turning directly to his agentive account of suffering, it is worth briefly conjecturing why Ricœur has offered claim 2, then, especially when he has the resources to do so much better. My suspicion, though admittedly only a suspicion, is that Ricœur is led into the problematic claim 2 by his uncritical acceptance of claim 1, combined with his motivation to distinguish pain and suffering as he takes it to be justified in the clinic. Claims 4 and 5 further raise my suspicion that there are, in fact, three underlying and connected assumptions which he neither makes explicit nor directly supports: first, that both pain and suffering are targets for treatment; second, that they are distinct targets; and third, that while we can expect, at least eventually, to have the means to eliminate all pain, suffering will always remain.

Insofar as these hidden assumptions are the motivation, as stressed in the previous section, this methodology seems to me to get things the wrong way around. As philosophers, we do not start with the idea that pain and suffering must be appropriate targets for clinical treatment—and distinct ones at that—and then go on to regiment or correct everyday theory on that basis. Rather, we must consider whether any given posit of everyday theory is an appropriate target for treatment. We start with everyday theory (as above: including, but not limited, to conscious experiences) and specialize and refine for particular inquiries and purposes thereafter. As might be anticipated, I am also and anyway unpersuaded of the truth of these hidden assumptions—at whatever point in the dialectic they are offered. To see why, we must first get clearer on the nature of suffering and just what kind of agentive problem it may be. Having done so, I briefly return to the question of treatment in the concluding section.

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IV. What Sort of Agentive Problem Is Suffering?

Ricœur offers an agentive account of suffering. At least, he says: "we can adopt as our working hypothesis that suffering consists in the diminution of our power of acting."[11] In this section, I want to enrich this hypothesis with the liberal account of agency that I favour. I think this enrichment can allow us to make progress in developing an agentive account of suffering.

Note first, however, that I will set aside the issue of affect for the remainder of this section. I take it that Ricœur's agentive account of suffering as (1) the dimunition of our power of acting is intended to be consistent with his identification of suffering as (2) a conscious experience with negative affect. It is not clear to me how this consistency is meant to be achieved. Perhaps he thinks that negative affect always *de facto* undermines agency. Perhaps, instead, his agentive account is intended not to refer to the diminution of the power to act as such, but instead to experiences, indeed negative affective experiences, of this diminution. On my view, both potential harmonizations have significant problems. For reasons of space, and as I've argued against affective accounts of suffering elsewhere, in this section I will simply set affect aside and focus on the agentive hypothesis which I find most interesting and more promising when taken on its own.

Turn, then, to the agentive hypothesis, shorn of affective commitments. Ricœur does not, in this translated lecture at least, tell us much about what agency is, such that it is not entirely obvious what will count as its reduction or diminution. The word 'diminution' certainly suggests that agency is something which comes in degrees. We might rightly worry, however, whether every reduction of agency—however it is understood—is sufficient for suffering. Surely some agentive problems are too minor to qualify as suffering. It seems clear to me that an agentive account of suffering must require that the agentive problem is a significant problem. But, in what sense? On my view, significant for the agent *qua* agent. To make good on this suggestion, however, and to unpack the account more generally: an account of agency is ultimately needed.

On my view, humans are complex agents with many functionally integrated forms of agency. Following Barandarian *et al.*[12], I offer a minimal and liberal account of agency according to which an agent is (1) an individual distinct from its environment which (2) can exercise its capacities in ways which modulate its environment (3) in accordance with norms that concern its integrity as that kind of agent. This facilitates an explanation of humans as biological agents, social agents, familial agents, financial agents, and so on. Each of these forms of agency is constituted by a set of capacities and norms in accordance with which those capacities are exercised by the individual. Being the distinct, complex individual that you are involves the functional integration of your particular set of agentive forms. Much more could be said about this account of agency, but it is hopefully enough to engage with our question of suffering.

Using this account of agency, now consider Ricœur's hypothesis that suffering is the diminution of agency—adding, as I think we certainly should, the further requirement that it is the *significant* diminution of agency. We can then say something much more informative and useful

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[11] Ricœur, "Suffering is Not Pain," 18.

[12] Xavier E. Barandiaran, Ezquiel Di Paolo and Marieke Rohde, "Defining agency: Individuality, normativity, asymmetry, and spatio-temporality in action," *Adaptive Behavior*, vol. 17, nº 5 (2009), 367–386. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059712309343819

about how agency may be reduced. In particular, we can look to all three conditions of agency. So, one's capacities may be undermined or threatened in ways which constitute a significant agentive problem, *e.g.* one may become ill, maimed, demented, or blind. One's environment may likewise change in undermining ways. If there is no potable water or no people, my biological and social agency will suffer. I will suffer greatly indeed, as I will be unable to act in my environment in ways which satisfy the norms of many of my agentive forms. Changes to the norms, as well, may engender great suffering. If my actions are guided by norms about what it means to be a successful citizen, mother, friend, or teacher which I am unable to satisfy to some significant degree—for reasons of capacity, environment, or any other—then I will suffer. Admittedly, the word 'reduction' or 'dimunition' is not always the most natural or appropriate for capturing these agentive problems, and I prefer the word 'disruption'. Nonetheless, Ricœur's core idea—that suffering is the diminution of agency—seems to me to be enhanced and made more plausible when enriched with this theory of agency. Not only does this bring Ricœur's hypothesis very closely in line with my own account, but it seems to me that it provides powerful resources for addressing the issues which he raises under each of his three "moments."

The three "moments" Ricœur explores when developing his agentive hypothesis are: (i) the agentive problem which suffering presents for our relationship to others, *i.e.* the self-other axis, (ii) a taxonomy of suffering, or ways or levels of acting, *i.e.* the act-to-suffer axis, (iii) and how to understand suffering as a potential teacher. Consider each of these and the way in which a minimal account of agency may help advance an agentive account of suffering.

Consider first the agentive problem which suffering presents for our relationship to others. Ricœur presents this as something of a paradox. On the one hand, as I understand him, when we suffer, we have a vivid feeling of our own existence that involves receding into ourselves. On the other hand, we have a "special intensification of our relationship with others," but one which is negative and involves separation. At first blush, these look entirely consistent without need of reconciliation: when suffering, I recede into myself and am separated from others, and I feel this separation intensely and negatively. These are metaphors which need unpacking, but they appear to be consistent metaphors! It seems to me that the tension arises in recognizing that the sufferer "calls" for the other. This, I think, is the dilemma. When we suffer, we feel both most separated, but also most in need and in this way most connected to others. It is, I think, also in this way that the self is both intensified as a distinct self in suffering, but also that our relationships with others are likewise intensified. We might then understand Ricœur as asking: how can suffering both intensify and weaken my relationships with others?

It seems to me that if we enrich Ricœur's theory as offered above, then we are aided in unpacking the metaphors which Ricœur uses to pose a dilemma, but also to understand and solve it. To "recede into ourselves" as we metaphorically do in suffering, can—using the resources above—be understood as becoming unable to act as successfully in our environment through the deployment of our own capacities. The environment is no longer, for the sufferer, a space of successful action. Indeed, suffering is constituted by the undermining of successful action—which always takes place in an environment in which, as an agent, one is distinct. The same is true, in many ways, of the sufferer's relationships with others when suffering. If they are no longer able to interact with friends in the manner with which they are accustomed—if their social agency is significantly disrupted—then they will suffer. This suffering is not only a reason that the sufferer

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is distinct from others, but the change in relationship can itself constitutes suffering in some cases. If one is no longer able to be a good friend, *i.e.* to satisfy the norms of friendship, then this, itself, can be a form of suffering. The dilemma is also solved, however, because though one's relationships may be in this way weakened, they are strengthened in others. Indeed, potentially in a great many others. The most obvious, perhaps, is that the sufferer may become reliant on others to satisfy many of the norms operative across many of their forms of agency. When ill, for example, my husband must now help me with the daily tasks which, I previously could accomplish well on my own. When one's capacities are disrupted such that they can no longer operate as successfully in their environment, the capacities of others are crucial.

Notice a further feature of resolving the self-other dilemma using this account of agency: namely, the way in which suffering may lead to the development of new forms of shared agency. Sometimes, suffering results in the merging of agency such that suffering become shared. Using the above account, agency is shared insofar as some forms of my agency are functionally integrated with those of an antecedent other. When my agency is undermined through the undermining of my capacities, if I begin to rely on their capacities, and they rely on mine, we may then come to share some form of our agency. If I used to both make the shopping list, do the shopping, and make the meals, but now need to rely on my partner's capacity for the latter and they on me for the former, we are now sharing this form of our domestic agency. In undermining some forms of my agency, suffering may facilitate the creation of others, and some of these new forms may be shared forms. Once agency is shared, suffering may be also. On my view, we can genuinely suffer with others insofar as we genuinely share a form of agency with them. We do not merely feel with or for others; rather, we really can suffer with one another. As above, the very call to others, the way in which we come to rely on the capacities of others and the way in which they begin to operate with us to satisfy norms of activity across a range of domains, can itself be a way that we come to share our agency. When these shared forms of agency are disrupted, we—together—suffer. In this way, the way in which suffering compels us to call to others can result in a situation in which we are no longer alone in our suffering.

Turn now, and most briefly, to Ricœur's second "moment" and the typology of suffering which Ricœur explores. Adopting the liberal account of agency sketched above will result in a far richer and more diverse typology of agency than that offered by Ricœur. While his sparse typology of four key domains of activity which suffering may undermine may be useful for some purposes, when thinking of the diverse range of ways in which we suffer, this typology is clearly impoverished. A good theory of suffering should be able to capture why and when we suffer both from and with illness, old age, childhood, change, fear, rejection, heartbreak, cancer, kidney failure, deficient education or nutrition, losses of all kinds, etc. It is not clear how we might begin to capture and organize this vast diversity merely using Ricœur's four levels of efficiency. The appeal to forms of agency, however, as constituted by the three dimensions identified above, seems to me to be a much more promising direction.

Third and finally, then, consider Ricœur's third "moment" and the difficult issue of suffering as a potential teacher. Ricœur is here admirably compassionate and careful. He takes suffering seriously and exhorts us all to do the same. Nonetheless, he maintains that there is some way in which suffering sometimes teaches. But what does it teach? And, I might add, how does it teach?

I think this difficult question is made yet more difficult by two further assumptions Ricœur makes which, while understandable, are ultimately mistaken.

His first assumption is that suffering is always evil or, at the very least, bad. If suffering is an agentive problem, and we are understood as complex agents as above, then while suffering is always bad *qua* some form of agency, it is not always bad for the complex agent as an integrated whole individual. It is certainly not always evil. When some form of my agency is undermined, even significantly, this is a change which may cause other forms of my agency to grow. Disruptions or losses to capacities can result in the development of others. As above, suffering can also cause the merging of some forms of agency such that my relationships with others are deeply strengthened and developed. Of course, this should not be overstated. Suffering is always bad from the perspective of the form of agency in virtue of which suffering is occurring. Some domain of one's activity, some part of who they are, is significantly disrupted or undermined. That is true. And some suffering is evil. Some suffering undermines agency, *e.g.* in ways which do not contribute to the good of the overall, integrated agent. Some suffering disrupts or even destroys a range of agentive forms and leaves the agent crippled and impaired in ways which are unredeemed and unrecoverable. That is also true. But not all. Not always. It is sometimes very good for me to have my agency undermined. It is sometimes very good for me to suffer.

The second assumption which Ricœur, at least sometimes, sounds as if he is making is that there may be a single, satisfactory, one-size-fits-all answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. That there may be one thing that suffering teaches. One reason that we suffer. Insofar as he does make this assumption, it seems to me mistaken. This, I think, is easier to see in the light of a theory of suffering which encompasses the rich diversity of the forms of suffering, along with the diverse range of causes and consequences of suffering.

So, what does suffering teach? As Ricœur recognizes: no swift, pat answer is appropriate. One difficulty, as above, is that different episodes of suffering offer different lessons to different individuals on different occasions. This includes but is far from limited to learning that we are vulnerable; that we are sometimes truly dependent on others; that we are adaptable; that environments are mercurial; that the world is not always suited to our needs; that forms of our agency can be created and destroyed while we yet persist; what and who we are; and on and on. What and whether suffering teaches will depend on which form is agency is undermined by whom and in what way. Though that doesn't give a direct answer to the general question, it provides some guidance for where to look for answers in particular cases. Even as suffering is diverse, so too are its lessons.

In closing this section, I want to admit that there is a difficulty raised by Ricœur which I think the minimal account of agency introduced here does not aid and, indeed, may be thought to exacerbate. Namely, the problem of the proliferation of suffering. Ricœur worries about giving an account of suffering which makes it ubiquitous or easy to come by. On my own account, our existence is littered with suffering. Agency is constantly and routinely undermined or disrupted. Neither our capacities, nor our environment, allow us to maximally satisfy all the norms operative across our many forms of agency. Indeed, for complex agents like us, we will constantly be operating with a set of norms which *cannot* be maximally mutually satisfied. Suffering is thus constant and inevitable. This may be a worry if we think suffering is something exceptional or unusual. But why think that? How much proliferation is too much?

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Suffering is always significant, but we must be careful about what this does and does not mean. Suffering is always, on the model of agency sketched above, a normative affair. It always matters for some agent in virtue of some form of their agency. This can be true even if everyday existence is riddled through and through with suffering. What is not true is that all suffering matters as much or in the same ways. Even as not all suffering is evil or bad for one, not all suffering creates the same kinds of obligations for its elimination or alleviation. Some forms of agency may matter more than others. Some ways in which agency is undermined may involve injustice, but some may simply involve the passage of time. By identifying different kinds of agents, and the different aspects of their agency, we are better able to distinguish the different kinds of suffering.

V. Conclusion

Ricœur's lecture invites us to consider the distinction between pain and suffering, as experienced by all and apprehended by the philosopher *qua* phenomenologist, with an eye to the clinic. I have argued that the role of the philosopher is not limited to phenomenological excavator; that pain is sometimes though not always a form of suffering such that these are not distinguished in the way Ricœur suggests; and I have illustrated some of the ways in which his agentive hypothesis for suffering could be usefully enhanced with a minimal account of agency.

As promised, I close by returning once more to the clinic and comparing pain and suffering one final time. I suggested that at least some of Ricœur's own distinctions between pain and suffering were motivated by three hidden assumptions about the clinic: first, that both pain and suffering are targets for treatment; second, that they are distinct targets; and third, that while we can expect, at least eventually, to have the means to eliminate all pain, suffering will always remain.

First, pain. I have argued elsewhere that pain is an everyday kind—a phenomenon identified and referenced in everyday life—encompassing a surprisingly diverse range of tokens.[13] I have defended the radical idea that pain is never an appropriate treatment target on the grounds that pain is not only a diverse class, but that each token pain is the result of the complex convergence of multiple mechanisms none of which are specific to pain. Treatment in response to pain reports appropriately targets these mechanisms. "Pain killers" are not directly targeted at pain and, as we all unfortunately know, they leave a great many pains entirely untouched. Pain is an everyday kind, tokens of which often cause their bearers to seek treatment in the clinic, but that is nevertheless not an appropriate treatment target. If I'm right about this, then pain is not eventually going to be eliminated through medical intervention, as Ricœur seems to hope. There will not be a universal analgesic for pain, since there is no single mechanism for pain to be targeted.

Compare now with suffering. One key moral of the discussion above is that suffering, understood as a significant problem of agency, is likewise an extremely diverse class. Unlike pain, however, it seems to me that some tokens of this class are appropriate treatment targets. As argued above, pain is sometimes constitutive of suffering. Pain sometimes constitutes a significant undermining of our agency. In these cases, our suffering is not an appropriate target on my view since, as above, I deny this of pain. Suffering of many kinds, including pain, may appropriately cause one to seek treatment, while not themselves being appropriate treatment targets. Many forms

[13] See again Corns, *The complex reality of pain*.

of suffering seem to me to be like this, *e.g.* rejection or loneliness. In other cases, however, our suffering may be appropriately targeted in the clinic. Some forms of suffering, some agentive problems, are appropriate targets of treatment. So, for example, cancer, heart attacks, and perhaps depression and anxiety are like this.

Like its proliferation, this diversity of suffering is not a problem for an agentive account of suffering. Indeed, this is a feature and not a bug. Our distinction between pain and suffering needn't respect the assumptions about the clinic which Ricœur seems to be bringing to the table. Pain is not always distinct from suffering, much less do they always present distinct treatment targets. If I'm right, pain is never an appropriate treatment target. If we accept Ricœur's own agentive hypothesis and recognize the diversity of suffering, some forms are appropriately treated in the clinic and others are not. The recognition of this diversity, and the limits of the clinic, are themselves insights which a philosopher may humbly bring to the table in interdisciplinary collaboration.

Ricœur is surely right, however, that suffering will endure. For a complex agent, suffering is constant and inevitable. Some of this suffering is appropriately treated in the clinic. Some is evil and fit only to be spurned, lamented, or accepted. Some constitutes injustice which we should fight through social change, while some should be embraced as the opportunity for growth and change. Suffering is as diverse as the complex agents who endure it.

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