

Saulius Geniusas, *The Phenomenology of Pain*, 2020, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 258 pages, index.

In *The Phenomenology of Pain*, Saulius Geniusas (Hong Kong) seeks to define the *experience* of pain. While scientific and sociological methods of studying pain elucidate the *causes* of pain experience, they often overlook the nature of pain experience itself. In an effort to begin an investigation of pain as a lived experience, Geniusas uses the phenomenological method, specifically Husserlian phenomenology. His study has three main goals: to introduce the phenomenological method in the study of pain, to give a new definition of pain which accords with this method, and lastly, to show the relevance of the phenomenology of pain to questions of personhood usually dealt with in philosophical anthropology. Geniusas embarks on a difficult task because he covers many topics related to pain, such as embodiment, personhood, pain dissociation syndromes, and temporality. Nevertheless, his book succeeds in that it not only gives a very clear and enlightening definition of pain, but also shows how its insights can improve contemporary medical and therapeutic treatments of pain.

The book includes an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. The first two chapters discuss explicitly the phenomenological method and intentionality while the remaining chapters elaborate on pain dissociation syndromes, temporality, embodiment, personhood, and the life-world, respectively. In the first chapter, Geniusas discusses the phenomenological method but also suggests two additions to the method for pain research. He argues that the phenomenological method fundamentally consists in the epoché, the phenomenological reduction, and the eidetic variation, but that factual variation and the genetic method need to be added as well in order to conduct accurate pain research. For the phenomenology of pain, the epoché demands that the phenomenologist not depend on the findings of the sciences and seek to *explain* the lived experience of pain. That is, the phenomenologist cannot reduce pain to merely a natural phenomenon. The phenomenological reduction concerns the phenomenologist removing herself from the natural attitude and focusing on pure experience. Here, the phenomenology of pain describes the pure experience of pain, pure experience being “an experience purified of all naturalistic apprehensions” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 16). Instead of explaining pain experience in causal and scientific terms, the phenomenologist describes experience as an experience which is lived through. Lastly, the eidetic reduction allows the phenomenologist to find the essence of pain, albeit not necessarily an exact essence. The eidetic reduction finds the essential characteristics in the experiences of a specific phenomenon, but there is room for some

variation within these characteristics. Geniusas then introduces the concept of “dialogical phenomenology” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 27) which is a type of phenomenological analysis that utilizes research from other disciplines and other cultures to factually verify its findings in the previous three methodologies. Factual variation does not work counter to the previous methodologies but instead provides possibilities which the phenomenologist can consider in the eidetic variation. Dialogical phenomenology is itself not a separate method, but is weaved into the three previous principles. Lastly, Geniusas adds the method of genetic phenomenology to the fundamental method for pain phenomenology because genetic phenomenology can bring to light “the origin and the development of pain experiences” over time in the life-world, further describing the temporal and personal aspects of pain experience (Geniusas, 2020, p. 40).

In the second chapter, Geniusas presents a stratified definition of pain. To begin with, he proceeds by taking into account the International Association for the Study of Pain’s (IASP) definition of pain: “Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage” (Merskey and Bogduk 1994, p. 209, Geniusas, 2020, p. 41). This definition is incomplete, for Geniusas, because it does not fully capture the experience of pain. That is, this definition does not give us much insight into what it is like to experience pain. Geniusas presents his own definition of pain as follows: “pain is an aversive bodily feeling with a distinct experiential quality, which can be given only in original firsthand experience, either as a nonintentional feeling-sensation or as an intentional feeling” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 42). Throughout the rest of the book, Geniusas defends this definition of pain experience. In this chapter, he inserts himself in the debate on whether pain is a nonintentional feeling or an intentional feeling. Carl Stumpf advocated that pain is a nonintentional feeling sensation while Franz Brentano conceived of pain as an intentional feeling. In order to reconcile this debate, Geniusas proposes that pain experiences consist of a fundamental nonintentional feeling-sensation, but also of a non-founding intentional feeling, making pain experience a stratified experience. The founding non-intentional feeling-sensation in pain experiences is pre-reflective in that the person lives through her pain without positing her pain as an intentional object. Following Husserl and his notion of “apprehension-content of apprehension” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 52–54), Geniusas classifies this pre-reflective aspect of pain experience as pre-intentional because pre-intentional feeling-sensations can lead to intentional feelings. A person does not need to experience the intentional feeling in order for the experience to be a pain experience, but intentional feelings can help constitute pain experiences (Geniusas, 2020,

p. 57). In intentional experiences of pain, the person can have various intentional objects. First, one can take her body as an intentional object. In addition, the intentional object can also be the pain itself. Lastly, one can experience pain intentionally in that the person relates to other objects through her pain (Geniusas, 2020, p. 49–51). Geniusas, instead of classifying pain as either non-intentional or as intentional, combines the two classifications in that pain experiences are founded by pre-intentional feeling sensations, but then can become intentional feelings.

In chapter 3, Geniusas considers pain dissociation syndromes, syndromes which may appear to serve as an objection to his definition of pain, in order to argue that his thesis does in fact account for these syndromes. He first considers congenital insensitivity to pain, or CIP, a syndrome in which a person does not experience pain with “dislike or distress” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 70). Since Geniusas’s definition of pain names pain experiences as aversive experiences, it appears that CIP serves as an instance of pain which does not fall under his definition. Geniusas argues that a CIP patient does not have pain sensations, and therefore, does not have “a whole pain experience” (Geniusas, 2020, 73). This sheds further light on his initial definition of pain; that is, pain experiences need pain sensations in order to be classified as pain experiences. He then brings other dissociation syndromes, including lobotomy, cingulotomy, and morphine; threat hypersymbolia; asymbolia; and painfulness without pain up against his definition, showing how each syndrome, rather than disproving his definition, either has only some aspects of pain experience or is not an experience of pain.

The next chapter deals with pain’s temporality. Since pain experience is precisely an *experience*, it must be lived through in present time. A reproduced experience of pain through memory, fantasy, or expectation is not an experience of pain because these reproductions are not original experiences. Geniusas, with many references to Husserl, first distinguishes between objective and subjective time, and then elucidates the notion of *presence*. Objective and subjective time differ in that subjective time “is not fixed externally and commonly is experienced in a more or less extended or contracted way” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 99) while objective time, usually associated with clock time, is not flexible. Pain deals with subjective time in that an experience of pain alters a person’s experience of time. Geniusas then begins with and works with a specific definition of presence, “the extended and concrete presence intended in the impressional, retentional, and protentional consciousness, and conceived of as a synthetic unity of the now, the not-yet, and the not-anymore” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 104), in order to explain the role of implicit and explicit presence, memory, and anticipation in experiences of pain. Later in

the chapter, Geniusas clarifies the field of presence “as the exhaustive horizon of experience” (Geniusas, 2020, 117). Regarding implicit and explicit presence, a person may implicitly experience the presence of pain without explicitly knowing about this experience. Furthermore, implicit memory affects the way the person experiences pain by bringing memories from the past into one’s experience of the future. Lastly, implicit anticipation, a form of bodily anticipation, brings one’s expectation of the future into his or her experience of the present. Geniusas sets up a nice segue by explaining the relation between time and personhood in order to introduce one of the final chapters, which deals with pain’s both repersonalizing and depersonalizing effects.

Chapter 5 discusses pain as an embodied experience. First, Geniusas investigates an apparent perplexity about the embodied nature of pain experience: the fact that pain is both an indubitable experience and is localizable in the body. That is, one cannot doubt the existence of the pain experience, but in addition, pain is also experienced in the body. The central question here is: how can something rooted in the body, which is usually thought of as ‘physical’, be indubitable when usually only psychological experiences are thought of as indubitable? Geniusas considers six solutions to this problem: a semiological account, a causal account, an associationist account, a representationalist account, a perceptual account, and a phenomenological account. All of these accounts fail, according to Geniusas, because they do not accurately describe lived experience and do not accord with experiential evidence. By contrast, understanding the body in pain as the *lived body* (*Leib*) rather than as only the physical body (*Körper*) enables one to properly understand the lived experience of pain. That is, “pain is neither purely psychological nor purely physical; rather, it is an *embodied feeling* that affects the *embodied consciousness*” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 127). It is important to note that for Geniusas the lived body is the “field of sensings” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 130). In addition, the lived body is the “zero point of orientation” for the person, the “organ” of the will, “the expression of the spirit”, and again, “the bearer of localized sensations” (Geniusas, 2020, p. 129). When a subject is in pain, the experience is indubitable, but the body is also an object for the subject since the pain is in the body. Pain experiences transform the original constituents of the lived body in that the body, instead of being the zero point, becomes distant to the person; instead of seamlessly serving as the organ of the will, it becomes an obstacle and hindrance to the will; thirdly, instead of expressing the spirit, it serves to break down the subject’s expressions. Still, the lived body in pain remains constituted through sensations. To sum up, this chapter highlighted pain experiences as embodied experiences through and in the lived body, a lived body

which further plays a part in the constitution of the person, a topic which Geniusas treats in the next chapter.

In the chapter entitled “The Phenomenology of Embodied Personhood”, Geniusas discusses how chronic pain experiences can be both depersonalizing and repersonalizing. He begins with a brief description of personhood, arguing that “to be a person is to be an embodied subject of perceptual, cognitive, emotive, and practical acts. To be a person is to stand in an intentional relation to the surrounding world and in a communicative relation to others” (Genusas, 2020, p. 147). In chronic pain experiences, the pain can disrupt the relation between self and world, self and other, and self and self. Depersonalization occurs when the person’s body becomes an obstacle to the person to the point that he or she starts to not identify with it. Furthermore, this depersonalization leads to fractured relations with other persons through isolation, dependency, and a difficulty in communicating one’s own pain experiences. Chronic pain not only consists in depersonalization, but also consists in repersonalization in that the person’s response, whether bodily, emotive, or cognitive, contributes to and affects his or her personhood, a personhood developed over time. At the end of the chapter, Geniusas briefly analyzes treatments of pain, discussing the relevance of listening in treatment. Since the patient is neither merely a body or merely a mind, treatments must treat both the physical and the psychological aspects of the pain experience. Furthermore, Geniusas establishes a reciprocal relation between illness and disease and between curing and healing. The person’s experience of pain affects the disease, and furthermore, even if the disease is cured, the patient may still need to be healed. A central aspect of this healing is the doctor listening to the patients and the patients listening to themselves. When patients listen to themselves and have someone else listen to their accounts of their pain experiences, this can serve as a way of “coming to terms” with their experience in an intersubjective way (Genusas, 2020, p. 158).

The last chapter explores pain experiences in the life-world. For Geniusas, one can only understand experiences such as somatization, which occurs when a person turns nonbodily experiences into bodily experiences, and psychologization, which occurs when one turns bodily experiences into nonbodily experiences, if one understands pain as occurring in the life-world. Geniusas, with inspiration from Husserl, regards the life-world as “the practical horizon in which we act, judge, and live our everyday lives” (Genusas, 2020, p. 172). This life-world is the intersubjective, historical, and cultural home of the person. When one conceives pain as originating out of this life-world, one can understand somatization and psychologization as arising as a response to a specific context. This chapter serves as a nice culmination of one of the general goals

of the book: to understand not only pain experiences, but also the human person and her context because pain experiences happen for a person rooted in a cultural milieu, and one must consider the larger context of the person's pain experience in order to have a better understanding of the experience of pain. While the life-world is the homeworld for the person, the person, Geniusas contends, also feels simultaneously not at home in this world due to her difficulty in expressing and accepting her experiences (Geniusas, 2020, p. 186).

One of the strengths of Geniusas's book is that due to his methodology, readers from many different backgrounds can benefit from his study. By making phenomenology dialogical, Geniusas opens up his study to findings from disciplines other than phenomenology. Philosophers, scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and really anyone interested in pain experience can both understand and critically engage with the book. Furthermore, Geniusas's attempt to understand pain experience by also understanding the human person makes his study a wholistic study. This segues into another strength of Geniusas's book, its practical implications for medical practice. Through a proper understanding of the nature of both pain experience and the human person, one can find more effective and efficient ways to treat various pain conditions. His explorations of the relation between listening and treatment of pain conditions, between the life-world and pain experiences, and between the lived body and the mind shed a new light on different aspects of medical treatments. Lastly, his book sets up many avenues for future research, such as the relation between pain and suffering and the status of animal pain. In conclusion, Geniusas sets a very difficult task for this book project, but he succeeded with a very detailed and wide-ranging study.

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