

Traumatic Brain Injury as Death,
and the Nature of
Reengagement With Society

A Perspective on Therapeutic Approaches

James T. Brown, M.A.

Traumatic Brain Injury as Death

Goal / Application of Presentation:

- To understand that traumatic brain injury provides particularly good insight to death / significant disconnection from society.
- To better tailor psychological and therapeutic approaches to cases involving traumatic brain injury.

Bio

- Traumatic Brain Injury Survivor, 1992
- M.A. Philosophy, University of Illinois, 2010
 - Teacher of Philosophy
- Continuing Graduate Studies, University of New Mexico
- Published Paper - *Traumatic Brain Injury as Phenomenological Death*
Global Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2017
- Presented Paper - *Traumatic Brain Injury Calls For An Expanded Metaphysics* - Southwest Conference of Continental Philosophy, 2018
- Board of Directors, Brain Injury Alliance of New Mexico

Bio, Pre-TBI

- Newly Married – Recent Move from Colorado to California
- Law Student, Pepperdine University
- Strange Symptoms – Tumor Diagnosis
- Assurance of Simple Removal – My Belief that this was a “Speed Bump”
 - “Plucking a pickle out of a jar.”
 - Easy, back to law school in a month



Bio – TBI

- More Complicated Tumor Removal Than I Was Led to Believe
- Severe Bleeding in Brain
- Survival, Two month coma, Intensive Care
- Four Month Hospitalization, Extensive Rehabilitation
- Inability to Return to Law School
- Physical Disability
- Cognitive Acuity Remained
- SITBI – Refers to this particular situation
 - But commonalities can be drawn



Basic Concepts of Philosophy

- Philosophy analyzes what it means to be human
 - This changes in brain injury
- **Metaphysics** – The nature of reality
- **Epistemology** – The nature of knowledge

Phenomenology – Branch of Philosophy

- **Phenomenology** is the **study of experience** and **how we experience**.
- **Phenomenology** is a **method of philosophical inquiry**, in which **reality** consists of objects and events ("**phenomena**") as they are **perceived** or understood in the **human consciousness**...

The Basics of Philosophy

https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_phenomenology.html

- Phenomenology affects the nature of reality (metaphysics), and the nature of knowledge (epistemology).

Phenomenology - Application

- Developed largely by the German philosopher **Martin Heidegger**
- Largely applicable to psychology and brain injury
 - Martin Heidegger's phenomenology provides methodological guidance for qualitative researchers seeking to explicate the lived experience of study participants.
 - Methodological Guidance – Begs the question:
“What is human ‘being’?”

Human “Being”

- **Phenomenology** is the **study of experience** and **how we experience**.
 - Phenomena - Our lived experience
- Each human is unique - Has different lived experience
- Heidegger - Defines what is fundamentally a part of all humans
 - By examining this, we are able to discern the effects of phenomena

Human “Being” - Thrownness

- A human being finds itself with characteristics that shape its engagement with the world.
 - So-Foundedness – A human is “thrown” into the world – The human has particular talents, desires, abilities...
 - Interested in law, good at academics, a husband, likes outdoor activities...
 - These characteristics are not chosen by the human, but rather are the factual situation the human finds itself in.
 - Interested in law, good at academics, a husband, likes outdoor activities...

Human “Being” - Mood

- A human being has a particular way of being “attuned” to the world. (How the human is aware of the world it lives in)
- Dispositions, aims, desires, skills, and particular ways of making sense of the world.
- Particular Mood – Anxiety –The human being is aware that s/he is an individual, separated from all other individuals.

TBI – Rethrownness

- A human being finds itself with characteristics that shape its engagement with the world.
 - Rethrown / Characterized by TBI
 - Interested in authenticity, philosophy and academics, an individual, a dog owner...
 - **There are some similarities - As I am “familiar” with my former self**
 - **All in a Much Different Way**

TBI - Radical Anxiety

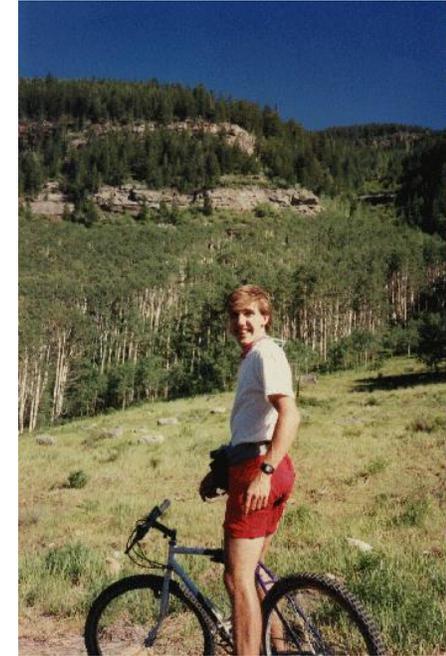
- Heidegger's Anxiety on Steroids
 - Survivors have been accustomed to a certain role in society, and have been "recast" to a different role within the same society.

Death Defined

- Traditional Concept of Death - Demise
 - Physiological Termination
 - Global Collapse of “Projects”
- Phenomenological Death
 - Global Collapse of “Projects”
 - One must live through this death – to witness this “global collapse”
 - SITBI - Fits Here

Pre-TBI – Life “Projects”

- Newly Married – Recent Move from Colorado to California
- Law Student, Pepperdine University
- Physically Active
- Pre-Professional Life
 - Future as a Professional
 - Activities
 - Friends



Post-TBI – Life “Projects”

- Intentionality – Disappeared in favor of a reactive existence
 - Sudden dependence
- Fundamental Change in Marriage Relationship
 - No longer a traditional husband, but now a recipient of care
- Very Ill-Equipped for Parenthood
- Physical Change
 - No longer able to participate in many physical activities I enjoyed
 - Part of my enjoyment stemmed from the way I was able to participate in activities
- Pre-Professional activities / friendships ended
- 15 Year Period of Finding Direction – 1992-2007

Current – Life “Projects”

- M.A. Philosophy
- Teacher of College Philosophy
- Father of a 20-year-old Daughter
- Research / Writing of Philosophy
- Brain Injury Alliance of NM – Board Member – Head of Web / IT

TBI - Rethrownness – Radical Anxiety

- Thrownness – Life “Projects” - First 24 years of life
 - Rethrownness – Post-TBI
- Heideggerian Anxiety - First 24 years of life
 - Radical Anxiety - Post-TBI

A Better therapeutic approach

- Global Collapse of “Projects” – A survivor of TBI has “Died”.
 - They have witnessed their life as they knew it collapse
- Futile to talk as if a survivor is going to “Get back to their previous self”
- Therapeutic approach:
 - Phenomenology / Existential Psychology