

## Editorial

## Psychological Approach of Pain

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From its very inception psychoanalysis has focused on as it is evidenced from the first Freudian models of the psyche. Two different conceptualizations of pain have evolved within psychoanalysis: pain as psychic trauma and pain as psychic expression resulting from some form of trauma. In the first instance, pain sets the boundaries for the Ego's energy and is in essence a narcissistic attack that subsumes a transformation of communication capacities and investments. In essence, a loss in the ability to love, a psychic representation of the territory of traumatic invasion and, it may even include a form of splitting. In the second case that is in masochism, hypochondria, hysteria, psychosomatic pain some relational impasses are expressed in the guise of specific somatic pain or by taking the form of a psychic non-verbalized dysphoria or discomfort<sup>1</sup>.

In both instances outlined above, the Ego functions as a translator who has the ability to 'read' the internal world, the language of drives and transpose it to the external world the screen of consciousness---the language of feeling-states-experiences. When these fluctuating drives are not excessive, the pleasure principle has the ability to regulate their intensity and to make them more tolerable. In this fashion, these drives are rendered conscious as feelings of pleasure or displeasure. When such drive fluctuations are intense (e.g., a sudden break with a love object- a person, thing or situation) then the regulating function of the pleasure principle becomes idle. The Ego can no longer control the disruption of drives and feels pain. While dissatisfaction is how the Ego experiences a situation of high intensity, making it fit accordingly, pain expresses the experience of uncontrolled intensity within a restless psyche. Dissatisfaction, thus, remains as a sense that reflects to consciousness an increase of intensity and is governed by the laws of the pleasure principle. Pain, on the other hand, depicts a deep deregulation of mental life that eludes the pleasure principle. From all of these feelings: love, hate, envy, affection, etc., pain is the feeling state that is more difficult to comprehend, and therefore, very difficult to study.

Psychoanalysis, the theory of the psyche and of the method of observation contributes to the understanding of

differences between pain and trauma in a way that illuminates their origins. The theory of trauma and the pain that is derived from it are inextricably intertwined with psychoanalytic theory and born from and within the development of Freudian theses regarding traumatic hysteria, where the foundations of trauma's role in the genesis of anxiety and the development of the psyche were set forth. Within these fundamental psychoanalytic tenets, the catastrophic role of trauma and the subjects' inability to address its foundations are laid out<sup>2</sup>.

Psychoanalytic theory's logos and contributions to psychopathology and psychiatry with regard to 'ethical pain or suffering' in terms of depressive pathology, excessive grief or melancholia are well-known. In such complaints and states of being somatic pain is not directly referred to. While in the laments or utterances of the melancholic person—who is being implicated into obscurity where s/he is thinking incessantly and where everything has been reduced to nothing—one encounters in narratives of somatic pain. The transition from physical pain to moral pain is nonetheless based on a ratio that contains only the phenomena that are of a similar nature<sup>3</sup>.

From a theoretical perspective, psychoanalysis focuses on subjectivity, and therefore, does not focus on the object that is pain, but what it contains, the content of the pain, how it is expressed (or not expressed) and the phenomena that accompany it. Pain is a subjective phenomenon, and hence, it is concomitantly felt and emotionally experienced. Moreover, pain is a personal experience as to how it is experienced and expressed. Pain, therefore, has specific individualized components where its effects and impacts vary from one person to another. Due to this, it is very difficult to reduce pain only to how it is psychologically expressed, and in this way, nullify its genesis. This is because pain is experienced and expressed subjectively and not objectively. The interests and the foci of psychoanalysis are on different forms of painful discomfort and the subjectivity of the patient<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Kanellopoulos, L. The psychoanalytic approach of pain. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), Edition Epékina, Athens:2012 (in Greek).

<sup>3</sup> Freud, S. (1895). Esquisse d'une psychologie scientifique. In: La naissance de la Psychanalyse. P.U.F., Paris : 1956.

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<sup>4</sup> Pedinielli, J.L. & Rouan, G. Douleur et traumatisme : lecture psychanalytique. *Douleur et Analgésie* n°3, 1997.

Therefore, psychoanalysis does not focus on pain as an object or objective experience, but the content of the pain, how pain is expressed (or not expressed) and phenomena that accompany it. The experience of pain can result from its intensity or chronicity, from the reshuffling of one's psychic economy, and from the transformation of the psychic apparatus. Since pain is susceptible to influence from other psycho-

logical phenomena, it is important to note that internal conflicts, deadlocks, and external difficulties are expressed "in a misleading fashion" by feeling pain. Pain, either somatic or psychic, determines our being and is drawn up or made of and with our being. Pain is a global and universal phenomenon; it is an awareness and consciousness of universal being.

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