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Autoreferát (teze) dizertační práce

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PŘÍSTUPY K BOLESTI V KLASICKÉ ŘECKÉ FILOSOFII A LÉKAŘSTVÍ

Approaches to Pain in Classical Greek Philosophy and Medicine

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2023

The main goal of this dissertation is to explore and critically evaluate the problem of pain in classical Greek philosophy and medicine. Pain is a very peculiar phenomenon since, even though everyone has experience with it, it evades conceptualisation and rational reflection. My aim is nevertheless to provide an attempt for describing and exploring what can be gained for our understating of pain through reading and analysing three corpora of ancient texts, namely *Corpus Hippocraticum*, *Corpus Platonium*, and *Corpus Aristotelicum*. I follow an approach to the study of antiquity which emphasizes the importance of studying ancient medicine for a proper understating of ancient philosophy and *vice versa*. The dissertation as a whole, thus, aims primarily at shedding light on one particular problem, namely the problem of pain in classical philosophy and medicine, and, secondarily, on seeing what this analysis can contribute to our understating of the relations between classical Greek philosophy and medicine.

In the introduction (chapter 1), I present a contemporary discussion on the relations between ancient philosophy and medicine and show the relevance of the medical treatises preserved until today in the so-called Hippocratic corpus (*CH*). Then I explain the specifics of ancient medical treatises, namely that the Hippocratic corpus differs significantly from other corpora of ancient texts because even though they are related to the name Hippocrates, we do now know their authors and it is very doubtful whether they share any substantial unity. For that reason, in the course of the dissertation, I focus more on a particular sub-corpora, namely the dietetic treatises, gynaecological treatises and the seven books of the *Epidemics*. Then, I critically comment on the contemporary discussion of the problem of pain in classical antiquity. Even though words denoting pain (ἄλγος, ὀδυνή, λύπη, πόνοσ and their cognates) are prolific in classical Greek medical texts, there are not many passages where the authors would offer explanations or accounts of what pain is. This is mirrored in the modern approach to this problem since there are only a few studies on this topic in contemporary scholarship and their outcomes are not decisive. In the area of ancient philosophy, where the problem of pain plays a significant role, too, the situation in contemporary scholarship is to a certain extent similar: since pain is primarily an ethical topic in Plato and Aristotle, the modern discussion of it is usually part of a scholarly literature on ancient ethics. However, until recently, more focus was devoted to the problem of pleasure and its counterpart – pain – was discussed only marginally. With a few authors who take pain in antiquity as relevant and worthy of exploring the topic (Evans, Erginel, and particularly Cheng), I hope my dissertation will shed light on some areas of ancient philosophy and medicine that were not yet sufficiently discussed. In the last part of the introduction, I provide a contextualisation of my theme by sketching a history of pain from Homer to Aristotle's contemporaries. In discussing several main figures of ancient Greek

Literature (Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, presocratic philosophers, Herodotus, Thucydides and Attic orators). I show, *inter alia*, that already in archaic literature, pre-platonic philosophy and other genres not directly concerned with philosophical or medical topics, the pain was discussed and reflected on. I show that some features of such discussions, particularly the question on the origin of pain, its kinds, and particularly its sense in human life are highly relevant as a backdrop for my discussions in the three central chapters.

In the following three central chapters of the dissertation, I focus on three research questions: What is pain? Are there any kinds of pain? What is the role of pain? Each chapter is moulded according to the specifics of the given corpus: I try to respect the texts themselves as much as possible and explore what they have to say about my topic. In the part of the dissertation devoted to the Hippocratic corpus (chapter 2), I start by analysing the passages in which it is clear that the authors speak about ‘bodily pain’, by which I mean explicitly localised in the body. I go through the seven books of the *Epidemics*, where pain-words play an important role in the case studies of ill patients about whom the authors of these books speak. I show that pain is primarily an important diagnostic symptom allowing the physician to provide a correct diagnosis and prognosis. In difference to the disease, whose cause and nature are usually hidden, the pain is something the patient can speak about and describe, which makes the physician’s job possible. The relevance of pain as a diagnostic sign is further explored in the next section where I discuss the gynaecological treatises, i.e., the texts devoted to the diseases of women. Since these texts play an important role in contemporary scholarly discussions, particularly in the question of whether there was a difference between male and female pain in Hippocratic medicine. Even though my analysis reaches rather a sceptical sense on this question, it supports the conception of pain seen in the *Epidemics*. Thus, across the different genres of the *CH*, a similar approach is to be seen emphasizing diagnostic and semiotic role of pain. In the next section, I discuss the role of bodily pain in dietetic treatises, i.e., in the texts devoted to the appropriate regimen and following topics, such as the right kind of nutrition, exercises, environment, etc. In this group of texts, and particularly in treatises *On the Nature of Man* and *On Ancient Medicine*, we find more theoretical passages providing explanations of the origin and therapy of pain. For this explanation, a wider theoretical framework is important to bear in mind, namely that the authors of these treatises conceived of the human body as composed of various constitutive parts. For example, the author of *On the Nature of Man* provides the famous theory of the four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile) and explains by it various pathologies occurring in the human body. If there is too much or too little of one humour or if the blend of the mixtures is badly balanced, pain takes place. Also, the place we feel pain in

indicates where the humoral imbalance happened and helps the physician to theorize about appropriate therapy. More theoretical passages in the corpus, thus, also support the semiotic role of pain. Besides that, we can see in them that pain can work in explanations of wider theories, such as in exploring the question of what the nature of the human body is, what is the relationship between the body and its environment, etc.

The second and third section focuses on other aspects of pain, that are connected to the body a little more loosely. First, even in the medical texts, there are passages where the pain words describe not only the pain of the body but also the suffering in general and even the emotional pain. Even though the medical authors are materialists and discussion of psychic phenomena is not at the centre of their focus, there are a few passages in the corpus where the questions such as the relevance of the soul in the awareness of the pain, relations between pain and pleasure and the sense pain have in the human life appear. Even though these questions are not so developed as in the later philosophical literature, we can find here the beginning of the ‘conceptualisation of pain’ by which I mean attempts to integrate pain into wider theories that are no longer focused exclusively on the body, but also to the contexts known from other genres of the Greek literature. These passages, even though scarce, are a precursor for what we’ll see in Plato and Aristotle, including the trend clearly visible in some medical treatises, to use the word *λύπη* for pain in general which is unusual until Plato.

Finally, in the last section of the second chapter, I discuss a specific problem related to dietetic medicine, namely what is the relationship between pain and exercise. This problem emerges since one of the pain-words, namely *πόνοϛ*, can mean both pain and exercise (or labour, hard work, and activity in general) in the *CH*. Particularly in the most important dietetic treatise extant from classical antiquity, *On Regimen*, where the word is used prolifically in the sense of exercise and activity in general, we gain a better take on this problem. Even though dietetic therapy should be in general painless, offering only mild exercises to the patient, in reality, pain is necessarily linked to exercises, especially if the pathology is already severe. Then, at least in some cases, painful exercises are a necessary means for treating a painful condition. Thus, a third perspective on pain in medical literature emerges in the dietetic treatises, namely the importance of pain in therapy. In sum, medical treatises open three perspectives on pain that are, as I argue, in the next two chapters, common to both philosophy and medicine. The first perspective is diagnostic: thanks to the pain we can gain some otherwise hidden information, in the case of physicians, about the human body. The second perspective is explanative: pain can be used in theories and explanations of these theories since it is a universally known phenomenon experienced by everyone, it can make the process of explaining a complex theory

(for example a theory of the nature of the human body) easier and more accessible to the physician's readers or listeners. Finally, pain or at least something painful can play a therapeutical role. even though the physician aims at alleviating pain and getting rid of the pathology causing it, he sometimes must choose a painful procedure to obtain these goals. Thus, pain – if rightly handled by the professional – can have a positive meaning in human life.

In the third chapter, I proceed to Plato. First, I show that it is no longer so easy to identify every pain with bodily pain. Rather, it is important to underline that for Plato, pain is a much wider phenomenon having its psychic, ethical and even political aspects. However, I also seek for an account or definition of pain, which, in several dialogues, can be summarised in the following way: pain is a disintegration of the natural state of the animal while its counterpart, pleasure is a process of return to this natural state. This account is symptomatic to Plato's general approach to pain: he is much more interested in pleasure which plays a more decisive role in his ethics. Pain is usually discussed only because it can contribute something to Plato's argument about the role of pleasure in the good life. His overall strategy, discussed in the second section is characterised by the focus on the question of what is the relation between pleasure and pain, and good and bad. Plato is aware that people naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain but he wants to show, *inter alia*, that not every kind of pleasure is to be pursued and not every kind of pain is to be avoided. Rather, we should aim at a proper evaluation of what is the relationship between the particular type of pleasure and pain and the good. For Plato and in contrast to hedonism against which he probably argues, pleasure cannot be identified with the good. Some pleasures are good and noble but in general, however, pleasure is necessarily connected to pain. Since for Plato, pleasure is not to be identified as the natural state but with a process leading to it, there must be always some preceding pain for pleasure to take place. In order to enjoy our meal, we have to experience a preceding hunger. In discussing the account of pain and the relationship between pleasure, pain and the good and bad, I thus show the use of pain for explicative purposes in Plato.

In different to the medical writers, Plato focuses more on the role of the soul in feeling pain. Not only is the case that every bodily pain – to be felt – must be perceived by the soul, but the soul itself can feel pain, independently of the body. Anger, fear and other phenomena we would nowadays call emotions are by Plato explained with the help of the notion of pain, since these feelings are kinds of pain felt by the soul itself. This move not only allows Plato to explore the inner life of human beings but also to open a second perspective on pain, namely that the way we experience particular emotions and pains reveals something about our character. The diagnostic role of pain is thus seen not only in the medical authors but also in Plato.

However, pain is no longer so important in indicating what bodily part is affected, but rather in exposing what is the character of the person experiencing it.

Also, if the pain is so ubiquitous a phenomenon that cannot be ignored, it becomes philosophically significant. Education, and the legal system (rules, punishments, etc.), are a means the philosophers and legislators have to influence the citizens. If the proper way to approach pleasure and pain is not the senseless pursuit of the former and absolute avoidance of the latter, there is a need for a proper relationship to pain. So, pain can gain a therapeutic role either in prevention – education –, or in correcting the actual moral faults. All three aspects of pain present in the medical treatises are thus to be found in Plato, too. Thanks to pain, Plato can explicate one of his most important ethical problems, namely the role of pleasure in the good human life. Also, pain can work as a diagnostic sign, indicating what is the character of the sufferer like. In order to act nobly, one must sometimes encounter painful things; if acting in accordance with virtues causes us pain, there is probably something wrong with our character. Finally, pain is sometimes necessary for activities that are naturally good and noble. While in medicine, pain was beneficial usually only in the process of healing a pathology (with a possible exception of preventive exercises), in medicine, pain plays a beneficial role in perfectly natural and un-pathological activities, for example in acting virtuously. By all means, in Plato, it is possible to discern the three approaches to pain that were present in the medical authors, the diagnostic, explicative, and dietetic.

In the fourth chapter, I proceed to Aristotle. His account of pain is in many ways similar to Plato's one. Both philosophers emphasize the relevance of pain in the domain of ethics, both focus more on the counterpart of pain, i.e., pleasure. In the first section, I seek an account or definition of pain. I show that even though Aristotle can use a similar explanation as Plato did and define pain as a disintegration of nature, he, actually proposes another model, too. Thanks to the notion of activity (ἐνέργεια) which Aristotle uses in his account of pain, he conceives of pain as hindering an activity. This conceptual move allows him to express some features of pain more relevant to human life (psychic, emotional, intellectual and ethical aspects of pain). In Aristotle, it is also easier to discern between bodily pain and pain of the soul, since he discusses pain both in his biological treatises, where his analyses resemble substantially the style and matter of the Hippocratic treatises and in the *Rhetoric* where he focuses more on the emotional aspect of pain. For Aristotle, emotions are mixtures of pleasure and pain. In both biological treatises and in the *Rhetoric*, we can see pain in its diagnostic and explicative role: bodily pain the animals or humans feel indicates what is wrong with their body, and emotional pain indicates our feelings and inclinations.

The most important role of pain is however seen in Aristotle's ethics since the philosopher is aware that pleasure and pain are the most powerful feelings influencing our choice and moral behaviour in general. For that reason, the moral philosopher or statesman must understand them and use them for good purposes. Similarly, as in Plato, Aristotle works with the fact that people naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain, and he also emphasizes that not every pain is to be avoided and every pleasure to be pursued. On the contrary, the task of the morally competent human being is to evaluate what pleasure is to be sought and what pain should be endured. Pleasure and pain, thus, work in ethics also as a semiotic and diagnostic tool indicating what the character of a given individual is like. The way we feel about performing a virtuous action indicates what really is our character like; in acting generously, we should not be sorry about the loss of our money, rather, we should be acting willingly and with pleasure. Similarly, when we are to perform a brave action, we should be able to endure the bodily pain possibly stemming from it. It is normal and natural to feel pain, however, the amount of it should always be appropriate to the situation. In ethics, pain has not only a diagnostic role. It is often a necessary condition to achieve something good and beneficial. Education, and punishments but also acting bravely bring along necessarily some pain. Without our capacity to feel pain and our actually undergoing it, it would not be possible to fully develop our moral character.

In the last section of the fourth chapter, I focus again on the notion of *πόνος*, which – similarly to Plato and the Hippocratics – played an important role in Aristotle, too. I take into account not only Aristotle's writings but also the Aristotelian *Problemata* and two treatises of Theophrastus of Ephesus. I show that in Aristotelian school the role of exercise, hard work and muscular activity was an important topic emphasizing, on the one hand, a potential gradual progress from exercise to excessive exercise and to pain, however, on the other hand, naturalness and ubiquity of the bodily activity that is not necessarily painful. I show thus that the enquiries on the relationship between exercise and pain that started in Hippocratic medicine were refined and qualified in the later philosophical tradition.

In the concluding chapter, I summarise my outcomes. The analyses I performed that even though physicians and philosophers approach pain from different perspectives they actually share a common framework consisting in using pain in three domains: pain is a diagnostic, explicative and therapeutical tool. Thus, both philosophy and medicine attempted to integrate pain into their doctrines. I showed that physicians used it for working with their patients and their bodily afflictions, whereas philosophers focused more on the role of pain in the diagnosis and treatment of moral character. Since the majority of the most relevant medical treatises are considered to be older than Plato's and Aristotle's writings, I assume the similarity

between the way how pain was approached supports the claim that Plato and Aristotle were inspired by Hippocratic medicine and particularly by its dietetic branch. Even though we cannot decisively say what medical treatises were read by the two philosophers, we can decisively see that they share some insights present in them. Plato and Aristotle, however, used the medical framework creatively and broadened it to psychology, ethics and politics. Pain can play a role in all these areas and can be used for some positive purposes. Thus, if reflected and explicated by philosophers, pain can be an integral part of a meaningful human life.

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Internships

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1/2023-3/2023 | Cambridge University, Faculty of Classics
Visiting PhD student, supervisor: prof. Gábor Betegh
Work on the project: Perspectives on Pain in Classical Greek Philosophy and Medicine |
| 10/2021-9/2022 | Humboldt University Berlin, RTG Philosophy, Science and the Sciences
Visiting PhD student, supervisor: prof. Philip van der Eijk
Work on the project: Perspectives on Pain in Classical Greek Philosophy and Medicine |
| 1/2020 | Aarhus University, Centre for digital history
The study visit focused on acquiring competencies in digital humanities |
| 9/2018-2/2019 | KU Leuven, Institute of Philosophy
Exchange study program Erasmus + |
| 9/2015-2/2016 | Paris-Sorbonne University 1, Department of Philosophy
Exchange study program Erasmus + |

Grants and Projects

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 2022-2023 | GACR Czech Science Foundation. Project n. 22-11418S, co-researcher
Mixtures of Body and Soul |
|-----------|---|

2020-2022 Charles University Grant Agency. Project n. 78120, the main researcher
Aristotle and Hippocrates on Pain

Publications

Linka, V. 2023a. Pain as hindering the *energeia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. *Aither* (in print)

Linka, V. 2023b. Bittersweet Condition of Human Beings: Mixtures of Pleasures and Pains in Plato's Dialogues and Their Relation to the 'Hippocratic' Medicine. *Forthcoming*.

Linka, V., Kaše, V. 2023. Pain in Classical Greek Texts. *Digital Classics Online* 9: 1-14.

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Linka, V., Kaše, V. 2021. Pain and the Body in Corpus Hippocraticum: A Distributional Semantic Analysis. *Digital Classics Online* 7: 54-71.

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Linka V. 2020. Zakoušení bolesti podle Aristotela. *Reflexe* 58: 53-73. (Aristotle on experience of Pain)

<http://reflexe.flu.cas.cz/archiv/reflexe-58/zakouseni-bolesti-podle-aristotela/>

Conferences and workshops

- 10/2022 Teleology in Aristotelian Tradition
Faculty of Arts, Palacky University Olomouc
Why does it hurt? Teleology of pain in Aristotle and its relation to the 'Hippocratic corpus'
- 5/2022 Approche antique de la rhétorique philosophique
Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
The Art of Rhetoric in the 'Hippocratic' *De arte*
- 11/2021 Aristotle's *Protrepticus*
Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague
Aristotle's *Protrepticus* XI,58.17-XII.60.10: Why is philosopher's life the most pleasurable?
- 4/2021 Pleasure and Pain in Ancient Philosophy
FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg
Aristotle on Pain
- 1/2021 Interdisciplinary conference "Bolest" (Pain).
Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague

- Perspectives on pain in classical Greek philosophy and medicine (in Czech)
- 10/2019 International workshop Jewish spaces, Faculty of Arts, Palacky University Faculty of Arts, Palacky University, Olomouc
Why the intelligent suffer? Maimonides on connection between pain and active intellect
- 4/2019 Student conference Praxis
Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague
Aristotle on Pain (in Czech)

Taught University Courses

- 2022/2023 Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Science, reading group focusing on ancient medicine (together with Mgr. Vladimír Mikeš, PhD)
- 2021 – Faculty of Medicine in Pilsen, Charles University: Medical ethics and Psychology (in Czech and English)
- 2022 – Faculty of Arts, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen: Philosophy and Ethics for social workers
- 2022 – Faculty of Health Care Studies, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen: Philosophy and Ethics for medical professions
- Spring 2020/2021 Faculty of Arts, Charles University Prague: Physicians and Philosophers on Pain (in English)
- Winter 2020/2021 Faculty of Humanities, Charles University Prague: Ancient medical writings (together with doc. Hynek Bartoš PhD, in Czech)
- Winter 2019/2020 Faculty of Humanities, Charles University Prague: Plato's Philebus (together with doc. Hynek Bartoš PhD, in English)

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