How phenomenology and existential hermeneutics can improve outreach from an ethical perspective

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I suggest to start with the idea that human being is:
– a being that has something in himself
– a being constantly in a research operandi,
– a being in research of himself, of this secret and mysterious part of himself
– a being constantly trying to become oneself,
Our task as human being is:

– To arouse, support and accelerate this process of development
– To let in this process into a narration
– What is playing out: the question of meaning
– To be homeless is an answer, may be inadequate, to a questioning
– Homelessness becomes an answer to a need: to go away of oneself
– Human being is a social animal (Aristotle)
– Since our childhood, we depend on others
– These relationships are not reducible to simple assistance and material caring
– The kind of contact with oneself is conditioned by the contact with others
– We need others to become oneself (theory of attachment)
But who is this other person?

- Sartre (1905-1980) thinks that human being develops his own consciousness only through the contact with another person.
- But the appearance of another person in my life is lived as a profound turmoil, because I am not anymore the master of the situation. **Someone thinks differently than me.**
- The experience of encounter becomes for Sartre a traumatic experience.
- I become an object, someone who is looked at and judged.
- The other decides of my value (“Hell is other people”), I could feel shame.
- There is no reciprocity, **the meeting is one way**
The point of view of Levinas (1906-1995)

- The other is not this one who judges me, but this one who asks me help and assistance
- The other is without protection and defence like the widow and orphan
- This is a request in front of which I cannot escape
- During the meeting, the other has priority on me
- The other breaks the unity of myself. Nothing is like before the advent of the other
- But, the opposite is also truth. The caregivers break the unity that the homeless has with oneself
- There is here also no reciprocity.
The case of Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)

- The experience of the other is an experience of reciprocity
- I am always with other people.
- It is this co-existence that allows the self-fulfillment of everyone
- Sometimes, this experience of reciprocity is impaired
The phenomenology of depression and schizophrenia

- We observe an impairment for interpersonal relatedness
  - The person feels separated from other people and the feeling of connectedness and mutual openness is diminished.
  - The world of the sufferer is closed with no possibility to change it meaningfully.
  - The world is impoverished (Toombs) or shrunk (Binswanger (1881-1966))
  - Time is shrinking with no future
  - Nothing matters so the world has no value. The world disappears, and with it the sufferer.
  - He does not exist anymore. Agamben \textit{(Homo sacer)} speaks of nudity. The person is excluded. She is in exile. I would add in exile of existence.
  - He is reduced to a biological live. Not anymore a citizen.
To be homeless

• According to phenomenology, to be homeless is to be without a world or with a reduced world
  – A world without language (or with a poverty of speech), mainly a world without an opportunity to speak, to be listened to, (and a world without silence).
  – People do not invest the world
  – They are only surfing on it
In this case, the interveners have to go out to meet other people.

- They would like to give to the sufferer an opportunity to get a world full of meaning, a world in which the sufferer can appear to himself and to others.
- The question is: to what extent can the interveners impose their presence facing indifference and hostility?
- The interveners are confronted with the limits of their commitment.
- They are caught between the respect of liberty and caring.
- They have concerns about consent, coercion, paternalistic attitude, social control (Williamson, 2002)
- It is extremely difficult to determine a course of action objectively.
The first step

- Consists in giving **unconditional hospitality** (Derrida 1930-2004)
- The goal: to arrive at the point of no regret to be born
- Hospitality becomes a battle against inhospitable environment that are the street, environment in which people fall in a void, a no man’s land
- The goal consists to transform a situation into a desire to live in spite of adversary
- But who give hospitality: the homeless or the care giver?
The second step

- What people need most: a human being “being there” for them
- Caregivers in “being there”, in “listening to”, create an opportunity for the people to deposit their lived experience, their being
- “Being there” and “listening to” become the condition in favor of a subjective appropriation
- The first two caring attitudes are attentiveness and openness to the other person that allow the sufferer to exist in his difference.
- By adopting this attitude of friendship the intervener helps change the world of the sufferer.
Change of being

- There is an effect (placebo effect). Just to know that somebody thinks and cares about me has a powerful effect on my life and my health.
- Ethics of care: to show that the other is important, being there for the other,
- To tame or to become accustomed to each other (St-Exupery: *The Little Prince*)
- Creating a good ambiance (humor), no agenda,
- Attentiveness and openness are processes that demand time.
- The first result is a change of being instead of a change of behavior, that is not always observable and measurable.
The third step

- Giving a house, the **house of language** in which people try to understand their life according their own experience
- “Language is the house of being” (Heidegger 1889-1976)
- Talking, listening and silence, i.e. speech, are the most essential part of language.
- Human beings dwell in language before anything else
- Language is the first housing for human beings
- It consists in **giving a voice** to people without voices
- It consists in letting the others speak according to his own words
- It means don’t speak according to a discourse that comes from medicine, psychiatry, psychology, etc.
- Speak according a discourse that is derived from lived experience
- In this case, the caregivers give a space for the advent of speech
The fourth step

- As care providers, our goal is to bring help for touching the catharsis point of life: **thinking about oneself**
- People are suffering because there is a lack of symbolization
- Because persons become themselves through symbolization, reflexivity
- The challenge consists to give meaning to something that has no meaning, or a poor meaning
Bioethics

- Traditionally, medical ethics has been heavily influenced by bioethics (Gastmans, 2013)
- According to this model, ethical problems are related to rights and responsibilities expressed through 4 principles: autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice
- Emphasizing on obligation and responsibility towards the patient, people do not recognize what are the stakes of the ethical process of making decision related to the relationship between a care provider and a care receiver.
Relational ethics

- Is a contemporary approach to ethics
- That situates ethical action explicitly in relationship (Austin, 2008)
- Is more than resolving ethical dilemmas through good moral reasoning
- It demands attentiveness and responsiveness to our commitments to one another
- It involves finding the fitting responses to our ethical questions
- Relational ethics supposes that the practice of ethics is always situated into relationships (Bergum, 2013).
- It is a process of reciprocity and interactivity that requires time and tact.
Fundamental ethics

Is a question:

How to live well with the desire to fulfill oneself and others according to the human condition

One of the meaning of ethics according to etymology is:

To live well

To dwell

The question: how to dwell with the world?
Questioning our world

- We live well with the world when we dwell in language
  - by interpreting what we are, our relationship with our own life, our family, our friends, with the care providers, etc.
  - by giving it a meaning to the point that the world becomes my own world
  - To appropriate his world, it is to make it his own, it is to be able to engage in this world
• Human being is essentially a being that thinks about his life and who deliberates in favor of a better life, a life fulfilled
  – In this case, a life fulfilled is not reduced to any idea of utility, but accomplishes itself through the mediation of significant activities
  – Intervening is to introduce oneself into the process of deliberation by **questioning the meaning of experience**
– The ideal consists of making that reflection and deliberation becoming a shared work, a common endeavor and a shared world (Gadamer 1900-2000).
– We become “we” (Binswanger: Wirheit)
– What unites us, is our reflection about the good life
– It is trying to see in human life other things than facts: ex. A diagnostic
– It is trying to see towards what this life, my life, your life is trying to open up
Be careful

- **Do not kill** meaning. To kill meaning is to kill a human being.
- **Do not manipulate** meaning. Meaning appears by itself. Don’t try too hard.
- **Do not instrumentalize** meaning. Meaning doesn’t serve to explicate our action, but to explicate our life.
- **Do not lie** about meaning. Be careful about false meaning or ideology.
– People we encounter are also ourselves
– We are sharing the same concern:
– Moving oneself through existence for the better
– People without home, are not only a social problem and a health problem,
– They are also a face (Levinas) who has a name, a story, a daily life, a complex soul and many dreams like us
– Homelessness like the others is not only a problem, it is also an enigma
• We have to remember that human beings has also a profound desire to be untied
  – To be homeless by choice: ex. Travelling, to be without responsibility, to be free of our time, etc.
  – So, it is not to be homeless that is a problem
  – It is the meaning we give to homelessness that makes a difference.
We can see it differently

– Because human being is an openness,
– A process of development
– Being homeless means only a rhythm slower in the process of development
The limits of dialogue

– Dialogue is not an easy thing
– There is tension, sometimes rupture
– Encounter another person is an adventure
– Like every adventure, it could finish badly
– There is a risk, but a beautiful risk
– It is the risk of liberty
Conclusion

– So the limit of commitment emerges from the interaction between the sufferer and the intervener.
– The minimal actions, doing small things, are the best ones and give limits to our commitment.
– We have to accept that it could require a lot of time