



The Life's Phenomenology in affective nursing care in COVID-19 pandemic: reflection study

Fenomenologia da Vida no cuidado afetivo de enfermagem na pandemia da COVID-19: um estudo de reflexão

Fenomenología de la Vida en el cuidado afectivo de enfermería en la pandemia COVID-19: un estudio de reflexión

Valdecyr Herdy Alves¹

Silvestre Grzibowski²

Bianca Dargam Gomes Vieira¹

Diego Pereira Rodrigues³

Ludimila Brum Campos Sampaio¹

Márcia Vieira dos Santos⁴

1. Universidade Federal Fluminense, Escola de Enfermagem Aurora de Afonso Costa. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.

2. Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Faculdade de Filosofia. Santa Maria, RS, Brasil.

3. Universidade Federal do Pará, Centro de Ciências da Saúde. Belém, PA, Brasil.

4. Hospital Federal dos Servidores do Estado Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.

ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Life as an approach to affective Nursing care in times of the coronavirus pandemic. **Method:** this is a theoretical-reflexive study based on the Phenomenology of Life presented by Michel Henry, in order to contribute to Nursing care by choosing the dimension of affection, from which the feelings, attitudes, and actions for the care of life arise in times of COVID-19. **Results:** Nursing care in times of coronavirus is disclosed as affective care for the suffering of the subjective life of each ego, which is revealed in its affective flesh and by affective welcoming. It was conceptually shown that this subjective life care is totally different from objective life. **Conclusion and implications for the practice:** the phenomenological value of affectivity in Nursing care requires a conception that considers life as a valuable good in itself, and respect for the other.

Keywords: Philosophy; Life; Nursing Care; Pandemics; Coronavirus.

RESUMO

Objetivo: refletir sobre a Fenomenologia da Vida de Michel Henry como abordagem para o cuidado afetivo de Enfermagem em tempos de pandemia de coronavírus. **Método:** trata-se de um estudo teórico-reflexivo com base na Fenomenologia da Vida apresentado por Michel Henry, de modo a contribuir com o cuidado de Enfermagem elegendo a dimensão do afeto, de onde derivam os sentimentos, atitudes e ações para o cuidado da vida em tempos de Covid-19. **Resultados:** o cuidado de Enfermagem em tempos de coronavírus como cuidado afetivo do sofrimento da vida subjetiva de cada ego, que se revela na sua carne afetiva e por um acolhimento afetivo. Mostrou-se conceitualmente que esse cuidado de vida subjetiva se distingue totalmente da vida objetiva. **Conclusão e implicações para a prática:** o valor fenomenológico da afetividade do cuidado de Enfermagem requer uma concepção que contemple a vida como um bem valioso em Si, e respeito do outro.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia; Vida; Cuidados de Enfermagem; Pandemias; Coronavírus.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre la Fenomenología de la Vida de Michel Henry como abordaje del cuidado afectivo de enfermería en tiempos de pandemia de coronavirus. **Método:** se trata de un estudio teórico-reflexivo basado en la Fenomenología de la Vida presentada por Michel Henry, con el fin de contribuir al cuidado de Enfermería eligiendo la dimensión del afecto, de donde derivan los sentimientos, actitudes y acciones para el cuidado de la vida en tiempos de Covid-19. **Resultados:** el cuidado de enfermería en tiempos de coronavirus se presenta como cuidado afectivo del sufrimiento de la vida subjetiva de cada sujeto, que se revela en su carne afectiva y por una acogida afectiva. Se demostró conceptualmente que este cuidado de vida subjetiva es totalmente diferente de la vida objetiva. **Conclusión e implicaciones para la práctica:** el valor fenomenológico de la afectividad en el cuidado de enfermería requiere de una concepción que contemple la vida como un bien valioso en sí mismo y del respeto hacia el otro.

Palabras clave: Filosofía; Vida; Atención de Enfermería; Pandemias; Coronavírus.

Corresponding author:

Diego Pereira Rodrigues.

E-mail: diego.pereira.rodrigues@gmail.com.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Michel Henry¹, the Phenomenology of Life reveals in the very Self, by affecting in Oneself and with Oneself, immediately unveiling the originality to the other; a manifestation of life that we prove from the indispensable affections in ourselves.

Michel Henry¹ has greatly contributed to philosophical thinking and to other knowledge areas. His fundamental theory is the Phenomenology of Life, which presents a subject that is affected in Oneself and with oneself, and this self-affection reveals its originality, a manifestation of life that we prove from the indispensable affections in ourselves.

To uphold the thesis of the Phenomenology of Life, Henry abruptly opposes Husserl's phenomenology that is based on the intentional consciousness to describe the world and life^{2,3}.

For Husserl, consciousness is the "consciousness of the world, it is the consciousness of anything, intentionality. May consciousness be intentionality in its essence, that means that it is intentionality that places itself in the condition of phenomenality, that it is phenomenality itself, that makes one see"^{4,13}.

The things, the objects, the phenomena appear in the intentional consciousness. Henry contests this theory by asserting that life does not need phenomenological reduction or intentionality to be manifested, for it manifests itself and thus, from now on, it reveals what is the most important, its very essence^{3,4}. In this sense, life will not be grounded only on an intentional act but it will create pure phenomenality⁵.

Thus, "life is phenomenological in an original and founding sense. It is phenomenological in the sense that it is the creator of phenomenology. Phenomenology arises originally and at the same time in life, in the form of life and no other way"^{5,13}. Life is the original and absolute phenomenality, no other strange entity but life is manifested in it. Subjectivity being absolute, it reveals the original phenomenon, and the content that is manifested is pure and true.

The theory of the Phenomenology of Life overcomes that major issue that was developed in traditional phenomenology, the distancing of the ego from absolute subjectivity or, in other words, the distancing that existed between the ego and the manifestation of original life. According to Henry, life manifests what it feels and experiences; there is no possibility for the existence of other content. "Life feels and proves Itself, that is why there is nothing in it that it does not prove or feel. And the fact that it feels Itself is precisely what makes it life"^{4,31}.

Fundamentally, life does not need an external ego to say what it is, since it is constantly experiencing itself. In that way, life reveals its essence openly and does not need any theoretical knowledge intending to say what it is; on the contrary, all knowledge, the Phenomenality of Life is grounded on itself and by itself. Faced with this, the thinker directs strong criticism towards Husserl's phenomenological tradition since, despite the ego, body, subjectivity, and other similar and important topics, he describes them based on the phenomenological method and on a constituted ego.

So, if there is no distancing between life, ego, and body, how does Henry demonstrate this theory of original life? How does this life expose its content in the original manifestation? The philosopher⁴ asserts that life is pure affectivity and that it engenders itself and affects itself. Thus, "life engenders itself in the process of its eternal self-affection, the process in which it comes to Itself, crashes into Itself, proves Itself (*soi-même*), enjoys Itself, and is not anything else but the eternal happiness of this pure joy (enjoying) of Itself. Living consists of that pure proving (proving oneself/experiencing oneself) (*s'éprouve*), only in that way it is possible to live, there is nothing anywhere else"^{5,132}.

With this surprising proposal, the thinker evidences that thinking about the origin of life of each living person's ego shall not be constituted outside Oneself, as elaborated by the theory of intentionality, but in the subjectivity of the original phenomenon's life, of the primary appearing that precedes all appearance. Because in this appearing, life gives itself, it is pure donation, and all the manifested content becomes true^{4,5}.

Life is this eternal self-affection of Itself, by Itself. It is a strength, an original power. And the content comes from the subjectivity with a strength that imposes itself and withstands the external powers. It is pure self-affection and, by carrying out this process, it reveals its essence. Self-affection does not have a beginning or an end, it is movement, internal self-movement that experiences Itself while living, with no interruptions^{4,5}.

Another important point is that life, for being pure self-affection, is affective life. The Phenomenology of Life ceases to be a theoretical phenomenology in the rational sense as once constituted, but pure affectivity. Affectivity is the essence and reveals Itself. The Phenomenology of Life does not constitute the phenomenon outside Itself, but the essence of the phenomenon's manifestation, it gives itself, this being the pure phenomenon. Consequently, it is not different from the phenomenon and its manifestation, from its phenomenization⁶.

Husserl's phenomenology describes the phenomena of the act of appearing that are in the consciousness; therefore, they are outside the essence, or more precisely, of life. Since in the phenomenization of the phenomenon of the world, it does not reveal Itself nor in Itself but in the constituted ego, that means in the outer side. As for pure appearing, it reveals the original phenomenon and, in self-affection resides the essence that is continuously manifested.

Thus, Henry⁴ asserts that the self-appearing of life does not bring any otherness with it, but only life in its immediate pureness. It exposes how it is. And the phenomenality of such self-appearing is transcendental affectivity. And the affective shades such as suffering, happiness, and their consequences, are entirely experienced; it is in them that the ego's life is revealed. Because of that, Henry places affectivity in the center of his phenomenology; after all, everything starts from it^{3,6}.

In this way, "affectivity is life's phenomenological essence, the impressive flesh on which the view of intentionality lacks a place – in this sense, (affectivity) is the pure not intentional"^{5,13}.

Affectivity is the possible most extreme opposition to Husserl's intentionality, it is not thinking but pure feeling oneself.

Thus, Henry's Phenomenology of Life⁴ directly involves the suffering of the other, and with the coronavirus pandemic, humanity has experienced high mortality rates. That way, until November 2nd, 2020, the COVID-19 world pandemic reached the figures of 46,618,804 confirmed cases and more than 1,201,833 deaths; with more than 5,545,705 confirmed cases recorded in Brazil, with 160,104 deaths⁷. Therefore, people are mutually involved with suffering, whether patients, families, or health professionals, who communicate in singularity, directing the look towards life, focusing on being welcomed effectively, full of meanings, of affection, and impulsiveness towards life.

Consequently, this study had the objective of reflecting on Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Life as an approach to affective Nursing care in times of the coronavirus pandemic.

METHOD

A theoretical-reflexive study based on the Phenomenology of Life presented by Michel Henry. The study intends to contribute to Nursing care by choosing the dimension of affection, from which the feelings, attitudes, and actions for the care of life stem in times of COVID-19.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Phenomenology of Life in times of coronavirus

As shown, the fundamental proposal of Henry's phenomenology of life⁴ is to defend in a masterful and overwhelming way the primacy of life. He directs tough criticisms to philosophy, but also to science⁸, since both have forgotten subjective life. That does not mean that it had not been researched during the history of thinking.

However, it was investigated as an object outside Itself, and this is precisely going to be the counterpoint that the thinker will make towards philosophy and science. The research studies that were conducted caused a deep crisis in humanity, for life was objectified.

In face of that, Henry complains harshly and, this appears practically in all his writings, about the oblivion of the original life, the affective and subjective life, for it is the beginning and contains its specific wisdom and should be infinitely respected in its essence. If detached, it is in great danger of having its existence extirpated definitely, as have been occurring, considering that it has been constantly threatened. In turn, the consequences are numerous, namely: despair, exclusion, mechanization, and lack of care and welcoming.

The Phenomenology of Life is born from this intrigue and proposes another saying, that is, for us to think phenomenologically about reductionisms. That does not mean that the philosopher abandons thinking, science and their contributions in favor of society. Perhaps humanity has seen in both of them, especially in science, the only possibility to be saved and, thus, effective

life was excluded. Henry excessively argues that life cannot be objectified because it reveals the essence of each ego that is affective flesh, and that this subjectivity needs to be respected⁹. To better reflect and make some considerations about the overcoming of the global problem of the new coronavirus pandemic, we can think of it based on Henry⁴. That is because the current tension is a visible result of the way of thinking and acting, that is, there is exclusion of the affective life, which means non-welcoming of the suffering of the other.

Perhaps we are concerned with and assigning more value to the things that we consider important. However, the crisis of the affective life, or better, the health of each ipseity in the present time, makes us rethink about what our priorities are in our existence. To relieve suffering, intending to save lives, we need to change our way of thinking, our concerns, look, and act perceiving the essence of affective life that is revealed and exposed to others.

As we have seen, the fundamental thesis of the Phenomenology of Life is to prioritize and place it at the center of the argument^{1,4,5}. In that way, Henry perceived that thinking did not value it, on the contrary, it placed it in the quality of an object to be analyzed. Thus, humanity fell into a deep crisis in all senses, due to the oblivion of affective life¹⁰.

In this sense, the Phenomenology of Life allows us to think about the body, which feels life in the affective shades that become unique and, at the same time, open up beyond aphasia to meet subjectivity¹⁰, for incarnated life is a life in which the others, by giving themselves with affection, do so in the constitutive intimacy of the feeling¹¹.

Thus, access to the phenomena's facets, and to the phenomenon itself, becomes possible only in what was experienced regarding co-ownership of life itself that affects in Itself as affection¹². Thus, to look at the implications of the Phenomenology of Life for the Nursing science in the care of patients suspected or infected with coronavirus is to interrogate the possibilities of care in the phenomenality of affection in the routine of nurses.

When thinking about life from the COVID-19 pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, and in Brazil on February 4th of the same year, when the Ministry of Health (*Ministério da Saúde*, MS) decreed the Health Emergency, intending to mitigate the spread of the disease, federal law No. 13,979 of February 6th, 2020, was instituted, wherein the measures to face the coronavirus public health emergency are set forth, such as establishing isolation of the population from social interaction, quarantine for the infected, people staying at their homes, and operation of only life-essential services, namely: health services, pharmacies, supermarkets and bakeries, among others^{13,14}.

Affective nursing care based on the phenomenology of life in pandemic times

In the Nursing care of COVID-19 suspected or infected patients, inquiring about the care routine is necessary. Likewise, caring beyond the health techniques, such as dressings, drug administration and body hygiene, techniques that translate

technical and fundamental care to ensure effective action; however, Nursing care will not be reduced to reason, it involves other facets of the nurse's and patient's life.

Thus, it becomes a challenge to understand that the subjectivity of Nursing care is constituted while experiencing the emotions that mobilize and affect the body of the nurse that reveal itself in the meanings and senses of the affections, passions and the impulse of life¹¹. This phenomenological issue of Nursing care is, therefore, of an affective nature: it goes from the affection of body senses to a meaning-giving subjectivity in the field of Nursing care.

In this sense, an essential nucleus is evidenced in the care in the Self and with the other in the Nursing area, based on Michel Henry⁴, instituted by the affectivity as the original process of life. Thus, to describe affective care in the Nursing practice for COVID-19 suspected and/or infected patients is disturbing.

Consequently, affective care is unveiled as the phenomenon of the Self and with the other, life and experience as inseparable poles in the primitive condition of affective becoming, a pure manifestation that mobilizes self-giving, affecting life in feeling itself; the phenomenality of feeling affective care¹⁵ as the origin of subjectivity opens up entrances to a real life experienced in the flesh, such as loving, suffering, doubting, feeling, forgiving.

Affective Nursing care based on MH's approach allows us to live subjectivity in Oneself and with the other in its absolute immanence without losing ipseity¹⁶, making self-giving possible in affective care. Life reveals itself in its facets, affective welcoming expresses respectful, individual, and mutual care, and favors being with the other, without invading the life of the patient, but welcoming them fraternally, in an act of feeling the patient's pain, making it possible to expand the care practice with affectivity.

The advance of the coronavirus imposes fears and suffering on the world population, requiring from the health authorities safe care to face the pandemic. In the Nursing field, 24-hour Nursing care in the hospital is vital, and these professionals can perform several activities intending to provide qualified care in order to reestablish health, among them, communication between patient, nurse and family members aiming to provide guidance on COVID-19, and the actions that are intended to avoid contamination such as, for example, social isolation.

Another item is the work overload of the Nursing professionals, since they assume care tasks uninterruptedly, serving all patient's needs.

In this fight against the coronavirus pandemic, health professionals worldwide are being infected and there is an increasing number of deaths among them. Despite the personal protection equipment (scarce in many countries, including Brazil) nurses, Nursing technicians and assistants among other health professionals seem to be more likely to contract the virus than most of the people, and perhaps, to develop the disease with more lethal conditions, due to the high exposure to COVID-19 and the stress experienced in the routine of health care¹⁷.

Thus, looking at the Nursing care dimension considering that it is giving of Oneself and to the other, establishing, in this

approximation act between nurse and patient, affective care in the care relationship, expanding affective manifestations that broaden health and make the affective modes of suffering and fruition possible¹⁸, as experienced by the nurses and patients in times of coronavirus.

In this sense, life in its routine is a donation felt and constituted in ourselves by affection, allowing for the construction of the very Self, which does not end, for caring with affectivity and giving breath to suffering, as a possibility of feeling the other, being affected by the other and taking over the care for the other. The sharing between Nursing care and the patient produces affection that is not watertight in itself, it is transformed among us (nurses and patients), in an original affective dynamics that constitutes them.

Affection is manifested in the routine of Nursing care to the patients infected with COVID-19, in the original mode of the life of suffering and fruition, being instituted in the founding link of this care. The relationship of affective care that occurs in this daily routine lived by nurses has an echo that is a mobilizer of affection in the body of the patients and allows for expanded care for feeling the various ways of physical, mental, and spiritual suffering, among other ways of caring that mobilize human existence.

Affection in care has an intimate relationship with the professional practice of Nursing since, by carrying out vital care measures aiming at the patients' well-being, it needs affective openness to touch the body of the other; that refers us to the humanization of assistance provided by this category, unveiling two dimensions: the objective one, which refers to the development of techniques and procedures, and the subjective one, which is based on sensitivity, creativity and intuition in the sense of caring for the other with affection.

Michel Henry^{4,5} allows us to see that Nursing care is constituted in life, in a direct relationship between nurse and patient; in times of COVID-19, the suffering and the pain of the patients infected and of health professionals in facing the pandemic is expressed in the world context.

Thus, Nursing care occurs in affective welcoming, an affectionate act in intersubjective care, a manifestation of the human condition, self-affection for the facets of care of life/health, not only in times of a pandemic.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE

To think Nursing care based on the contributions of Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Life is, therefore, a real need in times of coronavirus, in order to expand the perspective beyond the health techniques and to understand the intersubjectivity of affective Nursing care.

Thus, to value the feeling of life in Oneself and in the Other in its complexity is to respect humanity in its facets of suffering and fruition, being a manifestation of the human condition that allows for affective welcoming. The affective care applied to the Nursing practice means to rescue the dignity of the human being experienced and felt in happiness and pain when caring

for COVID-19 patients. This is a process that becomes urgent, either in pandemic times or not.

The study had as a limiting factor to the analysis of theoretical fields the scarcity of scientific studies addressing the relationship of Michel Henry's Phenomenology of Life concepts in articulation with the health emergency context worldwide caused by COVID-19.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Conception of the study. Valdecyr Herdy Alves. Silvestre Grzibowski. Bianca Dargam Gomes Vieira. Diego Pereira Rodrigues. Ludimila Brum Campos Sampaio. Márcia Vieira dos Santos.

Data analysis. Valdecyr Herdy Alves. Silvestre Grzibowski. Bianca Dargam Gomes Vieira. Diego Pereira Rodrigues. Ludimila Brum Campos Sampaio. Márcia Vieira dos Santos.

Data interpretation. Valdecyr Herdy Alves. Silvestre Grzibowski. Bianca Dargam Gomes Vieira. Diego Pereira Rodrigues. Ludimila Brum Campos Sampaio. Márcia Vieira dos Santos.

Writing of the article and critical review of the manuscript. Valdecyr Herdy Alves. Silvestre Grzibowski. Bianca Dargam Gomes Vieira. Diego Pereira Rodrigues. Ludimila Brum Campos Sampaio. Márcia Vieira dos Santos.

Approval of the final version of the manuscript to be published. Valdecyr Herdy Alves. Silvestre Grzibowski. Bianca Dargam Gomes Vieira. Diego Pereira Rodrigues. Ludimila Brum Campos Sampaio. Márcia Vieira dos Santos.

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Antonio José Almeida Filho

SCIENTIFIC EDITOR

Ivone Evangelista Cabral 

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