

REVIEW

Of the dissertation of PhD student Edmund M Charley

**"THE PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS IN
THE LIGHT OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS ON MENTAL
HEALTH"**

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The dissertation of PhD student Edmund Charlie includes 164 pages of text (by Bulgarian standards), of which 20 pages cover the bibliography used by the author. It is structured in 4 chapters, accompanied by an introduction and a bibliography. In the fourth chapter, entitled "Conclusions", quite unconventionally, the goals and objectives set by the PhD student are also listed.

The introduction convincingly presents the relevance of the problem worldwide, as well as the historical changes in the approaches and methods of treatment of mental illness. The actuality of the topic is beyond doubt and to add that in our country psychiatrists and clinical psychologists face similar problems.

The first chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the idea of mental health, according to Gadamer's hermeneutics. In the introduction of this chapter for me, the most valuable is the inclusion of philosophical perspectives to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and hence the improvement of comprehensive treatment of patients with mental health problems. In addition, PhD student Charlie rightly notes the essential role of the environment in which people with impaired mental health live, without neglecting the specific individual symptoms.

The historical review shows a shift in emphasis from religious and paranormal explanations to medical, mainly neurological points of view. The scientific and philosophical aspects have attracted more attention to a more complex understanding of mental health, taking into account since Platon's time the separation of body and mind (psyche). Another important point emphasized

in the dissertation is that according to philosophical research, mental illness requires study in a broader framework with special attention to the social, cultural and personal factors that affect people's mental health. "This holistic approach to psychiatric illness recognizes the interplay of internal elements and environmental factors, providing a deeper understanding of the disease treatment and management techniques that produce results" (p. 142 of the dissertation).

The problem of the difficulties of psychiatry, related to the transition from psychological to clinical practices, in which the leading one is drug treatment, without taking into account the individual characteristics and difficulties of patients, is well outlined. A significant conclusion of the doctoral student is that philosophical points of view stress on the holistic understanding of factors in the relationships between stressful situations, the influence of society and previous experiences on the human mind, and the use the hermeneutic approach of Gadamer. This method is especially good because it emphasizes facilitating communication between patient and psychiatrist. Analyzing the verbal and nonverbal components in the interaction leads to the identification of the underlying problems.

The main objective of the study was to investigate how Gadamer's hermeneutics, which deviates from the typical emphasis of psychiatry on the brain, can provide a philosophical understanding of mental health problems. (p. 13 of the abstract). The specific purpose of the dissertation is to offer an alternative perspective on mental health issues while promoting empathy. The specific tasks are also indicated.

The scope of the philosophical study covers three main areas:

1. The occurrence and manifestation of psychiatric diseases with emphasis on philosophical interpretation through hermeneutical reasoning.
2. Mental health issues shall be addressed especially after the emergence and spread of COVID-19.
3. Establish alternative approaches to understanding and treating mental disorders using the hermeneutic approach.

A worrying statistic from a WHO report shows that mental disorders are a significant part of chronic diseases, affecting almost 50% of the population. It is about mental stress, tension and

anxiety. The PhD student again defends the need to conduct serious philosophical research using a hermeneutical strategy to revise the understanding of mental damage, especially in relation to the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 epidemic.

The theoretical basis of the research in the dissertation seeks to combine the theory of mind, Ricoeur's research and Gadamer's hermeneutics. In Fig. 1 the conceptual framework of the study for a psychotic disorder patient is presented (p. 44 of the dissertation).

Operationalized definitions are also presented in the dissertation. Some are quite famous, so I will mention only a part of them: psychotic patient, psychiatric disorder, client, dysfunction and hermeneutics.

The second chapter focuses on mental health analysis with the use of philosophical principles. The cyclical nature of the evolution of mental health is considered as a consequence of superstitious and mystical behaviors that differ from one community to another and in different eras.

Not a neglected problem is the hostility of existing psychiatric institutions, ethical issues and regulatory obstacles that delay the adoption of innovative therapy. In terms of psychiatric illness, in modern psychiatric treatment, mental illness is often seen as brain disorder, creating dilemmas for patients and health systems.

On the positive side, the philosophical view encourages multidisciplinary collaboration filling the knowledge gap between mental health and science concepts and ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of mental illness. Also the PhD student justifies the need for a comprehensive approach to prevention, diagnosis and therapy, given that genetic predispositions and environmental factors play an important role in triggering mental disorders.

The emergence of philosophical hermeneutics and Gadamer's idea of the fusion of horizons offers an important point of view that emphasizes the need to expand meaning by merging different views. This approach proved to be very adequate for interpreting people's experiences and creating original treatments for mental illness. The approach helps to create a deeper understanding of mental health by gathering experience from professionals in a variety of fields.

Game theory, quite popular in social psychology through the research of another researcher, Sveneus, emphasizes Gadamer's accents on restoring health through patients' perspectives,

emphasizing the importance of changing roles that is envisaged between doctors and patients. Specialists play the role of mediators in this game.

Based on citations of various studies, the serious conclusion is drawn about the need to restructure the health system in order to meet the needs of patients with mental illness. The use of conceptual frameworks provide insight into how the social, economic or cultural environment can contribute to mental health issues and influence patients' treatment decisions. Complex conceptual frameworks lead to complex ways of dealing constructively with mental health issues. On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenological research provides insights that identify the relationships between variables related to human experience and help close the gap between therapy and the impact of mental illness on society. At the end of chapter two, the examination of philosophical texts by three major researchers related to Gadamer's understandings is also not missed: Martin Heidegger; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel; Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Chapter Three takes an in-depth look at the effectiveness of the idea of mental health, according to Gadamer's hermeneutics. The problems that causes depressive periods leading to mistrust, and loneliness. The actuality of the topic is emphasized by the conclusion that the depressed person experiences a deep sense of alienation from the outside world, which breeds distrust of interpersonal interactions.

PhD student Charlie cites literature to point out that awareness of the complexities of depression is crucial. At the same time, many depressed people are able to hide their inner struggles and put on a happy mask to hide their inner pain.

Addicted to the philosophical understanding of mental disorders, the doctoral student highlights the benefits of Gadamer's philosophy which is based on the idea that reality changes and develops because of the continuous interaction between the individual and his experiences in the real world. The well-known in social psychology conclusion from empirical studies about the importance of emotions and values for understanding our surroundings related to cognitive, emotional and instinctive openness to the world is also highlighted. In my opinion, something particularly important is also taken into account, namely the role of self-reflection – how a person evaluates his/her actions and experiences.

A critical analysis of the idea of mental health according to Gadamer's hermeneutics questions the dominance of conventional techniques in terms of mental health. According to Gadamer's theoretical perspective, mental health problems involve more than just physical problems. According to it, there is a white spot in our knowledge since the prevailing scientific models cannot account for the complex, dynamic conceptual frameworks that characterize human experience.

According to the doctoral student's analysis, Gadamer's philosophy has another advantage. It shows the ethics in the dialogue between a psychiatrist or psychotherapist, extremely essential for the healing process, as well as for the continuation of mental health therapy during the rehabilitation process.

Chapter Four "Conclusion" in the abstract for some reason begins with goals and objectives. The general findings also address the issue of drug companies' interaction with psychiatrists in their efforts for further research to improve the way mental illness is treated. The focus shifts to cognitive functioning and traumatic experiences. Since then in the treatment, philosophical ideas are also included in treatment of mental disorders. Besides Gadamer, other famous philosophers such as Heidegger, Hegel, and Merleau-Ponti provided unique philosophical perspectives on understanding mental illness.

The doctoral student's theoretical study highlights the shortcomings of conventional techniques and proposes philosophical methods to be used instead, with an emphasis on the perspective of Gadamer's hermeneutics for establishing the origin and treatment of mental illness.

The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation. With regard to publications on the topic, the PhD student presents three articles. I accept the five contributing points written by Ph.D. student Charlie that are theoretical with the possibility of application in research practice and treatment of mental health problems related to the big topic of mental health.

Critical remarks:

1. Very fragmented content, with paragraphs with 10, 11 subparagraphs, containing only few sentences, written on one and the same page, but exported and numbered in the table of contents.

2. Quite a few repetitions of the same ideas at different places in the dissertation. There is also ambiguity in terminology. For example in terms: mental, psychological, psychic and psychiatric problems.

3. Doctoral Theses by law are subject to certain requirements. There is no freedom as there is in a preparation of a monograph. That is why I will mention some technical problems: spacing between lines, numbering of the introduction and the final conclusions as chapters of the dissertation, non-alignment on the right, and in the English text of the dissertation and of the abstract paragraphs start as is the case with the use of Bulgarian language. In English language the requirement is that they are aligned at the beginning.

Questions:

1. Can a PhD student Charley formulate in one or two sentence his thesis that he defends in the dissertation?
2. What is the personal motivation of the doctoral student to choose especially this topic for his dissertation?

CONCLUSION

The dissertation topic: "The philosophical understanding of psychiatric disorders in the light of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics on mental health" was developed on a theoretical level. The application of the results obtained could contribute in Bulgarian psychiatric practice so that medical doctors to get a better understanding, study and treatment of people with mental health problems. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation. My notes do not diminish the work and achievements of the doctoral student. All this forms my opinion that the dissertation satisfies the requirements of the Bulgarian law for degrees and titles. That is why I suggest to the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Edmund Charlie.

Date:

Signature: