Gadamer and Healing

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Abstract: This study attempts to see that medical practitioners’ idea of healing is no longer the trend, healing can also be seen in the collective experiences of pain and suffering. To reconstitute this point, this will look over the traditional framework of psychotherapy in the realm of Freud and Adler. Additionally, this will describe the hermeneutic-phenomenologist perspective of Heidegger, a small part of Gadamer's idea of listening to the other, until such time that it will scrutinize Gadamer's idea of pain which is a hermeneutic stance to be open to the said experience that has already been forgotten in the history. That is to say, we forgot to understand and surmount the mystery of our death, our own finitude. Perhaps, the capacity to treasure and value this constant process of going through this pain is also a form of healing.

Keywords: healing, hermeneutics, death, finitude, philosophy, psychotherapy

1. Introduction

As psychiatrists, our work is about ‘making sense of experiences’ such as low mood, suicidality, voices, and paranoia as Bracken would point out.3 This response considerably manifests the focus of psychiatry in understanding the behavior of an individual based on the tools available to them like that of neuroscience, apparatuses, and other paraphernalia. This richness of scientific practice in psychiatry limits the diagnosis of patients and fails to recognize the philosophical groundings in administering psychiatry to patients. Indeed, mental health is arguably belonging to the natural sciences and yet the question is still the central concern nowadays. To show this point, an article in the New York Times had underscored the effectiveness of psychiatry through the intake of medication. Specifically, in the case of Dr. Levin, wherein “in a large part of changes in how much insurance will pay, no longer provides talk therapy, the form of psychiatry popularized by Sigmund Freud that dominated the profession for decades; instead, he presents medications and medication. Also, in place of 30-minute consultation to patients, it was overridden by a 15-minute consultation just because of giving a medicine already to patients for a simple and faster transaction. Isn’t it so alarming in the field of psychiatry since the ones being emphasized as talk therapy was gradually decreasing over time? To reconstitute this argument, many psychiatrists cannot be referred to as ‘real doctors’ unless their discipline is grounded in natural science.

Similarly, regarding the field of psychotherapy, it is characterized by a multiplicity of diverse theoretical approaches as well as is dominated by an ever-growing array of techniques to be used for specific therapeutic intervention. But then it fails to recognize that philosophical grounds determine the realities of life. This the reason why this paper contends that healing was no longer limited in healing patients in the field of scientific practice but it is to return to the hermeneutical analysis of pain in the context of one’s finitude. Specifically, as mortal beings, the challenge of pain and suffering awaits us. This challenging stance is not an unhelpful connotation to one’s life but it plays a vital role in what makes us human beings. That is, each day we are pressured to embrace the uncertainty of what life may bring to us, the mystery of death accordingly. To expound the main thesis of this paper, it identifies the traditional framework of psychotherapy, psychotherapy in hermeneutic-phenomenologist perspective of Heidegger, Gadamer’s hermeneutics and the idea of listening to the other, and Gadamer’s answer to healing in the context of finitude.

2. The Traditional Framework of Psychotherapy

The science of psychotherapy presumes that causal factors are influencing the human condition. That is to say, the connection between humans and the world follows a cause-and-effect pattern.4 Moreover, knowing that psychotherapy involves the investigative procedure, makes the said discipline cover the methods formulated by the sciences.5 To identify this, one should go over into the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. One major observation that influences him regarding this theory was his patients’ capacity to hypnosis; in this way, he merely told his patients to loosen up whatever comes to mind. With this, he believed that the unconscious mind is being forgotten. For this reason, several episodic situations happen to an individual when he was unable to share these feelings or emotions outside his mind. To show this, Myers as cited by Yunus has described that below the surface is the much larger unconscious region containing thoughts, wishes, feelings, and memories of which we are largely unaware, some of these thoughts he believed we store them temporarily in a

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preconscious area from which we can retrieve them at will into conscious awareness.\(^5\) As a result, when the unconscious states of the human condition are only stored in the mind, it will eventually slip out of one’s tongue and leads to a mood swing which can be seen as an outburst of anger.

Due to these emotional restraints, he theorized thisid, ego, and superego as the conflicting personality structure that is present to an individual. That is the id as the pleasure principle, the ego as the mediator principle between the qualms of the id and superego, and the superego which is the ideal principle.\(^6\)

On personal development, Freud considers erogenous zones as a factor to those pleasures of the id which does not lead to immediate gratification.\(^7\) That is an individual who experiences a form of fetish from one stage of their life until they reach puberty. In the explanation of Freud, when one is unable to overcome these pleasures, it will result in a negative habit when they reach their adult years. Take, for instance, in the case of the oral stage, when a child does not satisfy oneself in biting or sucking, the child redirects his attention to smoking and other forms of vice.

Unlike Freud, another psychotherapist in the view of Alfred Adler introduces a new theory in psychotherapy which was identified as individual psychology. This individual psychology lays its emphasis on one’s personal responsibility to seek for the good. That is to say, to recover from stressful patterns of the human condition. In the context of Boeree to magnify Adler’s theory, he underscores some questions like How does someone so sickly become so healthy, vigorous, and stressful? Why is it that some children sickly or not, thrive while others wither away? Or is it that something lays in each of us? These kinds of questions intrigued Adler and led him to develop his theory, called individual psychology.\(^8\)

Adler stated that the source of human striving is by way of inferior feelings where ‘to be a human being means to feel oneself as inferior.’ It is because this feeling is common to people; it is not a sign of weakness or inferiority.\(^9\) However, for Adler, it is different when one experiences an inferiority complex. From this condition, a person develops a poor opinion of himself, becomes helpless, and unable to cope with the demands of life. This has been derived from a person’s effort to counteract his body shape, or deficiencies resulting from spoiling or pampering as well as coming from neglect or rejection from parents. More than that, Adler connected being inferior to one’s sexual orientation as being feminine and masculine. For the reason that the two are in a constant struggle to fight for their weakness. On the part of women, it is because of their innate inferiority in their biological makeup while for men it is rooted in their connection to women. However, on the latter argument of Adler, being feminine or masculine does not relate to one’s biological makeup rather it is a result of a feeling of incompleteness that is followed after birth. Though, Adler has deemed inferiority as a condition that affects human life, the striving force of superiority is also another attempt experienced by man. But then, the strive for superiority does not categorize as an effort to dominate others rather it is a result to perfect oneself, to make oneself whole or complete. Striving for perfection is a natural tendency of man, and yet, there is this superiority complex that is greatly manifested when there is an exaggerated view of one’s abilities and accomplishments. That is to say, there is a kind of dominating feature that exasperates denigration to others.

As fashioned in the image of Adler which is in contrast to Freud it recognizes that each individual is a social being. Personalities are shaped by people’s unique environments, not by way of satisfying one’s biological needs. It is because Freud emphasized to a great extent the role of the unconscious drives in his theory particularly on the emphasis of sex. That is to say, Adler hypothesizes that the uniqueness of each person is one of the important elements to create and redirect one’s negative feelings or experience.

From the points of Freud and Adler, indeed it oversees those unique features of human existence like freedom, creativity, and self-relatedness. It is because there is already a certain classification to someone who experiences such abnormality or deficiency whether in the context of mental health or physical health. As a result, there is a need for philosophical undertones in understanding human behavior. For, the one-sided concentration on healing can generate a bias perception of reality. This philosophical viewpoint of psychotherapy can be seen in the hermeneutic-phenomenologist perspective.

**Psychotherapy in the Hermeneutic-Phenomenologist Perspective of Heidegger**

Existential phenomenology as mentioned by Wrathall gain its prominence in the 1950s to 1960s to characterize what is common to Heidegger, Sartre, or Merleau-Ponty. Starting with Heidegger, Wrathall believes Heidegger considers his work in analyzing existence.\(^10\) This analysis of existence centers its focus on a human being as something to be studied; for it was forgotten by the earlier philosophers to understand the nature of being. However, how come that we have a comprehension of what a being is all about?

Grossmann, a writer who interprets Heidegger, has put the meaning of being in an analogy.\(^11\) That is, to understand being, we must look at the kind of being which has understanding. To put it concisely, to understand being, we must first understand understanding. To understand

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understanding, we must first understand a being who has understanding and that is a human being. So, before understanding other beings in this world, one must first understand being. It is for the reason that the only being who shapes, influences, determines, and constitutes other entities in this world will no other than humans. However, it is not saying that one studies the nature of human understanding particularly the capability of a human mind. It is only trying to understand the network of ideas that makes being as such.

To further contextualize Heidegger’s point, he pointed out that the fundamental state of one’s existence is to be with the world. For, it is not already the Cartesian point of view of the abstract world as the most real. It is telling already that it is the concrete world that one experiences in real life. It is because it is the nature of human beings to be bounded by a complex of connections that makes up their world. That is, the world is part of who I am. But what is the deeper connection of this?

This deeper connection as stated by Grossmann through his argument on Heidegger lies in the idea that the relationship of humans into the world is grounded in the context of caring. A better translation for Heidegger would be ‘concern.’ It is not a concern that one only helps somebody out of pity. It is more than that; that is, you realize that this somebody experiences, feels, suffers, endures like yourself. In other words, a human is also a feeling being which is in contrast to the Aristotelian maxim that a human being is a rational animal.

Overall, what Heidegger is pointing out was a human being is intimately related to his world; the same is through as the world presents itself to a human being. That is a connection that gives shape to the everyday enterprise of life which again is manifested in his context of being-in-the-world.

What this hermeneutic-phenomenological standpoint of Heidegger is telling the people is that it is a tool for psychotherapy to understand therapeutic experience as a story-telling practice where complex narratives of the client are expressed and interpreted. In particular, as mentioned by Goolishian and Anderson, they pointed out that human beings are language-generating and meaning-generating systems and that the therapeutic system itself is linguistic. This means that the heart of counseling practice is centered on language, stories, and value generation. In other words, while human continuously experiences problematic situations, it is through narrative explanation of the experience, that the person cannot only be relieved rather he can have a sense of well-being by being attuned once more with his world.

Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Idea of Listening to the Other

Hermeneutics, in the realm of theology, is the science of interpretation, especially of scripture. Gadamer notes that the study of hermeneutics is of a different manner. Hermeneutics, for him, is of decisive openness to interpretation or understanding not only to my world but also to the other’s world. In that case, to see this point, one of his discussions through his Truth and Method had emphasized the difference of a horizon and to have a horizon to amplify this hermeneutic understanding.

Gadamer defends a human being is restrained through his vantage point and this can be situated on the concept of the horizon. This horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. However, in understanding, does it only end in having a particular vantage point? That is, how can one wholly perceive the world when he has a contracted understanding of his lived experience? Gadamer insists that one must have a horizon; specifically, to open up oneself to a larger picture of understanding. To that extent, he expanded the context of his narrow vision of the world. Applying it in a conversation, to get the narrative account of the other, one should listen to his horizon. It is because of the relentless effort of the other to open up himself to the I that he can completely realize the deeper situation of the other’s experience. Take, for instance, without initiation of conversation to the other, you are merely restricted with your first impression of the other. And yet, it does not end up with one session of conversation; it is more of a constant conversation to know the other’s actual self-identity.

This idea of openness to the other’s horizon can be equably maximized by Gadamer’s reiteration of the idea of transposing oneself to the other. It does not mean that you are going to leave yourself to be with the other. Transposing oneself to the other involves a higher form of particularity to the other. Meaning, you can put yourself on the shoe of the other to fully grasp his situation or to become conscious of the other’s self. It is because, for some time, we missed this idea that we are unconsciously affected by other’s presencing. If it is recounted in Gadamer’s line of thinking, “we are always affected, in hope and fear, by what is nearest to us…” That is, when we think of the world, it is curbed with our existence solitarily that we are only the one undergoing an array of anguish and suffering. And yet, we fail to imagine that there is somebody out there who has a more complex, rough, and horrible situation than us.

Gadamer continues his point by saying that in the intimate and reciprocal mode of conversation of one over another does not intend to reach an agreement. Knowing Gadamer’s perspective, “in a conversation, when we have discovered the other person’s standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him; so also, when someone thinks historically, he comes to understand the meaning of what has been handed down without necessarily agreeing with it or seeing himself in it.” In other words, each of you is evoked to form your arguments. This, at first, infers a dissonant viewpoint to lots of people. On a positive note, the more that you

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question each other’s views, the more you can heighten your insights. It is similar to a business meeting, when one can have the courage to voice out his thoughts, there is a greater chance of maximizing and clarifying the agenda. It is because most of the time in a group conversation, people are always imbibed with the point of conformity to the majority. Yet, a question arising from this view is that, is there a breadth of a deeper understanding of the agenda? In simpler words, understanding should always involve a matter of questioning not only to further maximize the view of ideas but also to defend the dynamic feature of the concept of understanding.

As similar to what Heidegger has postulated in the realm of psychotherapy, Gadamer has also stressed language as the guiding thread of the said process. That is, the verbal expression of the other in a therapeutic conversation can unfold the narrative context of his suffering. In light of this perspective, it is important to note the idea of transposing oneself to a person’s situation, to know and understand the other’s experience as well as the idea of questioning to see the other’s perspective. Applying these Gadamerian points when somebody experiences an inner void, there is this awareness that there is someone present, a therapist, for instance, who is willing to listen and be a helpful guide that this somebody can describe his sentiments and feelings to bring about a sense of meaning towards himself. That is, through this unifying power of narrativity of the other and the therapeutic idea of the therapist bears the idea of hope that one can go back to his healthy self over his senseless self. However, is there a deeper message of healing in this narrative expression of psychotherapy between the client and therapist? This can be further realized in the response of Gadamer to healing as referenced in the context of finitude.

Gadamer’s Therapeutic Answer to Healing in the Context of Finitude
If one wants to be exact then one should talk about demythologizing and thereby also of death, Gadamer says. That is, in defense of healing it endeavors to bring into consciousness the concept of death. It is because when confronted with death we are always alarmed and sensitive to its context and nature. In general, death was traditionally visioned as someone disappearing in town, a loss of loved ones due to illness or old age, as well as showing funeral processions. In the context of the now, it is found to be disturbing that death is equated to the prolongation of life which is in the guise of science and technology. The medication given by the doctor to his patients prevents a person to confront his suffering. This position suggests that when there is no immediate treatment as considered by the doctor, presumably death will be the potential consequence.

Isn’t it that death is the experience of the process of becoming human? This does not completely negate the previous argument; but then the more we are subjugated with this inevitable phenomenon, the more that we fail to recognize the aesthetic value of death. In the line of Hans Carrosa, ‘we do not hear the murmur of God’s song, we hear it only when it ceases.’ A wonderful line that tries to underscore the feeling of conquering one’s life and death experience even in the matters of conquering the burden of life. In the same way, Gadamer echoed, ‘there is a deeper connection between knowledge of death, the knowledge of one’s finitude, that is, the certainty that one day one must die, and, on the other hand, the almost imperious demand of not wanting to know, of not wanting to possess this sort of certain knowledge.’ That is, in our everyday encounter with the world, we are threatened to execute our personal goals and tasks as if it was the last time since we are mortal beings. With that, being identified as mortal beings, we are bounded by a set of deadlines, to be obligated in every possible way, in accomplishing our given tasks. Provided that we are consummated with an enormous task, we tend to overlook our finitude. On the contrary, even such preoccupation, we should be reminded that the clearest expression of life is to confront and surmount death.

Gadamer, in the same manner, has cited Aeschylus on his Prometheus Bound to show this tension of death. Going closely to this drama formulated by Aeschylus, it lays an effort to emphasize Prometheus as someone who brings forth fire and technology to human beings. And yet, Gadamer is more focused upon the idea that Prometheus has taken away the knowledge of human beings about their death. To reconstitute his view on this, he says, ‘Presumably, it is bound up with that inner connection already described between life and the repression of death that the knowledge that we must die remains almost veiled, even when, as mature adults, this knowledge has become established at the deepest inner level within us.’ While there is an idea of anxiety, there remains a possibility to be open to new and wide-ranging possibilities and to genuinely cope up with this anxiety of death.

Speaking of anxiety, anxiety does not connote the anthropological vocabulary of medical practice. In the realm of philosophy, this idea turns back to the philosophy of Schelling in his book On the Essence of Human Freedom. He accounted, ‘the anxiety of life drives the creature outside of its center.’ This assert however the use of the term ‘creature’ because he wants to delve deeper into the actual knowledge of death. And yet, it does not end there; since we are rational creatures that we concern ourselves with death. More so, despite translating anxiety to fear or to horror which can be derived from the Greek context, there is more to language to fully grasp what anxiety means. Anxiety is anxiety in the face of something, intentionality that directs an object to its frame of reference. Yet, we are still stuck to this point, what is anxiety all about?

Connecting anxiety, the ever-increasing phenomenon of science and technology greatly ensures the underlying principle of security among people. This is undeniably agreeable on the part of mastering themselves for the sake of their fields. That is, such mastery is intimately

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circumscribed with the impressive idea of science as the legitimization of facts. But, isn’t it that there remains beyond this point? For, in the milieu of neuro-psychiatry, indeed, they heal the patients to constant therapies and instruments; however, this anxiety is much concerned with the life that we as of now.

This intensification of the element of anxiety as commended in the search of security was not the main goal already as of the moment. That is, we build this conception of hope that due this idea of care, we seek to equate anxiety by preventive measures of the medical practitioners. If it can be put into an analogy, today due to the presence of continuous form of devoid and frustration, without hesitation we resorted into the various religions for us to block these unwanted feelings of negativity that life can bring us. To put it this way, we experience anxiety as a threat to mankind and as something even difficult to grasp.

This resonates however that with the advent of science, we transformed the concept of anxiety in their standardized norms and values. They linked illness to be always equated with health. Yet, these medical practitioners are unaware of the fact of asking patients what makes them unwell. This can be observed to some doctors who relate the symptoms to form their diagnosis right away, but isn’t it that several probing to be undergone for the hope of obtaining a proper diagnosis? In line with this, a matter of questioning poses the client to be conscious of itself and can freely express his point to the physician. It is because what has been recognized these days is that those patients who have the potential analysis of themselves to be unwell are believed to be admitted on a treatment. Isn’t it somewhat discriminatory on the part of the clients since it has provided a demarcation line to them for seeking medical assistance? It is as if it is already been deemed that when a symptom does not match the given illness then they are not qualified for such treatment.

What Gadamer suggests here is that the strategy of medical diagnosis cannot be responded to with research and questioning. That is to say, the only thing that can be adhered to is the pragmatic experience of the client; for he is the only individual who can know his suffering and that he needs to go with a professional therapist. From this momentary experience of suffering that he can accept the disposition of life in the face of anxiety. Particularly, to know anxiety is to grasp that we are being bounded by time and this time corresponds to the relationship of our suffering as beings impending toward death. However, to reflect on this birth cry of death wholly manifests the very moment of our emergence of the world to make sense out of it; it is not in such a way that it is meant to paralyze our everyday activity. The image of death opens up the fullest capacity of an individual to enrich himself as a means of being to the different phases of the world.

3. Conclusion

Psychotherapy, as well as psychiatry, occupies greatly the position of medical sciences which can be seen in the theories of Freud and Adler. This makes the conception of healing the patients’ experience of suffering a means to restore their physical well-being. In this manner, the methodic enterprise of psychiatric as well as psychotherapeutic practice treats the patient as an object of their practice. And yet it is not always the case; this struggle over the omission of pain is no longer the ultimate goal to attain such as that of ingesting medicines or undergoing surgical procedures to heal oneself. Alongside this careful model of scientific practice, it forgets the encounter of suffering as a significant factor in one’s life. It is because what has been implanted in one’s consciousness is the fundamental objective of overcoming suffering is in terms of the attainment of equilibrium and this can be expressed in the framework of a healthy body. This healthy body can be pictured out as a negation of any sort of sickness. However, how about the holistic view of looking at the concept of “health”? In a deeper sense, healthliness involves the striving force to be widely open to the possibility of disruptive elements of illnesses that can be linked closely to our finitude. This finitude represents the idea of our overlooked finiteness; the understanding that draws us closer to the uncertainty of our death. Perhaps, this uncertainty of our death enlarges the capacity of constantly embracing the surprising element of life that carries within it the components of inextricable pain and suffering. That is why Heidegger’s dictum on the language as the house of being is a necessary means that the self can express himself as well as others in the world especially for those who are crippled with health-related issues. On the part of Gadamer, due to his hermeneutical grounding, it extends the heart of philosophy as a pursuit of dialogue to understand the incomprehensible. In this way, psychiatrists and psychotherapists will not find a difficult time deciphering mental health problem, those people suffering from obsessive love, and so forth. That is, these medical practitioners withdraw from the point that they must diagnose something lacking to the patients but it is to see the patient as someone who analyzes himself that he is unwell and it is normal and acceptable to undergo such condition.

To add up to the Gadamerian viewpoint of healing, one should also be able to laugh throughout several adversities brought by life. It is not to laugh as if you are going to visualize life as a game; it is more of bearing courageously this anxious stance of pain. In the line of Gordon Allport’s statement, ‘so many tangles in life are ultimately hopeless that we have no appropriate sword other than laughter.’ It is for the reason that when one comes in face-to-face with pain, they implicitly ascribe fear as something that inhibits their life. To be precise, the concept of laughter is seemingly seen as a response to joy. But again, the notion of laughter constitutes within an involuntary reaction to the tension brought by life. It is as if it is an appropriate means to deal with the matters of hopelessness and frustrations. Another

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point of application to Gadamer’s context of finitude is in terms of those students’ refusal to be healed in relation for their experience of this online learning, one should be reminded of a constant communication to them. That is to say, we should never take it as a moment to stop inspiring and motivating students to reach their goals. It is because the notion of being the other enlivens within us. If we start to neglect them, what will happen to the future of our nation? No matter how hard it is to become a teacher-parent or a teacher-mentor, we should stick to our goal of instilling education to the younger generation and this is the mission of hermeneutics to inform but to be transformed also by the other.

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