

Pain is Beyng Itself: Heidegger's Algotontology¹

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Werner Hamacher in memoriam

ABSTRACT: Among the many words Heidegger explores in order to elucidate his primary matter for thought, one would not likely expect *Schmerz* (“pain”) to play a prominent role. And yet, in a selection of notes recently published in a limited German edition under the title *Über den Schmerz (On Pain)*, Heidegger goes so far as to claim that pain is beyng itself. In this paper I analyze Heidegger’s ontological treatment of pain and his etymology of its Greek counterpart, asking whether he does not ultimately anesthetize his readers to pain’s most rending effects.

KEY WORDS: pain, etymology, Ernst Jünger, Hegel, Georg Trakl

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Nenne mir Dein Verhältnis zum Schmerz,
und ich will Dir sagen, wer Du bist!
– Ernst Jünger

Sage mir Dein Verhältnis zum Sein, falls Du überhaupt davon
etwas ahnst und ich sage Dir, *wie* Du Dich und ob Du Dich mit “dem
Schmerz” “beschäftigen” wirst oder ob Du ihm *nachdenken* kannst.
– Martin Heidegger

Among the many words Heidegger explores in order to elucidate his primary matter for thought – *Seyn*, *Ereignis*, *Lichtung*, *a-lētheia*, *logos*, etc.² – one would not likely expect *Schmerz* (“pain”) to play a prominent role. And yet, in a selection of notes from the 1940s and 1950s recently published in a limited German edition under the title *Über den Schmerz* (*On Pain*), Heidegger goes so far as to claim that pain is beyng itself. Pain, for the later Heidegger, is not *merely* ontological (although this idea already differs markedly from the traditional physiological and psychological interpretations of it); pain belongs to the very sense and structure of beyng. Accordingly, in order to understand Heidegger’s later thinking of beyng, one cannot neglect his thinking of pain. To anticipate Heidegger’s argument: pain (*algos*) cares for (*alegei*), indeed just *is*, the articulation (*legein*) – that is, both the gathering and saying – of beyng. The gathering of beyng is thus the gathering of pain, and to study beyng is to study pain. Ontology is algology.

Heidegger does, to be sure, highlight the importance of pain in his two lectures on Trakl. For example, we read that pain separates, but, like Hölderlinian intimacy, it also holds together what it has separated; searing pain leads some to storm heaven, like the egotistical angels of *Paradise Lost* or the spherical doubles of Aristophanes’s encomium, but pain can also become gentle and let all things shine in their essence; pain produces, not gloomy isolation, but gleaming community; pain sustains the difference between things and world; pain is the source of life.³ Provocative as these claims are, they are nevertheless undeveloped and at times seem to come from nowhere, which has led to a variety of scholarly responses, from outright rejection to pious

recapitulation; many have ignored the theme altogether.⁴ To modify a claim made by Robert Bernasconi about Heidegger's remarks on evil in the "Letter on 'Humanism,'" it is as though Heidegger did not intend for his audience to understand, at the time, what he meant by pain in his Trakl commentaries.⁵

In this essay, I will situate Heidegger's peculiar comments within the broader framework of *Über den Schmerz*, which provides his most extensive treatment of pain now available and serves as the basis for much of the Trakl material. Since many scholars will be unfamiliar with *Über den Schmerz* or unable to access it, I will begin with a discussion of the source and status of this document (§1), and then briefly examine Heidegger's critical relation to the author whose work provided the basis for it, namely Ernst Jünger (§2). Thereafter I will turn to Heidegger's *modus operandi* in *Über den Schmerz* (§3) and to his critique of traditional interpretations of pain in this text and in other writings (§4), before moving on to his own affirmative position on the matter (§5) and to the etymology of the Greek word for it, *algos* (§6). Lastly, I will raise some lexical and philosophical objections to Heidegger's treatment, asking in conclusion whether he does not end up anesthetizing his readers to pain's most rending effects (§7).

§1. PHILOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Every year or two, the Martin-Heidegger-Gesellschaft publishes a short, limited edition book containing a previously unavailable text by or closely related to Heidegger. The society prints approximately one-thousand copies and distributes them exclusively to its members. While not all of these volumes are of great importance to Heidegger scholarship or to philosophy more broadly (and many volumes have become readily available elsewhere, such as in GA 73), several are pathbreaking. The latter include Heidegger's final words on phenomenology (*Auszüge zur Phänomenologie*, 2011–2012), which he composed while working on a never-completed introduction to the Collected Works; his notes, which he also intended for the same introduction, on the status of entities independent of the human and on the extent to which being needs the

human (*Das Argument gegen den Brauch*, 2013–2014); and, not least, the volume devoted to the topic of pain (*Über den Schmerz*, 2017–2018).⁶

As the editors of this most recent volume, Dietmar Koch and Klaus Neugebauer, explain, the twenty-five pages of material published in this text come from a slipcase in Heidegger’s literary remains titled “Über den Schmerz. Vgl. zu E. J. ‘Der Arbeiter.’” The editors relate that, in total, the slipcase contains around 570 pages of notes on pain that Heidegger composed within the timeframe of 1942 to 1959 and organized into numerous bundles. While all of the notes will eventually be published as a supplementary volume to Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe*,⁷ the volume currently available reproduces only a portion of one of the bundles and a single sheet from another.⁸ The editors state that their “selection was oriented around interrelated textual passages whose level of elaboration allowed a publication within the framework of the present yearbook to appear sensible” (ÜDS: 56).

The selections from the first bundle are organized as follows:

1. “Der Schmerz” (“Pain”), one page;
2. “Der Anschein des Schmerzes” (“The Semblance of Pain”), five pages;
3. “Der Schmerz” (“Pain”), five pages;
4. An unpaginated slip of paper with quotes from and references to Aquinas and Aristotle;
5. “Die Metaphysik des Schmerzes” (“The Metaphysics of Pain”), six pages;
6. “xxx,” six pages.

Due to an internal reference to Schopenhauer in “The Semblance of Pain,” the editors decided to include the following sheet from the second bundle:

7. “Schopenhauer über den Schmerz” (“Schopenhauer on Pain”), one page, with excerpts from and notes on Schopenhauer.

The online catalogue of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach provides additional information about the content of the second bundle, which I will reproduce here so as to be able to provide the most comprehensive picture of the materials possible at present:

- “Der Schmerz und der Tod” (“Pain and Death”);
- “Die Physik und die Meta-Physik des Schmerzes” (“The Physics and the Meta-Physics of Pain”);
- “Der erste Steg. Der Schmerz” (“The First Footbridge. Pain”).
- “Über den Schmerz” (“On Pain”);
- “Der Schmerz selbst” (“Pain Itself”);
- “Die ‘Gegebenheit’ des Schmerzes” (“The ‘Givenness’ of Pain”).
- “Der Schmerz als das Widrige und Negative” (“Pain as the Adverse and Negative”);
- “Der Schmerz und das animal rationale” (“Pain and the *Animal Rationale*”).⁹

These lists should give one an initial sense for the scope of Heidegger’s appreciation of pain, which would seem to be more than physical, and indeed more than metaphysical. Perhaps they have also begun to reveal how he could spend so much time writing about it.

As for the title (“Über den Schmerz. Vgl. zu E. J. ‘Der Arbeiter’”), “E. J.” refers to the twentieth-century soldier and author Ernst Jünger, and “Der Arbeiter” to one of his most important non-fictional works: *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (*The Worker: Dominion and Form*) (1932). For those familiar with this text, it might seem surprising that Heidegger would connect his treatment of pain so explicitly to it (and, in the title, *only* to it), as pain is hardly one of the book’s overt themes – indeed, the noun is altogether absent from Jünger’s opus. Why, then, does Heidegger mention Jünger? What, moreover, does Jünger have to do with this topic, and why does Heidegger seem to give him such a prominent role in his consideration of it?

§2. ERNST JÜNGER: ON OR BEYOND PAIN?

In 1934, just two years after the appearance of *Der Arbeiter*, Jünger published an essay bearing the very same title as Heidegger’s notes on pain, namely, “Über den Schmerz.” This essay appeared in a collection of Jünger’s writings titled *Blätter und Steine* (*Leaves and Stones*), which also included Jünger’s influential essay from 1930, “Die totale

Mobilmachung” (“Total Mobilization”). In the foreword to this collection Jünger explains how these two essays relate to *Der Arbeiter*:

the terminology introduced in *The Worker* as an optic expedient is once again applied in the reflection “On Pain.” “Total Mobilization” depicts the great process, *The Worker* the form whose historical task consists in carrying out the process. The present reflection [“On Pain”] advances the investigation one step further; it demonstrates that the touchstone of this procedure is to be sought, not in *values*, but in *pain*.¹⁰

The process to which Jünger is referring is the increasing transformation of individual life into mass energy through technological, industrial, political, economic, and military mobilization. Rather than protest against this trend, Jünger prophesies and promotes a new form or breed (*Geschlecht*) of human existence called the worker, which is wholly in accord with the epochal shift.¹¹ In the eponymous treatise, Jünger describes the worker as cold, functional, and merciless, hardly different from a machine. In Jünger’s later essay, workers are marked by their ability to steel themselves against pain.

Heidegger was well aware of these connections among Jünger’s three texts. He cites a portion of the above block-quote in a presentation on Jünger from January 1940 (GA 90: 257), and in notes from 1934–1940 he advances the argument that “the treatise on pain” in Jünger’s “last publication (*Blätter und Steine*)” is a continuation of what had preceded it (GA 90: 33). Given the considerable attention Heidegger devotes to Jünger’s “Über den Schmerz” – he mentions it on numerous occasions, and extensively annotated it in his personal copy of *Blätter und Steine*¹² – and given that Heidegger did not begin to develop his own unique views on pain until the 1941–1942 manuscript *Das Ereignis* (GA 71) (see §5.III, below), thus *after* his encounter with Jünger’s essay,¹³ it is reasonable to identify this essay as the point of departure for Heidegger’s own work on pain. The ample secondary literature on the Jünger/Heidegger connection has largely neglected this work, tending to focus

instead on Heidegger's reading of "Die totale Mobilmachung," *Der Arbeiter*, or Jünger's contribution to the Festschrift for Heidegger's sixtieth birthday, titled "Über die Linie" ("Beyond the Line").¹⁴ While it would be advantageous for future research to study Jünger's influence on Heidegger's appreciation of pain more closely, here I would only like to note Heidegger's critique:

What "pain" itself is, is neither interrogated nor stated, but is only presupposed as a physiological fact of the "body." The "description" simply follows the manner in which this "pain," which is "in itself" present at hand, is *objectified*. Jünger does not see that the inner presupposition of this objectification is the meaninglessness of beings. Hence the leftover stock of all dying metaphysics comes in at the end: *the "bestowing of meaning."* The "objectification" itself is of a piece with the securing of standing reserve that is proper to the will to power.
(GA 90: 437)

In other words, Jünger, like Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler before him, remains trapped within a presupposition-laden metaphysics that fails to ask after the meaning of being itself or the meaning of pain itself. We could thus translate the title of Jünger's essay, not as "On Pain" (*über qua de*), but as an attempt to go "Beyond Pain" (*über qua trans*). Heidegger makes a similar point regarding Jünger's "Über die Linie," namely, the line of metaphysics (GA 9: 386/292 et passim), although, in the case of pain, meditating *on* it does not lead us elsewhere, i.e., to being itself as subtending metaphysics; for, as we will soon see, to contemplate pain is already to contemplate being. Before moving on to Heidegger's own position on pain, it should prove helpful to examine how he prepares for it.

§3. VIA DOLORIS HEIDEGGERIANA

As published in *Über den Schmerz*, Heidegger's notes begin with a paradox. Pain is at once utterly familiar and unspeakably obscure. Without further ado, we can all list off the things that ail us: back pain, headaches, the loss of loved ones, nightmares, anxiety, alienation, despair, evil. But what unifies them? What makes it possible for us to say that things as disparate as betrayal and a mosquito bite are both painful? How, to use Hegel's terminology, do we in this case raise what we are all acquainted with (*das Bekannte*) to the level of cognition (*das Erkannte*)? Not, to be sure, by way of Hegel's own phenomenology, which, as I will discuss in the next section, takes the painful path of negative experience only to arrive at the painless state of absolute knowing. The goal is to understand pain *in itself*, not for another; it is to understand pain in terms of what Heidegger calls the "simplicity of its still hardly thought essence" (ÜDS: 30). For this we would need a different sort of experience and a different sort of phenomenology. Heidegger claims that such an experience would not occur within the domain of beings or *Seiendes* (as examined by physics, for example); it accordingly would not be of something particular, whether physiological or psychological. Nor, moreover, would it occur within the domain of the being, *Sein*, of beings (as examined by metaphysics); it accordingly would not be of something common to all entities, both physiological and psychological. Rather, a proper experience of pain would be an experience on the order of *being itself*, which Heidegger sometimes designates with the archaic spelling *Seyn* ("beyng" in premodern English), as I have often done in this article. This is an experience that would "unsettle metaphysics at its core [*im Wesen erschüttern*]" and "transform the human being's relation to truth" (ÜDS: 39). Heidegger endeavors to prepare (us) for this experience in his notes, even as he articulates a distinctive sense of pain that only such an experience could have made possible. (I will not delve into a discussion of the apparent hermeneutic circularity at work here; instead, I will simply leap into the circle with Heidegger [GA 2: 418/SZ 315] and work from there.)

Although Heidegger does not use this language, we can, at least provisionally, view his notes in *Über den Schmerz* as deploying several strategies or methodologies to prepare for and elucidate the genuine experience of pain. First, to use terminology from the late Husserl and the earlier Heidegger, there is a genetic or deconstructive phenomenology, whereby Heidegger traces the genesis and standardization of common approaches to pain. By de-sedimenting our interpretive foundations and dismantling the edifice we have built on them, Heidegger frees us up for a direct encounter with pain.

This liberation is terrifying, at least initially. We must nevertheless first experience the emergency of exposure and the paralysis of impasse if we are truly to allow a transformation to transpire, rather than carrying on in our ignorance and complacency. This transformation may do nothing to alleviate our pain and suffering. Indeed, practically speaking, it might be altogether useless. It is not, for all that, unnecessary. Recalling Meister Eckhart and the Taoist classic *The Zhuangzi*, Heidegger contends that this uselessness is actually what is most needed (ÜDS: 40, 53).¹⁵ In his notes, Heidegger tries to awaken us to this necessity, or, if you prefer, “to provoke [the requisite] terror in our Dasein,” as he had put it many years prior (GA 29/30: 255/172). There is thus a second, hortatory or provocative strategy at play in Heidegger’s notes.

Finally, in his positive account of pain, Heidegger is conducting what he later calls a “phenomenology of the inapparent” (GA 15: 417/FS 80). Pain, at this level, does not show itself to the senses or show up in consciousness. It, together with its transformative truth, actually hides behind what it appears to be (ÜDS: 35). As with *beyng*, there is something essentially concealed about it. The task, however, is not to tear the truth out of pain, but to learn to correspond in language to what the pain of *beyng* gives to be said, however darkly (ÜDS: 49, 51). We must learn to stop thinking *about* pain, thus from a perspective outside of it. We must instead learn to start

thinking “painfully” – from the side of pain as the assertion of *beyng* [*vom Schmerz her als dem Zuspruch des Seyns*], which ad-sertion [*Zu-Spruch*] is the

appropriate event [*Ereignis*] as the truth of beyng itself [*Seyns selbst*]. (ÜDS: 51)

In other words, our thinking must not claim to apprehend pain, let alone declaim against it; it must instead hold itself *open to* and then hold itself *to* the claim or *address* of pain itself: *Denken an den Schmerz als den An-spruch* (ÜDS: 53; cf. 51). What we are dealing with is thus not a treatise “*über den Schmerz*” – whether “on” it or, with Jünger, “beyond” it – but a thinking that is, in German, “*an den Schmerz*,” which in this context might best be rendered as a thinking that is *aligned* with pain.

Yet we must work our way there. Or better: we must work off the common misconceptions of pain so as to let pain be as it always already implicitly is. If pain really is the matter for thought and the matter of thought (ÜDS: 51), if pain is *die Sache selbst*, then this preliminary work might go by a different title; it could just as well be a reformulation of Husserl’s motto for phenomenology: *Back to pain itself!*

§4. ZUM SCHMERZ SELBST!

Among the advantages of the recently published *Über den Schmerz* is that it provides not only Heidegger’s most developed treatment of pain, but also a distinctive deconstructive-phenomenological analysis of some of the standard ways in which it has been interpreted. I will discuss several of these approaches in this section and draw out their implications for understanding pain and for understanding in general.

When we think about pain, we tend to treat it as some *thing* to be explained (ÜDS: 46, 48). “*What is pain?*,” we ask, “*ti esti algos?*,” as though pain were no different from a triangle, a horse, or virtue. Now, there are many ways to answer this question, all with their own set of aporias. Perhaps the most common response is to locate pain within the domain of sensation and feeling. Excessive force is applied to one of my sense organs, and I cringe or cry out. Pain, whether provoked from within (an erupting tooth, a heart attack) or from without (a bee sting, a blinding light), is something that befalls me and causes a reaction, or rather multiple reactions. Physiologically, the affected

organ itself responds to the assault (with inflammation, for example). Psychologically, I interpret the pain as something to be resisted (with ibuprofen) or tolerated (when the ibuprofen fails and I don't want to take anything stronger for fear of dependency). Heidegger notes that this active/reactive paradigm of pain remains firmly "within the ken of body and soul" (ÜDS: 31).

A third response is possible. Let us call it "metaphysical." Although pain seems to present itself initially and for the most part within the horizon of body and soul – I say *seems*, because Heidegger does not state whether this presentation is essential to all human experience or already the product of a wrong state of affairs – it is only in *interpreting* pain accordingly that the domains of the physical and the psychological become fixed as the domains of being as such. In other words, Heidegger is contending that metaphysics, which he defines as the "distinction between the physical and the non-physical, between the sensuous and the super-sensuous" (ÜDS: 43), emerges precisely from a mistaken, albeit phenomenologically understandable interpretation of pain. Heidegger develops this contention in a long passage from the group of notes titled "The Semblance of Pain." The first half traces the conceptual genesis of the physical domain:

The mode of cognitive comportment toward pain is also reactive. It is an explaining and a construing [*Deuten*]. The explaining moves within the series of cause and effect, which the realm of the physical and physiological showcases [*darbietet*]. Thought rigorously and seen truly, it is in pursuing the presentification [*Vergegenwärtigung*] of the adverse incursion that this realm is first thought as that which it is. Pain first showcases the physiological and the physical, and, therefore, the explaining that clearly goes back to this from the givenness of the incursion is taken to be satisfying and intelligible. (ÜDS: 32)

The second half of the passage points to the genesis of a psychological domain of resistance that nevertheless remains essentially dependent on the physical:

The construing goes beyond the physical, but into a region that for its part is already given together with the incursive character of the adverse as that from which pain can be countered willfully and by means of comportment and bearing [*Verhaltung und Haltung*]. (ÜDS: 32)

If for no other reason (though there is much more to come), this striking derivation of metaphysics from the misreading of pain should provide sufficient impetus to examine Heidegger's work on the topic.

Pain, like no other experience, exposes the fragility of the barrier erected between body and soul, even if it does not always break that barrier down completely. Cancer changes a person, and stress can cause otherwise unaccountable chest pain. Despite this, pain affords ample opportunity to reestablish the divide. Heidegger's discussion considers several of these dissociative techniques (ÜDS: 33-34, 37-38, 43-44), which I will arrange under the headings of (1) denial, (2) development, (3) reduction, and (4) biological construal.

(1) One can deliberately deny the relevance of pain for one's psychological wellbeing ("I won't let pain stop me from leading a fulfilled life").

(2) Or one can give pain meaning for one's development. Pain is, after all, crucial for athletes ("no pain, no gain"), artists ("knowledge comes only to those who despise happiness"),¹⁶ and all sorts of spiritual seekers ("tribulation yields patience").¹⁷

Both of these approaches, denial and development, emphasize human willpower (ÜDS: 33). But if Heidegger is right that the will is not merely something that *can* be perverted, but is *itself* a perverted determination of our proper relation to beyng (ÜDS: 47), then neither approach can suffice to explain the nature of pain (GA 7: 97-98/EP 110). It is no accident that Heidegger traces the will to a time before its rigorous thematization in Christianity. The will, he maintains, is already at work in the very inauguration of metaphysics in ancient Greece.¹⁸

(3) Another way to reinforce the barrier between body and soul, or in this case between body and self, is to diminish pain's significance by placing it within the broader context of beings as a whole (ÜDS: 34), that is, by reducing its status to that which it putatively shares with the totality of what is. For example, one might say that pain, like everything else, is nothing more than material in motion. This approach could provide consolation, or it could provoke a desire to dominate pain as one dominates nature à la Claude Bernard or Francis Bacon. Either way, if one abstracts oneself from such a totality, one by definition remains trapped within an unquestioned metaphysical inheritance. But even if one does not treat oneself as any different from the totality – however it may be interpreted – one still fails to ask after the grounds for the conceptualization of that totality. One treats only of beings as such, not of the truth of being. Starting around the mid-1930s, Heidegger uses the same pejorative term “metaphysics” to characterize this limited approach (GA 6).

(4) Another possibility is to interpret pain more narrowly, as pertaining solely to the lived experience (*Erleben*) of living entities (*Lebewesen*), and in particular (even if not exclusively) the human being. This biological or organismic interpretation of pain has the same metaphysical drawbacks as the earlier approaches: it first presupposes a distinction between physical disturbance (“actual or potential tissue damage”) and psychical apprehension (“an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with” it);¹⁹ it then construes pain as a signal to reestablish security by fight or flight. Additionally, the very focus on life and lived experience is itself already metaphysical for Heidegger. He suggests as much in *Über den Schmerz* when he speaks critically of the predominance of “metaphysical ‘lived experience,’” which blocks access to the sort of experience that would transform our relation to truth and to being as such (ÜDS: 39–40). Heidegger typically reserves the term *Erfahrung* for this latter sort of experience.

In sum, all of these approaches presuppose a problematic rationalist (and therefore humanist) methodology. In a passage in which he curiously uses the term *erfahren* for metaphysical experience, Heidegger writes:

To experience and think pain metaphysically means to represent it “rationally,” as a fact that is explainable and in need of explanation; it means to think pain in human terms, whereby the human being remains the inexhaustible *animal rationale* and that at which the “sense” [*Sinn*] of pain is aimed. (ÜDS: 51; see also 43)

The task, as mentioned above, will be, not to think of pain in human terms, but to think of the human being, and indeed of beyng as such, in terms of pain. To this end, it will be necessary to ask, not *what* pain is, but *how* it holds sway beneath or before definable objects.

Before we turn to painful thought or thinking painfully, there is one final way of interpreting pain I should mention, which Heidegger does not as such address in *Über den Schmerz*, but which is important for an appreciation of his understanding of this topic. I am referring to Hegel’s position on pain, which Heidegger names explicitly on several occasions elsewhere throughout his corpus. (This alone is significant, as Heidegger rarely mentions other philosophers when discussing pain. In *Über den Schmerz*, for example, the only references are to Aquinas and Aristotle on the primacy of the sense of touch [ÜDS: 41], and to Schopenhauer on the notion that pain is positive and pleasure negative, that is to say, devoid of pain [ÜDS: 33, 54]).²⁰

(5) Pain, for Hegel, is characteristic of finitude, otherness, and alienation. Rather than avoiding these, however, or taking refuge in a self-subsisting and ever-selfsame god, we must, if we are to attain the satisfaction of absolute knowledge, take “the path of despair” and undertake the “labor of the negative.”²¹ That is, we must work through the particular shapes that consciousness assumes and suffers during its scientific formation so as to reach a universal self-consciousness that does not abandon these earlier shapes, but elevates and preserves them as essential moments of its genesis. Or, in religious terms, we must endure “the dark night of the soul” before the dawn of reunification, the Cross before the Resurrection, Good Friday before Easter.²² Pain is thus put into its proper, ultimately pleasurable perspective: “The pain

that the finite senses in its sublation,” Hegel writes, “is not painful, since it is thereby raised up to a moment in the process of the divine.”²⁵

Heidegger attacks Hegel’s position on pain from three sides. First, Hegel treats pain as a matter for consciousness, not for being itself (GA 68: 103/79). It is accordingly subjective. Second, the pain of negativity is “swallowed up” in the positivity of absolute knowledge (GA 68: 15/12). It is accordingly temporary, instrumental. Third, seen from the perspective of the end, pain is thereby deprived of its genuinely disruptive potential. Conceptually, even if not experientially, “everything,” in Heidegger’s gloss, “is already *reconciled*” (GA 86: 269). While Heidegger’s own interpretation of pain can, without much difficulty, escape the first two charges he levels against Hegel, we will have to ask whether the same can be said of the third, that is, whether Heidegger does not end up viewing pain under the aspects of eternity and reconciliation. Before doing so, let us turn to his affirmative treatment of pain in *Über den Schmerz* and in his reading of the poetry of Georg Trakl.

§5. THE GENTLE GATHERING OF PAIN

In *Über den Schmerz*, Heidegger draws heavily on etymology to describe the non-metaphysical structure of pain. He primarily uses two sets of terms. The first set draws on the root word *reißen* (“to rend”) and should be familiar to readers of Heidegger’s essays on Trakl (ÜDS: 34; GA 12: 24/PLT 201–2; GA 12: 57/180). The second set plays on the connection between the verb *zeigen* (“to show”) and the noun *Zeichen* (usually rendered as “sign”) (ÜDS: 35).

I. *REISSEN*

Initially, we see that pain rips away (*entreibt*) our sense of wellbeing. Far from opening our eyes to the sense of being itself, though, pain tends to eclipse itself and blind us to its truth. It sweeps us along (*fortreibt*, literally “tears [us] forth”) in the belief that pain is merely a matter for sensation and subsequent sense-making. It seduces us into metaphysics. Pain, like the *phusis* of Heraclitus, hides what is most

proper to it behind what it shows itself *as*. A complete account of pain cannot neglect this non-phenomenal domain. Heidegger again uses the language of *reißen*. Pain, properly speaking, is a certain type of *Riß*, which means “tear” or “rift,” even as its etymology also points toward the seemingly opposite sense of “inscription.” (Compare the English “write” and German’s own *Aufriß* or “outline.”) Since, as we will see, Heidegger develops the philosophical implications of this contronym, *Riß* would, in Hegel’s language, be a speculative word on the order of *aufheben*; it marks the unification of opposition, the identity of difference.²⁴ We could render the auto-antonymy of *reißen* in English with the verb “to cleave,” meaning both “to sever” and “to stick fast,” or perhaps with the more playful “rend(er)ing,” which would have the simultaneous sense of tearing apart and giving back. In *Über den Schmerz*, Heidegger describes (albeit elliptically and in the idiosyncratic terminology of his later thought) the various aspects of cleaving pain as follows:

in this sweeping along [*Fortriß*] a cleaving [*Riß*] eventuates [*sich...ereignet*] that shrouds itself in the semblance of the incursion and the adverse. / The cleaving holds itself within the ambiguity between, on the one hand, the ripping away and sweeping along [*entreibenden Fortrisses*] and, on the other hand, the cleaving that conceals itself as the difference. / The cleaving as the outline [*Aufriß*]. That is, the clearing and joining bringing of the difference into its own [*lichtende fügende Ereignung des Unterschieds*]. (ÜDS: 34)

Since the other references to the *Riß* of pain in *Über den Schmerz* provide little clarification of its connection to the terms of the final sentence of this quote (see ÜDS: 36, 40, 50), it should prove helpful to look at Heidegger’s development of the *Riß* of pain in his reading of Trakl in the early 1950s.

II. HEIDEGGER ON TRAKL

Heidegger's interpretation of Trakl's "Ein Winterabend" ("A Winter Evening") in the 1950 lecture "Sprache" ("Language") is especially relevant. Trakl's poem reads:

When the snow falls on the window,
And the evening bell tolls long,
There's a table prepped for many
And the house arranged just so.

Several in their pilgrimage
Come on dark paths to the gate.
Golden blooms the tree of grace
Rising from the earth's cool sap.

Wanderer steps in, so still;
Pain has petrified the threshold.
There in purest brightness gleam
On the table bread and wine.

*

Wenn der Schnee ans Fenster fällt,
Lang die Abendglocke läutet,
Vielen ist der Tisch bereitet
Und das Haus ist wohlbestellt.

Mancher auf der Wanderschaft
Kommt ans Tor auf dunklen Pfaden.
Golden blüht der Baum der Gnaden
Aus der Erde kühlem Saft.

Wanderer tritt still herein;
 Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle.
 Da erglänzt in reiner Helle
 Auf dem Tische Brot und Wein.

Heidegger glosses the first stanza as beckoning things to bear forth the world of earth and sky, divinities and mortals (what he calls “the fourfold”), and the second as beckoning world to grant things their essential sway and shine. In the third stanza, we hear how these modes of beckoning relate. Things and world do not stand opposed to one another. There is, to be sure, some difference, but it is not such that they would lack intrinsic connection. Heidegger says they are *geschieden* but not *getrennt*; there is, we could say, a scission without a sundering. He uses this language (and, eventually, that of *reißen*), to develop a distinctive theory of difference. He says that things and world are intimately connected by means of a unique middle, which he clarifies with the use of the Latin preposition *inter* and what he admits is the corresponding German *unter*. (This is already striking, given his typical deployment of pejorative Latinate terms in contrast to positive Germanic ones, especially in his later thought.) Such intimate inter-mediacy is not inter-dissolution or inter-flation, but is only possible as inter-section or inter-scission; it is only possible as a literal *Unterschied*, the most common word for difference in German. As Heidegger puts it, using Germanic words that are hardly translatable without recourse to Latin:

The intimacy of world and thing is not a melting together. Intimacy prevails only where what is intimate, world and thing, purely sects/cises itself [*sich scheidet*] and remains sected/cised. In the middle of the two, in the between of world and thing, in their *inter*, in this *Unter-*, prevails the section/scission [*Schied*]. (GA 12: 22/PLT 200; cf. GA 80.2: 995)

Heidegger proceeds to expand on this notion of *Unter-Schied* by connecting it with the terminology of “bearing” in Greek and German (*diaphora*: “difference” or, literally, “carrying through”; *Austrag*: “carrying out” or “carrying to full term”). He then endeavors to read it in conjunction with the second verse of the final stanza, “Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle.” Although in the past tense, he says we should hear the verb *versteinerte* as still enduring in the present, like the still-present speaking of what has been poetically spoken (*Gesprochenes*). Pain has not just *hardened* the threshold (another word for the just-developed “middle”); pain is still present and active, *hardening* the threshold, making it the reliable and enduring center of support for the inter-section of thing and world. Indeed, pain just is (transitively) this inter-section. To explicate this, Heidegger draws, finally, on the language of *reißen*:

Pain cleaves [*reißt*]. It is the cleaving [*Riß*]. Only, it does not cleave asunder [*zerreißt*] into splinters that drive apart. To be sure, pain does cleave apart, it cises [*scheidet*], but it does so in such a way that it likewise draws everything to itself, gathers everything into itself. [...] Pain is the jointure of the cleaving. It is the threshold. It bears out the between, the middle of the two that have been incised into it [*in sie Geschiedenen*]. Pain joins the cleaving of the inter-scission [*Unter-Schiedes*]. Pain is the inter-scission itself. (GA 12: 24/PLT 201-2)

Pain, in other words, holds things and world apart even as it holds them together. Their separation is the condition for their articulation, by which I mean both jointure and (self-) expression. *Analogically*, we could say that pain at once isolates individuals and calls them to community: I feel that no one can relate to my pain and yet I cry out for comfort and connection; upon parting from the mother, the newborn, as Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it, cries out in a first attempt at conversation.²⁵ But we must be careful not to let the analogue become the thing itself; indeed, we might need to forget it altogether if the task truly is to think of being and the human being in terms of pain and not of pain

in terms of the human. Moreover, it is not as though things and world were once wholly unified and only subsequently disconnected or once wholly disconnected and only subsequently unified. Their articulation is *also* the condition for their separation. Primordial pain just is this co-constitutive interplay, or in the terms of the passage from *Über den Schmerz* cited above: pain clears (that is, opens up, *lichtet*) the difference even as it joins (*fügt*) things and world.

For things and world, we could substitute beings and being (as Heidegger suggests in his notes), but we would need to take these in a non-metaphysical sense (hence the latter as “beyng”); even so, Heidegger is not always terminologically consistent: sometimes he uses *Seyn* or “beyng” to refer to one side of the difference (ÜDS: 36); sometimes he reserves it for pain in its primordial enabling and sustaining (*Er-eignung*) of the difference (ÜDS: 48). The point, in any case, is that Heidegger’s way of thinking of pain is a way of thinking that goes deeper than the entire tradition of western metaphysics. Indeed, in *Über den Schmerz*, we learn, remarkably, that pain is the *sine qua non* of Heidegger’s longstanding project to think otherwise: “The human being and pain otherwise, and *only therein* is the Other Thinking determined [*das Andere Denken*]” (ÜDS: 51; emphasis added).

If it is true that, with our discussion of difference, we have already begun to think painfully and thus otherwise, our relation to truth itself must have also been transformed (see ÜDS: 39); or rather we must have already begun to think in accordance with our “essential, albeit long concealed relation to the truth of beyng” (ÜDS: 40). That is to say, we must have already let ourselves be claimed by the truth of the pain of beyng and let it speak. The second set of terms Heidegger develops in *Über den Schmerz* will help us further articulate this connection to truth.

III. ZEICHEN, ZEIGEN, ZEICHNEN

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger provides a formal definition of phenomenology in accordance with its radical etymological sense. Phenomenology engages in “letting that which shows itself [*sich*

zeigt], just as it shows itself from itself or of its own accord, be seen from itself or of its own accord” (GA 2: 46/SZ 34). De-formalized, or in terms of content, phenomenology would pertain to that which initially and for the most part does *not* show itself, yet is nevertheless foundational for that which does; phenomenology would deal with the hidden, if not altogether forgotten, being of beings.

Although, for various reasons outlined above (see especially §3), this phenomenological-ontological approach will not work for pain itself (if it ever could for being), Heidegger nevertheless retains some of its language, even as he reinterprets this language to suit his later ends. I mean the language of letting and the language of showing. I will return to that of letting later. For now, let us hear how Heidegger once again draws on etymological connections to reconfigure the truth of a word, and indeed to reconfigure truth itself. I will first cite a couple passages and then provide an interpretation. These passages, like so many in Heidegger’s treatment of pain, defy ready translation. The first passage reads:

Pain *is* signing [*Zeichen*]. What does this mean, that it is a sign [*ein Zeichen*]? The essence of signing determines itself by self-showing [*Sichzeigen*], and its essential constitution emerges from the necessity that includes self-showing. This, however, is the appropriative event. Pain is not merely “signing” in the vague and indefinite sense that something points to something only in some respect. Pain is the signing of that which essentially is in the sign. Pain is a sign of the appropriative event. By eventuating [*indem er sich ereignet*], pain is as signing, that is, as the self-showing appropriative event [*das sich zeigende Ereignis*]. (ÜDS: 35)

Later in the manuscript, Heidegger writes:

pain is not merely something that is [*etwas Seiendes*], (a datum), but rather being [*Seyn*] itself – this in its self-showing – not, for instance, a sign that would point

[*zeigte*] to being [*Sein*] (thus again a being [*Seiendes*] in relation to being [*Sein*]), but rather beyng itself in its truth (clearing) as showing [*Zeigung*]. It is in this manner that pain essentially holds sway [*west*]. (ÜDS: 48)

First of all, it is important to recognize that the German *Zeichen* (“sign”) is related to *sich zeigen* (“to show oneself”). Both date back to the Proto-Indo-European *deyk-* (“to point out”). Given the discussion of the *Riß* of pain as both pulling apart and joining together in an outline or sketch (*Aufriß*), Heidegger might also be thinking of the derivative German word *zeichnen* (“to draw,” “to sketch”). In any event, we are not dealing here with a sign pointing elsewhere, whether it be to other beings (such as my hand and the boiling water I just touched) or to being as the whole or essence of all that is (such as one might imagine who takes pain to be the origin of philosophizing) (see ÜDS: 49). This referential reading of pain’s *Zeichen* is either non-ontological (remaining solely on the plane of beings, what Heidegger calls “ontic” in *Being and Time*) or superficially ontological (failing to heed the source of the difference between being and beings, a failure that the later Heidegger often, as in the second quote above, designates by his use of the term *Sein* or “being” without a “y”).

But if pain does not point elsewhere, is pain therefore meaningless? Could we not then say, with Cicero, that it is nothing to us (*nihil est plane dolor*),²⁶ or at least to that part of us which is itself meaningful and for which things can have a meaning, namely our reason? Could we not perhaps go further by doubting meaning altogether and taking some perverse shred of solace in the sheer nihilism of body and soul? Could we not celebrate what Hölderlin laments at the start of “Mnemosyne” (also titled “Das Zeichen” in one of its versions)?

We are a sign, without meaning
 We are without pain and have almost
 Lost language in the foreign.

*

Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos
Schmerzlos sind wir und haben fast
Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren.²⁷

Before abandoning all hope, we should see that such a meaningless, painless sign is but a sign of modern alienation, as Heidegger frequently notes in his interpretation of this poem.²⁸ Just because pain is not a sign in its customary sense does not mean it has no significance. What we need is a different sort of sign, a sign in the fullest sense of the word. Again, Hölderlin, this time from “Der Ister”:

A sign is needed,
Nothing else, pure and simple [...].

*

Ein Zeichen braucht es,
Nichts anderes, schlecht und recht [...].²⁹

Pain, as such a sign, would be the very self-showing of the eventuating of being. Such self-showing, however, would not be without its own self-restraint and self-concealment. As Heidegger writes in a note on Hölderlin’s river-poem: “Supreme showing [*Zeigen*] in restraint [*Verhaltenheit*]” (GA 73: 739). Or, in the language of *Über den Schmerz*:

Especially by unveiling and concealing itself in such a way that the apparent itself veils the inapparent, pain is in itself already different from what it appears as in the semblance. Pain *is* signing. (ÜDS: 35)

In short, pain would be truth as primordial *a-lētheia*, a meaningful configuration of un-concealment in which *lēthe* never wholly gives way.³⁰ It would, moreover, be truth in its Germanic sense of sheltering:

Pain is the sign of the clearing harbor in which the departive [*abschiedliche*] inception is retained [*gewahrt*] and the truthful keeping [*Wahr-heit*] essentially holds sway. In the experience of pain as the cleaving, the transformation of the essence of truth [*Wahrheit*] eventuates. (ÜDS: 40)

Heidegger is here alluding to themes he develops in the 1941-1942 manuscript *Das Ereignis* (GA 71), where he speaks, not just of pain as the essence of the ontological difference (GA 71: 129/110), but of the pain of parting (*Abschied*, literally “cutting away”) from the hegemony of beings (GA 71: 137/117) and, most importantly, of the pain of indwelling another (non-metaphysical) inception (GA 71: 28/20, 184/156; see also ÜDS: 46-50).⁵¹ Perhaps, given how far we have come from our initial appreciation of the topic, it will not be surprising to hear that, on Heidegger’s account, this is also a pain that bears its own *delight* (GA 73.1: 724; GA 97: 447).

IV. ALGONTODICY

On Heidegger’s reading, pain does not just furnish us with a new way – perhaps, astoundingly, the *only* way – to experience truth itself and understand beyng itself. Pain also furnishes our dwelling (*Wohnen*) with delight (*Wonne*) and serenity (see GA 98: 407 for the wordplay). Or better: pain, properly experienced, *is* this dwelling. Heidegger has moved from the truth of pain as the self-showing sheltering of thing and world to pain as our proper abode.

In other passages, Heidegger does, admittedly, seem to ascribe an essentially twofold, even duplicitous, tendency to pain, especially when he is discussing the flame of spirit in Trakl’s work. Like the Old High German **gheis*, pain can break out into insurrection or gather into gentle releasement (*Gelassenheit*).⁵² It can, as Heidegger glosses Trakl, “tear the wandering soul forth [*reißt . . . fort*] and inscribe it [*zeichnet . . . ein*] into the jointure of storming and hunting, which, storming heaven, would like to hunt down God,” but it can also “reach mildness” and “bestow what is essential” (GA 12: 57-58, 60/OWL 180-81, 183). In terms of *Über*

den Schmerz, however, the insurrectionary trait would seem to be merely metaphysical, and in any case, even on the twofold reading, disruptive pain can be essentially contained.³⁵

Heidegger does not redeem pain by making it serviceable for life. He does not provide us with coping mechanisms. But that is precisely the point. We must learn to heed the pain of *beyng*, beyond or before all programs and praxis. Only in doing so will we discover a gentleness beyond or before all physical and psychological consolation:

Thinking which has been transformed, as thinking which is aligned with pain [*an den Schmerz*] as the claim or ad-dress [*den An-spruch*] (no longer thinking about pain as a fact and occurrence), is of *no use* in the effort to make progress and improvements in combating pain, *not even in the elimination of sorrow* [Leides]. What is it for, then? But in it [namely, this thinking that is aligned with pain] a softening [*Be-sänftigung*] eventuates, in the sense of bringing the gentle into its own [*Ereignung des Sanften*]. Not only *useless* – but [the fact] that use and the useful are not the most valuable and the most necessary. The most necessary is the “*unnecessary*.” (ÜDS: 53)

Yet why, one might ask, has the truth of pain not forced its way into our purview after all these millennia of reckoning and tampering with it? *Because*, Heidegger answers, *pain itself has nothing to do with compulsion. Because everything comes down to letting be and letting be said, not to apprehension and appellation.* “Because,” he exclaims,

it [the essence of pain] is *beyng* itself! Because this is inceptively grace [*Huld*] and the gentle – the never-urging – but rather always only serene, consensual in beings, what speaks assuringly [*Zu-sprechende*], hence the gathering of releasement [*Ge-lassenheit*]: indwelling is not “work”³⁴ and action, but rather the wholly other

– namely, the *determinative attunedness* [Be-stimmt-heit] of the human being into his inceptive essence [*in sein anfängliches Wesen*]. (ÜDS: 50)

Even if Heidegger’s treatment of pain provides little comfort for our everyday cares, and even if it does little to explain why pain was misconstrued and thereby exacerbated to begin with, Heidegger has, in his way, justified pain’s ultimate purport. Pain is the meaning of beyng.

Elsewhere, Heidegger even tries to save the word “pain” – or to be more accurate, he tries to save only *one* word for pain in *one* particular language: not the English, not the German, but the Greek *algos*.

§6. ALGOS: AN ETYMOLOGICAL EXCURSUS

In an anonymously compiled Byzantine Greek-Greek lexicon known under the Latin title *Etymologicum Magnum* (where, incidentally, a possible source for Heidegger’s oft-contested understanding of “*alētheia*,” “truth,” as “*a-lēthē*,” “un-concealment,” can be found),⁵⁵ one reads:

Pain, distress: along the lines of “care about,” “worry about”; [along the lines of] what we value highly and worry about. For, things involving much suffering merit worrying about. Or, [pain is] the kind of thing one does not speak of or name.

*

Ἄλγος, ἡ λύπη · παρὰ τὸ ἀλέγω τὸ φροντίζω · ὃ περὶ πολλοῦ ποιούμεθα καὶ φροντίζομεν. τὰ γὰρ πολυπαθῆ, φροντίδος ἄξια. ἢ ἃ μὴ λέγει τις καὶ ὀνομάζει.⁵⁶

Here pain is understood in two or possibly three senses. First, to worry is to suffer. The things I care about (*alegō*) are precisely the things that bring me pain (*algos*). Second, and somewhat speculatively, we might read *para*, not as “along the lines of,” but as “contrary to.” (*Speculatively*, because *para* doesn’t have this sense when used in the same position in other entries in the lexicon.) Whether it be physiological

or psychological, from within the body or without, pain would then be an incursion into my everyday concerns and values. Pain would be what throws my cares into disarray. Indeed, on this reading, the very word for pain in Greek would embody and inscribe its jumbling activity: *algos* – both the word and the thing – is a distortion of *alegō* – both the word and the thing. Finally, pain belongs in the realm of the inarticulable or of the precariously articulable. It is among those things that ($\tilde{\alpha}$, *ha*) one just does *not* speak about (*legei*). Although the anonymous lexicographer uses the negative particle *mē* here (thereby suggesting typification of a class or disquiet), what seems to be implied is an alpha privative. *Algos* would then be the *unsaid* (*a-legomenon*) or at least what ought to remain unsaid, lest uttering it should summon it. Perhaps, taking the power of the privative further, we could even say that pain rends all language asunder. Just as certain anarchists are not merely without government, but actively seek to destroy it, so too would pain destroy all attempts at articulation.

In contrast, Heidegger does not correlate pain with quotidian cares and ontic affairs. Pain has a deeper sense, and it is to pain *itself* that I should turn my attention; it is *precisely* of pain that I should speak (or “let be spoken”). Heidegger’s etymology also differs from the lexicon’s. In a long letter to Ernst Jünger published during Heidegger’s lifetime in two separate essays under the titles “Über ‘Die Linie’” and “Zur Seinsfrage,” Heidegger writes:

If one were to venture to think through the relations between “work” as the basic feature of beings and “pain,” going back through and beyond Hegel’s *Logic*, then the Greek word for pain, namely *algos*, would first come to speak for us. *Algos* is presumably related to *alegō*, which, as an intensifier of *legō*, means intimate gathering [*innige Versammeln*]. Pain would then be what gathers into utmost intimacy [*das ins Innigste Versammelnde*]. (GA 9: 404/305–6; cf. GA 7: 214/EGT 60)

Although the connection between *algos* and *alegō* is tenuous, it seems Heidegger is correct in deriving *alegō* from *a* + *legō*.⁵⁷ However, we can easily see here that Heidegger, like Hegel, does not interpret pain privatively, as what cannot be said or as what undoes all saying. Instead, he takes the alpha to be an *alpha intensivum*, strengthening the *legō*, which for its part does not, on Heidegger's reading, have its most common meaning of "I say," but rather has the radical sense of "I gather." Heidegger often associates being or beyng (*on*) with *legein* qua gathering: ontology is the gathering of beyng (in both senses of the genitive). Pain, then, as intense, intimate gathering, is like beyng, only more so. Pain is paradigmatic beyng, or beyng at its best. Might *algos*, as intensified *legein*, therefore be even more important than the other Greek words by which Heidegger tries to think beyng?

§7. IN THE NAME OF SCHMERZ

In any case, the history of the German term is curiously absent from Heidegger's accounts of pain. Why, we should ask, doesn't he trace the origins of *Schmerz*, especially given the latter's possible connection with burning (*verbrennen*, *cremare*),⁵⁸ which he easily could have harnessed for his interpretation of the flame of spirit in Trakl's work? This is all the more surprising, since Heidegger subjects nearly every key term in his reading of Trakl to etymological scrutiny. As I have argued elsewhere, one of the major exceptions is the term *Abgeschiedenheit* ("detachment," "departedness"), whose history Heidegger ignores altogether, despite claiming that Trakl's entire body of poetic work is situated around it.⁵⁹ The second major exception, I would now like to argue, is *Schmerz*. If Heidegger avoids the etymology of *Abgeschiedenheit* because of its universalist implications, he avoids the etymology of *Schmerz* because of its singular and scattering effects. The history of the word *Schmerz* hardly supports the sense of gathering Heidegger wants to locate in it. Its roots refer to hurting, chafing, and stinging, and its cognates are comparably resistant: the Greek *smerdnos/smerdaleos* suggests something dreadful, the Sanskrit *marditum* suggests crushing destruction, the Latin *mordere* suggests biting, and the English "smart" suggests sharp pain.

Heidegger's thought is undoubtedly (and notoriously) guided by what he once called the "*force of the most elementary words*" (GA 2: 291/SZ 220). The tricky thing, of course, is to discern which words qualify. While many may not, Heidegger never suggests that *Schmerz* would be included among the excluded. He does, at one point in *Über den Schmerz*, offer a genealogy of pain:

Yet in this process [of experiencing pain properly] pain must set aside the semblance that has everywhere and for a long time dominated its appearance, according to which it is such as to assail the human being, to do something to him (affection). Something that presses in on [him] is inflicted. What is inflicted is suffered as what is adverse. Pain comes forth "in" the human being as a bodily and psychic manifestation. The metaphysical name for this is the title "sensation" and "lived experience" and "feeling" – *aisthēton* and *aisthēsis* would correspond to this. But pain is *lupē*, and before this and actually [it is] *algos*. (ÜDS: 36)

But *Schmerz*, the *word*, is not in play here. Heidegger does not treat it as he does all those bastardized Latin translations of the Greek *Urwörter*. It is as though, uncharacteristically, he wanted to separate the thing from the word, being from language. Yet isn't *Schmerz* a primal German word, if ever there was one? One might reply that all Heidegger is doing is simply prioritizing Greek over German, *algos* over *Schmerz*. But on what basis? And how to account for his opposite maneuver in his reading of Trakl, where *Geist* means, not *pneuma* – let alone *spiritus* – but Old High German **gheis*, "to be outside of oneself"? Even granting the primacy of *algos* over *Schmerz*, how to discern (*legein*) its true sense (*etymon*) among the plethora of possibilities? Why, finally, should it outstrip the pain of *lupē*, which, for its part, might call to mind the loosening, dissolution, and destruction of Greek *luein*, or the shattering and rending asunder of Sanskrit *loptum*,⁴⁰ thus precisely *not* the gathering Heidegger finds in *algos*?⁴¹

In any event, leaving etymology aside – if this is even possible – what of the thing called pain? Heidegger deserves credit for thinking seriously about pain, and it is quite remarkable that in *Über den Schmerz* Heidegger places pain at least on the same fundamental level as his notions of the clearing, the appropriative event, and truth as sheltering unconcealment. In the future, every scholar of Heidegger’s thought will accordingly need to address his treatment of pain. But they will also need to question it. For Heidegger’s treatment, at least in the material available to scholars at present, fails to heed and account for the profound significance of irreparable ontic pain – the pain, for example, that rends the body asunder, not the pain that mends all wounds; the pain of personal loss and alienation, not the pain that gathers into community. Heidegger, for his part, dismisses this searing pain of particularity as derivative, as the product of a failure to heed the gentle call of beyng.

One might contend that, on a deeper level, Heidegger has already accounted for it: there is, after all, a moment of rending, of cleaving *apart*, in his ontological conception of pain. And yet, as we have seen, such separation is always brought back *together* by a higher mending. In gathering, pain ultimately sublates its own scattering. The wounds of beyng – to modify Hegel – always heal, even if scars should remain. When it comes to pain, Heidegger thus does not escape the final charge he levels against his German predecessor: “everything *is* already *reconciled*” (GA 86: 269). While this might be a saving grace for some, it hardly saves the phenomenon of pain. For the sake of all those who have suffered, for the sake of the truth, and, dare I say, for the sake of beyng itself, we owe more fidelity to this phenomenon than Heidegger allows. Heidegger’s algontology is doubtless an analgesic. Whether it is a tranquilizing act of bad faith is another matter.

NOTES

- 1 In what follows, “ÜDS” stands for Heidegger, *Über den Schmerz, Jahresgabe der Martin-Heidegger-Gesellschaft*, 2017–2018. All translations throughout this essay are my own, although, in accordance with the journal’s style guidelines, I have provided references to English translations of Heidegger’s work when extant.
- 2 See Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 8, 142.
- 3 GA 12: 24–25, 27/PLT 201–2, 204; GA 12: 41, 57–62, 68/166, 180–84, 189–90.
- 4 Jacques Derrida, for instance, only mentions the term in *Geschlecht III: Sexe, race, nation, humanité*, ed. Geoffrey Bennington, Katie Chenoweth, and Rodrigo Therezo (Paris: Seuil, 2018), 93, and he treats it, all too briefly, in *De l’esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 173–75. David Farrell Krell, who on many occasions had encouraged Derrida to devote more time and attention to the topic, only recently addressed it in detail in a few pages (283–89) of “Derrida, Heidegger, and the Magnetism of the Trakl House,” *Philosophy Today* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 281–304, pages to which this chapter is indebted. See also David Farrell Krell, *Phantoms of the Other: Four Generations of Derrida’s “Geschlecht”* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), 93, 141–42, 152, 160–61. For explications of Heidegger’s account of pain, see Orville Clark, “Heidegger and the Mystery of Pain,” *Man and World* 10, no. 3 (1977): 334–50; Orville Clark, “Pain and Being: An Essay in Heideggerian Ontology,” *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1973): 179–90; and Parvis Emad, “Heidegger on Pain: Focusing on a Recurring Theme of His Thought,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 36 (1982): 345–60. Andrew J. Mitchell, “Entering the World of Pain: Heidegger,” *Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought* 150 (2010): 83–96, advances Heidegger’s comments in the direction of mortal exposedness and constitutive relationality, and Cathrin Nielsen, “Der Schmerz: Zu Heideggers Trakl-Deutung,” in *Das Spätwerk Heideggers: Ereignis*

– Sage – *Geviert*, ed. Damir Barbarić (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2007), 143–62, advances them in the direction of a non-ecstatic, infra-phenomenological vitality. Caputo, “Thinking, Poetry, and Pain,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 288 (1989): 155–81, lambastes Heidegger’s insensitivity to the flesh and to the Judeo-Christian elements of Trakl’s poetry. While my objections overlap in part with those of Caputo and of Krell, I place greater emphasis on etymology and, because of *Über den Schmerz*, which was not available to any of the scholars mentioned in this note, pain at the level of beyng itself. Walter Muschg, *Die Zerstörung der deutschen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1956), 223, called two of Heidegger’s remarks on pain (GA 12: 59–60/OWL 181–83) “abracadabra” and an “assassination attempt on the German language.” For a discussion primarily of Heidegger’s earlier remarks on pain in his 1939 seminar on Herder’s *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, see Ilit Ferber, *Language Pangs: On Pain and the Origin of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 4. I have, finally, drawn much inspiration from Werner Hamacher, “Other Pains,” trans. Ian Alexander Moore, *Philosophy Today* 61, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 963–89.

- 5 Robert Bernasconi, “Being Is Evil: Boehme’s Strife and Schelling’s Rage in Heidegger’s ‘Letter on ‘Humanism,’”” *Gatherings* 7 (2017): 164–81 (164).
- 6 Because of their limited availability and an absence of translations, the society’s *Jahresgaben* have, as one might expect, received little to no attention in the secondary literature. A couple of exceptions: William McNeill devotes the final chapter of *The Fate of Phenomenology: Heidegger’s Legacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020) to the *Auszüge zur Phänomenologie*, and Markus Gabriel discusses the importance of *Das Argument gegen den Brauch* in his *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 38–39, 156n26, 199–200. An updated German edition and translation of *Das Argument gegen den Brauch*, with an introduction by Tobias Keiling

and Ian Alexander Moore and commentaries by Markus Gabriel and Mark Wrathall, have recently been published in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 3 (2022): i–xvi and 508–559. A special topic on *Das Argument gegen den Brauch* is forthcoming in *Gatherings*.

- 7 Klaus Held, *Marbach-Bericht über eine neue Sichtung des Heidegger-Nachlasses* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2019), 24.
- 8 Heidegger titled them, respectively, “Der Schmerz” and “Über den Schmerz.” They are available in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach under invoice numbers 75.7300,2 and 75.7300,3. Information about the manuscripts not provided by the editors can be found in the online catalogue of the archive: <https://www.dla-marbach.de/katalog/handschriften/> (accessed 2 June 2022).
- 9 The only other bundle in the slipcase that shows up in the online catalogue (under invoice number 75.7300,1) bears the same title as 75.7300,2, namely “Der Schmerz”; unfortunately, its contents are not specified. For other archival material on pain, see invoice numbers 75.7327,3c; 75.7372,3; 75.7366,3; and 75.7305,9.
- 10 Ernst Jünger, *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934), 12–13.
- 11 Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 10: *Essays II* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2015), 89 et passim.
- 12 His marginalia are reproduced in GA 90: 436–59. For his references, see, in addition to the above-mentioned, GA 9: 391, 403–4/296, 305; GA 71: 116/99; GA 73: 800; GA 87: 284; GA 90: 125, 201, 242, 244–45, 257, 335, 346, 387, 391; and his letter to Kurt Bauch, dated 18 February 1945, in Martin Heidegger and Kurt Bauch, *Briefwechsel 1932–1975*, ed. Almuth Heidegger (Freiburg: Alber, 2010), 96–97.
- 13 In the 1945 letter to Bauch that I mentioned in the previous note, Heidegger claims that he had just read Jünger’s “Über den Schmerz” for the first time, though this can hardly be taken literally given Heidegger’s numerous, substantive references to Jünger’s text prior to 1945.

- 14 For instance, Vincent Blok's book *Ernst Jünger's Philosophy of Technology: Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene* (New York: Routledge, 2017), refers only once to Jünger's "Über den Schmerz" (37n29). For a valuable study that does consider Jünger's text and Heidegger in some detail, however, see Giovanni Jan Giubilato, "Dolor e historia del Ser: El debate entre Heidegger y Jünger sobre el dolor en la época de la técnica," *Naturaleza humana* 18, no. 1 (2016): 55–68.
- 15 Meister Eckhart, *Die rede der unterscheidung*, in *Die deutschen Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963): 300, lines 1–2 (cf. GA 73.1: 878); *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6, 231 (cf. GA 77: 239/156 and GA 80.2: 1177–1178).
- 16 Georg Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Walther Killy and Hans Szklener, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1974), 256.
- 17 "hē thlipsis hupomonēn katēgazetai" (Romans 5:3). See also Job 6:10, and 2 Corinthians 7:9 ("Now I rejoice, not that you all were pained [*elupēthēte*], but that you were pained to the point of repentance; for you were pained in a godly fashion [*kata theon*]"). A classical analogue can be found in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, verse 177: *pathei mathos*, "learning through suffering."
- 18 In *Über den Schmerz* Heidegger associates the will with Aristotelian terminology: "[...] How did the will enter into the self of the human being? The will appears initially in the shape of *actio*, that is, in the shape of the *energeia* of *noein*. Within this essential delimitation of the human being, which is also that which is carried out by Christianity, the only thing remaining is to renounce one's own will before the will of God.) But it is not just one's own will that must be sacrificed; rather the will-essence in general must come to appear as the computational transformation into the monstrous non-essence of being [*die Verrechnung in das Unwesen des Seins*]" (47; cf. 49). For further discussion of the connection between metaphysics and the will, see Bret W. Davis,

- Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), and especially pp. 161–64 for the role of Plato and Aristotle.
- 19 Definition proposed in Srinivasa N. Raja et al., “The Revised International Association for the Study of Pain Definition of Pain,” *PAIN* 161, no. 9 (September 2020): 1976–1982.
- 20 Heidegger jots down passages from Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* (3.15.6) and *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (22.5 and 26.3 ad 9); he refers to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 9.10; and he quotes from part 2, book 4, chapter 46 of Schopenhauer’s *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Incidentally, when asked for an evaluation of Hans Wenke in 1945, Heidegger mentioned the latter’s co-authored book on pain, which contains discussions of several works by authors relevant to Heidegger’s analysis (including the same question from Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*, the same work by Schopenhauer, and Jünger’s “Über den Schmerz”). See Ferdinand Sauerbruch and Hans Wenke, *Wesen und Bedeutung des Schmerzes* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1961) (first published in 1936). Heidegger called the book “diligent but paltry” (GA 16: 407).
- 21 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952), 61, 14–15.
- 22 G. W. F. Hegel, “Glauben und Wissen,” in *Werke*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 432–33. *Dark Night of the Soul* is a poem by John of the Cross.
- 23 G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion II*, in *Werke*, vol. 17 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 273–74.
- 24 G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik. Die Lehre vom Sein (1832)*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Meiner, 2008), 101–2.
- 25 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Schmerz: Einschätzungen aus medizinischer, philosophischer und therapeutischer Sicht*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 2010). For more on the community-founding and linguistic dimensions of pain, see Ferber, *Language Pangs*.
- 26 Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, ed. M. Pohlenz (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1965), 2.31.

- 27 Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 3 vols., ed. Michael Knaupp (Munich: Hanser, 2019), 1:436, verses 1–3; see also 3:257, and GA 8: 12/10.
- 28 See GA 7: 137; GA 39: 135/119–20; GA 53: 190/153; GA 73: 755–757; GA 75: 55–56; GA 79: 57/54.
- 29 Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 1:476, verses 50–51.
- 30 Heidegger, *Auszüge zur Phänomenologie*, 94.
- 31 For more on this manuscript and a brief discussion of the role of pain in it, see Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Poietic Writings: From "Contributions to Philosophy" to "The Event"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), chapters 8 and 9 (especially pp. 157–58).
- 32 Heidegger's marginalium in his personal copy of Georg Trakl, *Die Dichtungen: Gesamtausgabe, mit einem Anhang Zeugnisse und Erinnerungen*, ed. Kurt Horwitz (Zurich: Die Arche, 1946), following the poem "Grodek." Located in the unprocessed collection of the Martin-Heidegger-Archiv der Stadt Meßkirch. For a transcription and translation, as well as further discussion, see Ian Alexander Moore, "Heidegger's Trakl-Marginalia," *Research in Phenomenology* 51, no. 1 (2021): 99–122.
- 33 For more on this essential, indeed eschatological containment, see Krell, "Derrida, Heidegger, and the Magnetism of the Trakl House," and Ian Alexander Moore, "The Promise of Pain: (Di)spiriting the *Geist* of Heidegger's Trakl," *Política común* 14 (2020), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/pc/12322227.0014.002?view=text;rgn=main>.
- 34 *Contra Jünger's Der Arbeiter*.
- 35 Anonymous, *Etymologicon magnum seu magnum grammaticae penu*, ed. Friderici Sylburgii, editio nova correctior (Lipsiae apud Io. Aug. Gottl. Weigel, 1816), s.v. Ἀληθές. For a discussion of one of the most prominent attacks on Heidegger's etymology and the ultimate retraction of that attack, see Robert Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (Amherst,

- NY: Humanity Books, 1989), 17–27 (who nevertheless does not mention this lexicon).
- 36 Anonymous, *Etymologicon magnum*, s.v. ἄλγος.
- 37 Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histories des mots*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1968), s.v. ἄλγος and ἀλέγω.
- 38 Elmar Seebold, *Chronologisches Wörterbuch des deutschen Wortschatzes*, vol. 2: *Der Wortschatz des 9. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), s.v. smerzan.
- 39 Ian Alexander Moore, “For the Love of Detachment: Trakl, Heidegger, and Derrida’s *Geschlecht III*,” *International Yearbook for Hermeneutics* 18 (2019): 233–56.
- 40 For *luein*, see Anonymous, *Etymologicon magnum*, s.v. Λύπη; for *loptum*, see Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970), s.v. λύπη. Neither of these connections survives scientific scrutiny: Frisk calls the latter into question, and does not even mention the former as a possibility; likewise with Chantraine’s discussion of the same term in *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, vol. 3 (1974). Such would not, in other cases, stop Heidegger’s speculations, though.
- 41 In his early work on Aristotle, Heidegger always follows the Stagirite in viewing *lupē* in a pejorative light. Aristotle contends that pleasure and pain, *hēdonē* and *lupē*, threaten to make us lose sight of the true end of our actions (*Nic. Eth.*: 1140b11ff.). *To lupēron*, which Heidegger renders, not as “what is painful or distressing,” but as what “oppresses or depresses [*niederdrückt*],” cannot, for all that, be eliminated; it is, in Heidegger’s words, “a fundamental determination of the human being,” who is thus “constantly in danger of becoming concealed [*verdeckt*] to himself by himself” (GA 19: 52/36). Rather than bringing us to ourselves, pain propels flight from ourselves (GA 18: 247/166). It is thus a source of inauthenticity. *To lupēron* can, however, be resisted; indeed, in our circumspective comportment (*phronēsis*) we are “*in a constant battle against the tendency to concealment* [Verdeckungstendenz]

that lies in Dasein itself" (GA 19: 52/36-37). On this reading, pain is precisely the enemy of truth (*alētheia*), even as it allows for the possibility of unconcealment (*a-lētheia*). As one might expect, it is also centered on Dasein, not *Sein* itself. My thanks to Karl von der Luft for encouraging me to think about *lupē* and *luein*. Thanks also to Ilit Ferber and Scott Campbell for their helpful comments on the essay.