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DISPOSITION: THE “PATHIC” DIMENSION OF EXISTENCE AND ITS RELEVANCE IN AFFECTIVE DISORDERS AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

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1. Preliminary remarks

This paper aims to explore the “pathic” dimension of existence, which is both the capacity of being affected and being situated within moods and atmospheres. Furthermore, it will show how this dimension affects psychopathological phenomena, such as affective disorders and schizophrenia. The importance of this dimension of existence is central in the way we conceive life in general, since *feeling* and *understanding* are not separate, rather they share a kind of mutual relationship that is able to give us access to ourselves, to the world, and to alterity in general. The “pathic” dimension of existence is also important in the way we conceive illness and in particular the so called “psychiatric object”, an object which can neither be defined only in terms of illness, diagnosis, symptoms and methodologies able to capture valid phenomenal distinctions concerning the patient’s experience nor, at the same time, can be reduced to the human organism or some parts of it; rather, the ‘psychiatric object’ is more complex and requires further explorations, understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of the interplay between moods and atmospheres, through which human being has to be [Heidegger 1962].

In order to reach this goal, the first part of this paper will insist on the significance of Heidegger’s meditation for a phenomenological approach to psychopathology. In fact, his contribution to phenomenology

lies in his attention to understand emotions and moods, and drawing on key concepts of *Dasein's* constitution, such as *Befindlichkeit* [Brencio 2019]; particularly,

whereas Husserl had put aside questions about ontology and metaphysics, Heidegger made these questions the foundation for his investigation of human experience and action. This has been characterised as a shift from reflective to hermeneutical phenomenology [...] and asked how we are to understand (i.e. interpret), evaluate, and finally act on what we experience. This ontological shift introduced questions into the phenomenological investigation. [...] Heidegger does not just ask what and how we experience, but also how we feel about our experiences. Furthermore, the question of how we feel inevitably entails further questions about the nature of our feelings (ontology) and what we should do about them (normativity) [Stanghellini & Rosfort 2013, 206].

Although today there are still some interpreters who consider Heidegger as *merely* the “Shepherd of Being” instead of a philosopher who took seriously many of the issues related to human being, it is indisputable that his contribution to the dialogue between philosophy and psychiatry has been pivotal throughout the mid-50s, thanks in part to the experience of the Zollikon seminars: they were a series of seminars delivered between 1959 and 1969 in front of an audience of doctors, psychiatrists and analysts, ranging from fifty to seventy participants, from two to three times each semester, held within the Zollikon house of Dr. Medard Boss. Certainly, Heidegger has not been the only philosopher of the XX century to devote his efforts to understanding human beings under a new light and, surely he is not the only one to propose new approaches to medicine, but if we consider his education – predominately theological and philosophical, and not medical in *any sense* – we cannot recognise the merit of his meditation within the context of fundamental issues of Western science and its implication in the wellbeing of humans. In his meditation and far from elaborating any new anthropology or psychology, Heidegger tried to investigate the fundamental structures of existence throughout the so-called *meditative thinking* (*Besinnung*), a way of exercising phenomenology that provides a different paradigm,

inaugurated in *Being and Time*, to conceptualise existence.

In the second part, this contribution will discuss how moods and atmospheres are of interest within psychopathology. Additionally, it intends to provide a hermeneutical-phenomenological account for the role of affects in understanding affective disorders.

2. *Disposition, moods and the world*

The core concept of the pathic dimension is a pursuit that Heidegger explores during his early lectures in Freiburg, precisely during 1918-1919. In these years Heidegger is concerned predominately with the issue of life and the living being, as the typical language of *Lebensphilosophie* shows; in the lecture courses of 1918 entitled *The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview* and *Phenomenology and Transcendental Philosophy Value*, Heidegger insists on the supremacy of life, understood as pre-theoretical, over the theoretical dimension: «This primacy of the theoretical must be broken, but not in order to proclaim the primacy of the practical, and not in order to introduce something that shows the problems from a new side, but because the theoretical itself and as such refers back to something pre-theoretical» [Heidegger 2002, 47]. In these years Heidegger is interested in showing how intentional life is grounded in the *affective*, both the active and the passive aspects of intentional directedness. His early project can be understood as a kind of radicalization of the Husserlian-Brentanian notion of intentionality, in order to demonstrate that the unity of intentional life at a pre-theoretical level is grounded on the “pathic” dimension of existence. This purpose however must be considered carefully in regard to the risk of irrationalism, a danger that the young Heidegger was aware of. He finds a philosophical solution that is able to avoid this risk whilst simultaneously preventing the grounding of existence on the primacy of the theoretical; this philosophical solution is the discovery of a “pathic” element of existence, referred to in German as *vorweltliche* (pre-worldly):

What is essential about the pre-worldly [...] signifying functions is that they express the characters of the appropriating event, i.e. they go together (experiencing and experiencing experienced)

with experience itself, they live in life itself and, going along with life, they are at once originating and carry their provenance in themselves. They are at once preceptive and retroceptive, i.e. they express life in its motivated tendency or tending motivation [Heidegger 2002, 89].

This “pathic” component represents the higher potential for life, a plurality of possible meanings and this «possibility arises of understanding life as such. Then the absolute comprehensibility of life as such will emerge. Life as such is not irrational (which has nothing whatever to do with ‘rationalism’!)» [Heidegger 2002, 164]. It means not only to redefine the grounds of existence as such, but also to take a first step in the direction of a different approach to meaning and truth: meaning is, in fact, primarily disclosed pre-conceptually and pre-theoretically: «This pre-theoretical, pre-worldly ‘something’ is as such the grounding motive for the formal-logical ‘something’ of objectivity» [*ibid.*]. According to Heidegger, it is through moods that we can know the world in general and the possibility of “truth”. Whereas modern philosophy holds that “truth” is a function of propositional logic, Heidegger argues that it is a pre-predicative mood that grounds all predicative truth [Held 1993].

It will be during the lectures of 1920-1921 in the field of phenomenology of religion that Heidegger will develop not only his own approach to phenomenology but also his analysis of moods and the core concept of the pathic element in existence. In the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* he analyses religious life starting from those elements that permeate factual life, such as motivations and tendencies, two formal indications used to analyse how theories or beliefs emerge from within life itself: «Philosophy arises from factual life experience. And within factual life experience philosophy returns back into factual life experience. The concept of factual life experience is fundamental» [Heidegger 2004, 6-7].

Factual life experience is that in which philosophy is *enacted*: «Philosophizing [...] must be viewed in its original attitudinal *enactment* (*Einstellungsvollzug*)» [*ibid.*, 40]:

Factual life experience is very peculiar; in it, the path to philosophy is made possible and the turning around which leads to philosophy is enacted. This difficulty is to be understood through

a preliminary characterization of the phenomenon of factual life experience. Life experience is more than mere experience which takes cognizance of. It designates the whole active and passive pose of the human being toward the world. [...] The peculiarity of factual life experience consists in the fact that “how I stand with regard to things,” the manner of experiencing, is not co-experienced. What belongs to cognition according to its own meaning must be phenomenologically isolated prior to all decrees that philosophy is cognition. Factual life experience puts all its weight on its content; the how of factual life experience at most merges into its content [*ibid.*, 8-9].

The peculiarity of factual life experience lies in the fact that the *how* of experiences (relation) merges with the *what* (the content) and with another *how*, in which the relational meaning is enacted (enactment). These three directions of sense (content-, relational-, enactment-sense) do not simply coexist, but form the totality sensing each experience. Heidegger is very clear on this point:

I experience myself in factual life neither as a complex of lived experiences nor as a conglomeration of acts and processes, not even as some ego-object in a demarcated sense, but rather in that which I perform, suffer, what I encounter, in my conditions of depression and elevation, and the like. I myself experience not even my ego in separateness, but I am as such always attached to the surrounding world. This experiencing-oneself is no theoretical “reflection”, no “inner perception”, or the like, but is self-worldly experience, because experience itself has a worldly character and emphasizes significance in such a way that one’s own experienced self-world no longer stands out from the surrounding world. [...] One could object that I experience myself – how I feel – nonetheless factually, without special reflection [...] but this how, too, is no thoroughly formed manner of relating to something but a significance factually tethered to the surrounding world. The factual of which cognizance is taken does not have an objective character but a character of significance which can develop into an objective context [*ibid.*, 10].

Motivation is for Heidegger the way in which factual life structures and *enacts* its movement; both tendency and motivation are the structures that constitute the grounds of experience, the so-called «naked homogeneity» (*nackten Gleichartigkeit*). They should not be understood as two independent “states” or “parts” of a process, but rather as two ways of describing the very same process, that which establishes *manifestation* (*Bekundung*), providing the “directional force” behind the intentional phenomenon [Heidegger 2013].

It is in the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* that Heidegger makes an explicit reference to mood: they are what is decisive in encountering things and they are the means of access to the world as we comprehend and signify it as it is. These moods are often called by Heidegger – in this context – *affections*, recalling the Latin word *affectiones*. These moods are examined in the context of Heidegger’s reading of S. Paul’s letter to Thessalonians and are basically reconstructed into two fundamental types: the first one is the distress, the absolute concern in the horizon of the return of Christ (θλῖψις), and the second one is the joy of Christ’s love (χαρά). Distress and joy represent the fundamental condition of Christians in the early communities, during the 1st century B.C.

According to Heidegger, Aristotle is the first philosopher to have investigated affects (or passions, from the old Greek πάθη) and to have stressed how human being is constitutively a *being-in*, because this being is always determined by πάθη. *Being-in* indicates again a kind of situatedness, our being in an emotional state: «It is, above all, decisive that we lose composure, as in the case of fearing without encountering something in the envioning world that could be the direct occasion of fear. In this being-a-matter-of-concern of the πάθη, corporeality is co-encountered in some mode or another» [Heidegger 2009, 139-140]. In the summer of 1924, Heidegger lectured on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, showing how philosophical logos and the propositional judgment of philosophical discourse are grounded in everyday speech, originating from factual existence, in which situation, affect and mood disclose the determination of *Dasein*. Affect is thus a constitutive phenomenon of discursive disclosure, and logos is a fundamental characteristic of the *Dasein* whose capacity for meaningful disclosure is grounded in affect. In the discourse we find the διάθεσις (disposition) of the listener and

the importance of πάθη (affects): «These πάθη, ‘affects,’ are not states pertaining to ensouled things, but are concerned with a disposition of living things in their world, in the mode of being positioned toward something, allowing a matter to matter to it. The affects play a fundamental role in the determination of being-in-the-world, of being-with-and-toward-others» [*ibid.*, 83].¹

Nevertheless, it will be in *Being and Time* that Heidegger will thoroughly explore the role of moods and the fundamental structure of existence, disposition² (*Befindlichkeit*), as an a priori constitutive part of *Dasein*'s facticity. *Befindlichkeit* first appears in Heidegger's work as a translation of the Aristotelian notion of διάθεσις (disposition). It is in the years 1924-1927 that he develops a concept of disposition that constitutes a radicalization of Husserlian's phenomenological approach, in order to provide a concrete account of a phenomenological “beginning” and to offer a description of human being in terms of “living life”. *Befindlichkeit* is not a starting point in the context of Heidegger's understanding of fundamental structures of *Dasein*, but rather a stepping stone on his path toward phenomenology that illuminates his relationship with Aristotle, a central point of his philosophical education.³

¹ On this theme see also Coriando 2002.

² The word *Befindlichkeit* is one of the most difficult to translate in English. In the essay entitled *Affectivity in Heidegger: Moods and Emotions in Being and Time*, Andreas Elpidorou and Lauren Freeman provide a broad account of how *Befindlichkeit* has been translated into English by various scholars, such as ‘state of mind’, ‘findingness’, ‘affectivity’, ‘disposition’, ‘attunement’ and many others. For a detailed reconstruction of the different translations, see Elpidorou & Freeman 2015. The choice to translate *Befindlichkeit* with ‘disposition’ is due to the use of the German reflexive verb *sich befinden*, which literally means “finding oneself”. In the ordinary way of speaking, the colloquial sentence “*Wie befinden Sie sich?*” means “how is it going?” or “how do you feel?”, etc. In the everyday language this expression remarks the situation in which someone finds himself/herself situated. It is starting from this situated experience that the world and some entities in the world are disclosed to *Dasein*: the ‘disposition’ is both this being into a situatedness, as ontological and constitutive dimension, and being open to the world, keyword for the transcendence and to openness.

³ The lecture *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (Winter Semester 1921-22), the course entitled *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (Summer Semester 1924), and the

Disposition expresses the fact that human beings are always situated in a mood and always open to the world; in this sense, *Befindlichkeit* works on two levels: on one hand, it shows how *Dasein* is essentially always *disclosed* to the world, to others and to entities; on the other hand, it shows how *Dasein* is always orientated toward both a horizontal and a vertical axis. Every mood and every consequential feeling activates this double axis and illuminates *Dasein*'s ability to understand itself, its existence as *Mit-sein*, and its way of behaving [Coriando 2002; von Herrmann 2008]. Heidegger identifies three ontological features of *Befindlichkeit*: the first is that it discloses to *Dasein* its thrownness; the second is that moods disclose being-in-the-world as a whole; the third is *Befindlichkeit* implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us. Disposition is itself the existential kind of Being in which *Dasein* constantly surrenders itself to the world and lets the world 'matter' to it.

In his *magnum opus* Heidegger shows that moods play a pivotal role in the feeling we have of belonging to the world: moods are not an intentional state directed at something, rather they are conditions of possibility for such states. This is possible because of the ontological nature of *Dasein*, whose basic state is its *being situated*, or in other words, its relationship with the world: being-in-the-world stresses the topological feature of *Dasein*, its being in a place, being situated. The situatedness [Malpass 2006] is a constant feature of *Dasein*: finding ourselves already in situatedness means finding ourselves gathered "there", as the German word *Da-sein* (being-*there*⁴) illuminates: «By its very nature, *Dasein* brings its 'there' along with it. If it lacks its 'there', it is not factually the entity which is essentially *Dasein*; indeed, it is not this entity at all. *Dasein* is its *disclosedness*, [...] '*Dasein* is its *disclosedness*', means

lecture *Platon: Sophistes* (Winter Semester 1924-25) are important pathways of Heidegger's understanding of the Aristotelian concepts *πάθη* (affects) and *διάθεσις* (disposition). On this topic see Hadjioannou 2013; Volpi 1984; Brogan 2005.

⁴ «To translate "Dasein" as "being-there", while it does mean that the sense of "here" that can be involved with "Da" is lost, nevertheless makes clear the way in which *Dasein* is indeed a mode of being that is characterized by its "there" – it is its *there* – although how this "there" is to be understood remains itself in question» [Malpass 2006, 50].

at the same time that the Being which is an issue for this entity in its very Being is to be its ‘there’» [Heidegger 1962, 171]. The situatedness is strictly related to the existence’s facticity and it manifests itself in us precisely through our own moods (*Stimmungen*): «In having a mood, *Dasein* is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be. ‘To be disclosed’ does not mean ‘to be known as this sort of thing’» [*ibid.*, 173].

Moods are not a kind of psychological state that we experience within a given world, rather they are a «background through which it is possible to encounter things in the ways that we do, as ‘there’, ‘not there’, ‘mattering’, ‘not mattering’, ‘for this’ or ‘for that’» [Ratcliffe 2010, 128]. Moods have neither an ‘internal’ nor an ‘external’ phenomenology: «A mood assails us. It comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside’, but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being. [...] The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something» [Heidegger 1962, 176]. A mood is a «background to all specifically directed intentional states. It is part of the structure of intentionality and is presupposed by the possibility of encountering anything in experience or thought» [Ratcliffe 2010, 128].⁵ Even though moods are considered to be psychological phenomena, Heidegger insists on the fact that psychology is not able to grasp the ontological importance of mood through the lens of an ontological perspective: «Having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and is not itself an inner condition [...]. It is in this that the *second* essential characteristic of states-of-mind shows itself. We have seen that the world, *Dasein*-with, and existence are *equiprimordially disclosed*; and state-of-mind is a basic existential species of their disclosedness, because this disclosedness itself is essentially Being-in-the-world» [Heidegger 1962, 176].

⁵ See also Ratcliffe 2009; 2013.

3. *Existential feelings and atmospheres in understanding affective disorders*

Heidegger's contribution in understanding one of the fundamental structures of existence is important not only in understanding why moods give access to the world, but also in exploring affective disorders, a field in psychiatric studies that is particularly problematic due primarily to four reasons that can be summarised as follows. Firstly, a historical one: for a long time, in the history of emotions the attention devoted to investigating affectivity was relegated toward elusive mental states, more than often reduced to either cognition or volition or simply ignored as epiphenomena; secondly, a methodological one: emotional theory still stresses the traditional introjection of feelings into an inner "psyche", separated from the body as well as from the world; thirdly, an epistemic one: theories that aim to investigate affectivity pay the price of Cartesian heritage, that is the mind-body problem that does not help us to comprehend how emotion can be perceived and felt through the body, a kind of split between these two "substances"; finally, an ontological one, that is affectivity itself, an umbrella term under which we can consider different manifestations of affectivity itself: moods, feelings, emotions, affects, passions, and so on. As pointed out by Thomas Fuchs,

affects are not mental states in the immanence of the subject that we project onto an otherwise indifferent sum of objects. Rather, they are modes of bodily attunement to, and engagement with, the lived world. It is only through our affectivity that we find ourselves in a meaningful environment in which persons and things matter for us, and in which we care for them as well as for ourselves. Affects are the very heart of our existence [Fuchs T. 2001, 613].

In the following, I will examine two categories of affectivity:⁶ these are existential feelings, and atmospheres; I will try to show how their changes can alter affective disorders and schizophrenia.

The expression of existential feelings as defined by Ratcliffe refers

⁶ For a detailed discussion of affectivity and interaffectivity, I refer the reader to Berrios 1985; Fuchs 2012; Fuchs 2013.

to «a group of feelings that are not directed at specific objects or states of affairs within the world [...] [but] constitute a sense of relatedness between self and world, which shapes all experience», in that «they give us a changeable sense of ‘reality’ and of ‘belonging to the world’» [Ratcliffe 2009a, 180]. Matthew Ratcliffe has been the first one to recognise that this group of feelings has been scarcely taken into consideration by philosophers, who on the contrary have focused on standard listed emotions, and to find their expression in literary narrative or in autobiographical accounts of psychiatric illness, instead of philosophical works. Moving from Heidegger’s ontology of moods, Ratcliffe develops his own idea around this group of feelings; usually they «suggest general existential orientations, in conjunction with feelings. Some are quite mundane, such as feeling ‘settled,’ ‘at home,’ or ‘part of things,’ whereas others, such as ‘feeling estranged from everything’, convey less frequent and sometimes pathological forms of experience» [*ibid.*, 181]. These expressions say something about an alteration in perceiving the sense of reality, which impacts subjectivity and interferes with intersubjectivity, particularly in cases of severe and major depression. Existential feelings are not intentional states with specific stimuli – such as being afraid of something, or being sad about something else – neither are they non-intentional feelings, rather they represent «an all-enveloping sense of reality and embeddedness within a shared world, a world that is presupposed by our more localized experiences and thoughts» [Sass & Ratcliffe 2017, 93]. According to Ratcliffe, existential feelings have a dynamic structure and are inseparable from their dispositions to act. Among this group of feelings there are also the feelings of freedom and openness, as well as the feelings of vulnerability or uneasiness, the feelings of certainty and familiarity as well as the feelings of estrangement, reality or surreal. The body is not perceived as an object of awareness, but as a medium through which one’s being-in-the world is experienced [Fuchs 2001]. Distortion of these feelings remain unnoticed, because they manifest themselves primarily in the way the world appears to the patient. As highlighted by Stephan and Slaby [Slaby & Stephan 2008], existential feelings can be divided into three groups: the first group is made up of elementary existential feelings (such as the feeling of being alive, of feeling oneself, at home in one’s body; the feeling of reality, the

feeling of meaningfulness) and normally they are unquestioned, even if this requisite is not valid in the case of psychopathological phenomena when these feelings are altered; the second group is composed of general existential feelings (i.e. feelings of being healthy, tired, satisfied or empty, in harmony or disharmony with oneself) and they are part of everyday experiences, as well as mental disorders; the third group is made up by social existential feelings (such as feeling at home in the world and with others, feeling welcome, familiar, or feeling like a stranger, distant, disconnected, rejected, or isolated); this last group of feelings is particularly important in describing depression or schizophrenia.

Another important category of affectivity is the affective atmospheres, aspects of subjective or intersubjective life expressed by a non-intentional relation. These are feelings that do not seem to refer to any distinct object at all; rather, they are a kind of tonality accompanying our situation in the world and they cannot be relating to anything in particular: «Atmospheres are indeterminate above all as regards their ontological status. We are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them. We are also unsure where they are. They seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze» [Böhme 1993,114]. Atmospheres are ineffable albeit their distinctive feature is that they arise in the space of *between* – between people, between people and situations, between a single person and things: they recall the Japanese concept of *aida*, a *being between* which originates the self [Kimura 1992].

Atmosphere is the intermediate space between the invisible and what lies behind. Atmospheres tell us that “you feel something in the air”: they are an unfinished quality that do not have a precise and determined object. Due to their ambiguous characterization, atmospheres can be defined also as an important element for collective and shared emotions and can affect with certain force and participation the emotional life of the subject. The word “atmosphere” recalls a broad series of sensations, moods and feelings that can be expressed, for example, through a particular kind of music, or through a certain way of painting, and or even literature and poetry. The aesthetic experience is the orig-

inal basis for this word, however they have also become an important element in expressing one's emotional life because of their indeterminacy and vagueness. It is precisely due to this vagueness that affective atmospheres unsettle the distinction between affect and emotion and manifest their bearing in affecting social dimension:

Affect with the impersonal and objective. Emotion with the personal and subjective. Invoking one or the other term has come to signal a basic orientation to the self, world and their interrelation [...]. Atmospheres do not fit neatly into either an analytical or pragmatic distinction between affect and emotion. They are indeterminate with regard to the distinction between the subjective and objective. They mix together narrative and signifying elements and nonnarrative and asignifying elements. And they are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal. On this account atmospheres are spatially discharged affective qualities that are autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with [Anderson 2009, 80].

Substantial modifications in existential feelings and affective atmospheres may impact affective disorders and schizophrenia. I would like to recall the role of “delusional atmospheres” in the manner in which Jaspers writes in his *General Psychopathology* as important example of these modifications. According to Jaspers, we can distinguish between ‘delusion proper’ from ‘delusion-like ideas’: the delusional belief is a secondary judgement that arises in the context of a more primary delusional experience, that is a non-specific shift in the person's relationship with the world. Jaspers describes the «delusional atmosphere» with these words:

Patients feel uncanny and that there is something suspicious afoot. Everything gets a new meaning. The environment is somehow different – not to a gross degree – perception is unaltered in itself but there is some change which envelops everything with a subtle, pervasive and strangely uncertain light. [...] Something seems in the air which the patient cannot account for, a distrustful, uncomfortable, uncanny tension invades him. [...] This gen-

eral delusional atmosphere with all its vagueness of content must be unbearable. Patients obviously suffer terribly under it and to reach some definite idea at last is like being relieved from some enormous burden [Jaspers 1997, 98].

Delusional atmosphere can be described as a particular kind of affective state which precedes the development of delusions and consists of a unique combination of perceived environmental changes such as anxiety, perplexity and foreboding. In the frame of delusional atmospheres, we face a shift in the general structure of experience that substantially modifies our sense of reality. Derealisation is certainly one aspect, and when combined with depersonalization experiences significantly affect the patient's existence. This can be found for example in the schizophrenia spectrum (but also in other conditions as well, e.g. cases of dissociative, anxiety, and mood disorders) as described below by this first-person report:

At the age of 37, I had a psychotic break, just 3 years short of a diagnosis of late-onset schizophrenia. [...] I now live with auditory hallucinations, formally classified as “outer space” hallucinations that I hear outside of myself and, for me, stem mostly from sounds in the environment. [...] I am disturbed by sounds, especially by the hypnotic resonance of motors and fans, for they carry with them the most persistent voices. These voices refer to themselves as the Wherewho. [...] Spaced out and terminally disconnected, I am not always able to focus even when trying my hardest. [...] I feel like a fraction of myself in stark contrast to how I felt [...] prior to the schizophrenia. [...] Though I am working again, I have a pervading sense of loss about my life. This illness has affected all aspects of how I perceive myself and how others perceive me. There's been a radical shift in my social interactions, family relations, and cognitive abilities [Watson 2015, 6-8].

Delusional atmospheres involve a transformed sense of general meaningfulness or significance and may produce an alteration in the dimension concerning the sense of continuity and predictability, for example the loss of the so called natural self-evidence [Blankenburg 1971]. De-

lusional atmosphere involves at least partial loss of a consensus reality, or vital contact, and thus erosion of a distinction between what is ‘part of the public world’ and what is ‘imagined by me’, as the personal story of Elyn Sacks tells us:

Schizophrenia rolls in like a slow fog, becoming imperceptibly thicker as time goes on. At first, the day is bright enough, the sky is clear, the sunlight warms your shoulders. But soon, you notice a haze beginning to gather around you, and the air feels not quite so warm. After a while, the sun is a dim lightbulb behind a heavy cloth. The horizon has vanished into a gray mist, and you feel a thick dampness in your lungs as you stand, cold and wet, in the afternoon dark. For me (and for many of us), the first evidence of that fog is a gradual deterioration of basic common-sense hygiene, what the mental health community calls “self-care skills” or “activities of daily living” [Sacks 2007, 35].

The atmosphere of the depressive and the manic worlds are described either as gloomy or, on the contrary, as abnormally bright; by contrast, schizophrenic persons are often described as manifesting ‘flat’ [Sass & Pienkos 2013]. There are a number of features of affective psychosis that bear striking resemblance to these ‘atmospheric’ changes that are often assumed to be specific to schizophrenia: paranoia, with its sense of being at the centre of a threatening or insinuating world, is especially common in mania but also in depression [Sass & Pienkos 2013]. The disruption of affectivity disturbs the sense of reality, as the story of Cindy, a schizophrenic patient, shows. Her mum to tell us her story:

Cindy has been living under the shadow of schizophrenia these past 17 years [...], she has been a patient at a State hospital for 11 years and was in and out of the hospital for 5 years before this “fog” (as she calls it) descended on her at the age of 20. [...] Cindy’s habits of daily living and personal grooming are very poor, though she sees a rhyme and a reason for the things she does. Taking a shower means just standing under the water, usually cold, and two pats with a towel and she’s dry. She enjoys using fingernail polish and lipstick but can do so only under supervision, as she likes to apply it to her nose and cheeks. There

are certain shoes that keep her legs thin and are worn for this purpose occasionally and keeping track of her glasses is really beyond her capabilities [Smith 1991, 689-691].

What emerges in considering how moods, existential feelings and atmospheres impact affectivity is not only a way to describe the narrative of people with affective disorders or schizophrenia, but also is an invitation for practitioners to consider how affectivity can also influence the therapeutic encounter in the delicate process of meaning making: by assessing psychopathological phenomena we face the *fragile understanding* [Costa *et al.* 2019] grounded in clinicians' own pathic pre-reflective experiences that are involved in the making process and participation of atmospheres in the frame of clinical encounter. Under this regard, the training of psychiatrists in this kind of understanding may have implications in the diagnostic realm, and in the therapeutic realm, namely by reinforcing the patient-doctor empathic relationship [*ibid.*].

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Keywords

Disposition; Heidegger; Moods; Atmospheres; Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the “pathic” dimension of existence, which is both the capacity of being affected and being situated within moods and atmospheres. The broader sphere it intends to pursue is to show how the “pathic” dimension of existence is related to psychopathology and clinical practice, such as affective disorders and schizophrenia. In reaching its aims, the paper will initially focus on key concepts in Martin Heidegger’s meditation, such as *Befindlichkeit*, a structure of existence that, rather to be a starting point in the context of Heidegger’s understanding of fundamental structures of *Dasein*, it is a stepping stone on his pathway toward phenomenology and its roots, precisely, into Heidegger’s relationship with Aristotle, a central point of his philosophical education. In a second moment, the paper will discuss how moods, existential feelings and atmospheres are of interest of psychopathology and it intends to provide a hermeneutical-phenomenological account for the role of affects in understanding affective disorders.

DISPOSITION

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