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

A Perspective on Therapeutic Approaches

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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
• 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](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

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