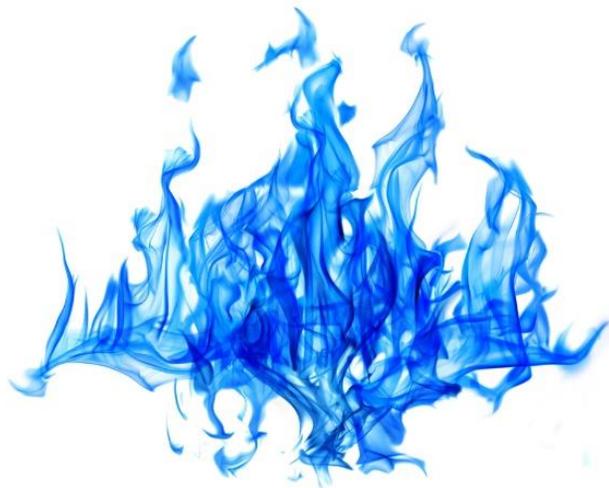


PHILOSOPHY AND THERAPY OF EXISTENCE

Perspectives in Existential Analysis



ANDERS DRÆBY SØRENSEN

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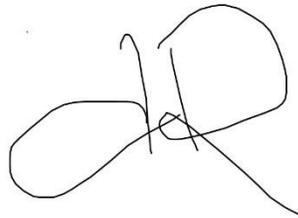
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Introduction

This volume explores the interface of philosophy and existential therapy from six different theoretical perspectives. In this sense, the book focus on applied philosophy or philosophical therapy. Thus, the main conclusion from the book is that existential therapy is a philosophy and therapy of existence rather than a kind of psychotherapy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long tail stroke extending to the right.

Anders Dræby Sørensen

Negative Sociality

An Existential Study of Relational Alienation and Conflict in Jean-Paul Sartre and Ronald Laing

Introduction

In the tradition of Søren Kierkegaard, the central focus of existential theory is widely regarded as the subjectivity of the concrete and unique individual, assigning a subordinate status to social issues. This paper will help to rectify this situation by introducing the concept of *negative sociality* as an analytical prism to study the problematization of *relational alienation* and *conflict* in Jean-Paul Sartre and Ronald D. Laing. Using this concept makes it possible to examine *how Sartre and Laing elucidate the fundamental connection between human sociality and subjectivity*. To make sense of the concept, I will related it to the ideas of sociality in Martin Heidegger and Martin Buber.

Sociality to Heidegger and Buber

Sociality is as an explicit issue to Heidegger and Buber, who both turn against the tendency towards *solipsism* within the tradition of *subject-philosophy* from Descartes to Kant. Essentially, this solipsism involves that philosophy only takes the existence of the self and not the existence of the other seriously, because there is no necessary link between the subject and other subjects or objects. According to René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, I must understand the other person from my own self, which tends to make the other an alien, since my knowledge the other is firmly rooted in the content of my subjective consciousness (Descartes 1998; Kant 1999).

In 'Being and Time', Heidegger rejects the notion of the isolated subject by examining the ontological structure of human being as a *Dasein* (Being-there) that is always already *in* the world. Furthermore, Heidegger rejects the ontological separation between self and other by stating that *Dasein* exists as *Mitsein*, a Being-with others, as part of its Being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1996:118). Hereby, Heidegger only examines sociality as an essential feature of individual existence and not in itself (Schatzki 2008:233). However, since human beings exist in a primary coexistence with other human beings, one does not experience those *others* as alien beings from whom one distinguishes oneself. This ontological sociality is conditioned by *Dasein's* responsibility for its own existence as possibility. *Dasein* can exist as *inauthentic* Being-with and loose itself in the *they* that is characterized by common impersonal relationships (Heidegger 1996: §29). *Dasein* can also exist as *authentic* Being-with in genuine relationships, which requires that *Dasein* is brought back from the they to

realize its own Being-towards-death. Since death exclusively belongs to the *jemeinigen* Dasein, human being realizes its authenticity in “solitude rather than in negative sociality” (Manning 1993:53), and authentic sociality is therefore mediated by a sort of existential solidity.

Similarly, in ‘I and Thou’ Buber Buber rejects the ontological separation between self and other by describing the basis of existence as a two-fold *interaction* between human beings and the world that furthermore can be separated into two kinds of *attitudes*. The secondary *I-It* attitude is the origin of the subject-experience in Descartes and Kant and represents a depersonalized sociality characterized by *distance* between the self (ego) and other beings (Levinas 2008:15; Buber 2004:30). The primary *I-Thou* relationship is a *mutual* one that takes place as a *meeting* between people as persons with a whole existence and it involves *love*. This true encounter represents personalized sociality and it resemble the authentic relationship in Heidegger’s theory. However, personal existence does not derive from a relation to one’s own Being-towards-death. Rather, personal existence involves an including relationship with the other as part of a *dialogical subjectivity* (Ibid: 28).

Both Heidegger and Buber describe human being as constantly having to oscillate between two modes of sociality that they tend to conceive as ontologically neutral. However, Buber also explains modernity as containing an ontological crisis. Thus, modernity involves a movement from loving I-Thou modes of involvement to instrumental I-It ways of interrelating and in Buber there is a strong tendency towards an ethical understanding of the I-Thou attitude as more positive.

Sartre and the Look

The first and second part of Sartre’s ontological elucidation of human existence in ‘Being and Nothingness’ involves a distinction between two related realms of being: (1) the being of phenomena (*being-in-itself*), (2) and the human being of consciousness (*being-for-itself*). Fundamentally, this being-for-itself is *freedom* that is *nothingness* and as such transcendent negation of being.

To reject solipsism, Sartre also introduces *being-for-others* as a third ontological category, accounting for a further aspect of human subjectivity. Originally, the other is not revealed to me as an object but as a free subject who makes me aware of my own objectiveness as potentially being seen through the others *look* as an object (Sartre 2008:280). Thereby, this existence of the other-as-subject is revealed to me as *certain* (ibid:302).

Through the look, the other-as-subject reveals me to myself as having a *self* that is myself, and unlike in Descartes and Kant I cannot deduce this experience of *me* from my own consciousness. Rather, the experience is derived from an essential modification of my consciousness by the others gaze (ibid:262). Thus, unlike Buber, I do not become a whole

person but a modified existence through the encounter with the other person. Furthermore, against Heidegger's conception of Being-with, this encounter involves alienation through:

...a negation which posits the original distinction between the Other and myself as being such that it determines me by means of the Other and determines the Other by means of me (ibid:315)

The encounter with the other reveals that the relationship between me and the other person is internal and not external. However, my encounter with the other is one of negation of myself. It does not only give me an experience of the other as an inapprehensible alien but also of me as an outside that I am partly alienated from because it is not totally under my understanding or control: The "other does not constitute me as an object for myself but for him" (ibid:275). In other words, I become aware of the other-as-a-subject with a freedom that is not my transcending my own transcendence in a way that I am defenseless. To a certain extent my being-for-others is inapprehensible to me and it negates my capacity to freely interpret myself and though my encounter with the other constitutes possibilities to me those are alienated possibilities (ibid:263).

To Sartre, sociality essentially seems to be a matter of restricted freedom establishing an awareness of alienation. I can overcome this transcendence of transcendence by relating to the other as a subject to an object, almost as in Buber's I-it relationship, and thereby reduce him: I can transcend the other's transcendence in turn and my former objectifier becomes the object. Consequently, all human relations can be perceived from a fundamental dialectic of domination, in which my being-for-others is matter of domination and subordination (ibid: 386). Thus, unlike Heidegger and Buber, to Sartre the being-for-itself is profoundly alone and initially he does not leave possibility for two subjectivities to engage fully in a mutual encounter:

It is therefore useless for human reality to seek to get out of this dilemma: one must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him. The essence of the relations between consciousness is not the *Mitsein*; it is conflict (ibid:429)

Against Heidegger and Buber, the original meaning of being-for-others is *conflict* and sociality is fundamentally negative. In his play 'No exit', Sartre likewise states that "hell is other people" (Sartre 1955:47), and whereas Buber described love as an expression of a true encounter, to Sartre the project of love is fundamentally one of possessing the freedom and subjectivity of the beloved one (Sartre 2008:387-392). However, according to Sartre, I can seek to transcend the experience of social alienation and self-alienation by choosing myself authentically as freedom. By doing that, I set the freedom of others as a goal, which opens the possibility for genuine relationships (Sartre 2007:62), although Sartre fails to

make a full elucidation of the character of this relationship. Thus, firstly Sartre almost resemble Buber by describing how I become myself through interrelatedness, even though this is a negative mode of relating that modifies me. Secondly, Sartre rather resemble Heidegger by describing how I become an authentic self, capable of genuine sociality, through an individual instead of an intersubjective process.

Laing and the Threat of the Other

While Sartre describes how we are objects of others' look and how that make us feel exposed and imprisoned, in 'The Divided Self' Laing investigates a similar experience in order to understand the subjectivity of schizophrenic persons. Both Sartre and Laing grasp their approach as existential phenomenology, but Laing's ambition is therapeutic rather than philosophical.

Like Sartre, Laing outlines the paradox that all human beings are at the same time separate from and related to other human beings as an essential part of their existence and, against Heidegger and Buber, that we are somehow alone because no other person is a "necessary part of our being" (Laing 1990a:26). Quite similar to Sartre, Laing also makes a distinction between one's *being-for-oneself* and one's *being-for-the-other* and states that in any human relationship, the other is the object of intentionality for the own persons subjectivity.

This also applies within orthodox psychiatry, which experiences the patient through a technical "vocabulary of denigration" as a "*failure of adjustment*" (ibid:27). With the words of Sartre, the psychiatrist is thus involved in a transcendence of the patient's transcendence by avoiding "thinking in terms of freedom, choice and responsibility" (ibid:27) and relating to the other as a subject to an object, that is only comprehensible within the prejudging language of the subject (ibid:38). Consequently, the relationship is a conflictual one of possession and alienation that creates the same division between consciousness and behavior involved in the schizophrenic experience.

From an alternative position of love, the existential phenomenologist must leave his own world to learn how the patient experiences his world and himself in it. To do this, he must reorient himself towards a radical different way of being without prejudging the patient. Furthermore, Laing bears more resemblance to Buber than Sartre by opening the possibility for a close encounter if the schizophrenic meets someone "by whom he feels understood" (ibid: 165; Laing 1990b:39). Yet, opposite Buber, Sartre fails to provide a full elucidation of this interrelatedness.

Apart from this, Laing gets close to Sartre's description of the look, when he uncovers the schizoid as a person who:

...feels both more exposed, more vulnerable to others than we do, and more isolated (Laing 1990a:37)

Rather than being a meaningless failure, schizophrenia is understandable as an existential strategy that a person invents to live in a situation with unlivable external pressure. Schizophrenia arises in situations where the schizoid person is lacking *ontological security*, and this makes everyday living a perpetual threat to the person's self (ibid:42). As part of his insecurity, the schizoid person experiences sociality as a threatening reality, generating different types of anxiety. Thus, the person experience sociality as a negative dimension of existence: According to Laing, *engulfment* refers to a dread of losing one's identity by interaction with others, and the person either gets involved in a constant battle or seeks isolation in order to avoid being absorbed by others. *Petrification* refers to the dread of being depersonalized as an object by the others look and turned into stone, and the only way to avoid this threat is to depersonalize the other by turning him into an object first (ibid:43-51). The resemblance to Sartre's theory of being-for-others as a conflict regarding freedom is striking, although Laing only wishes to describe schizoid and not ordinary experience. This covers the fact that Sartre seeks to explore the ontological dimensions of sociality, while Laing rather wishes to explore its practical implications to certain people.

To Sartre, I become a myself through interaction with others, and Laing likewise describes how the schizoid person forms a false self-system by means of social interaction: The problem of being-for-others is analyzed as multiple self-systems that are established by identification of the self with the fantasy of the persons by whom one is seen (ibid:117). While Sartre made sociality involve a kind of alienation from the self, Laing thus describes how sociality might lead individuals to a division between a "true" inner being-for-one-self without relations to others and an outer alienated false being-for-the-other involved in meaningless relatedness.

'The Divided Self' primarily examines psychiatry as involved in a negative relation between psychiatrist and patient as well as schizophrenia as a subjective experience that occurs in relation to a negative conception of sociality. In his later work, Laing tries to explore schizophrenia as caused by negative social patterns between the schizophrenic and others (Laing 1990b:93). Thus, the negative perception of the connection between sociality and subjectivity is present throughout Laing's writings and to a certain extent the point to Sartre.

Conclusion

The concept of negative sociality has made it possible to distinguish between the perception of sociality in Buber and Heidegger on one side and in Sartre and Laing on the other side.

They all reject solipsism by examining sociality as fundamental aspect of human subjectivity. However, whereas Buber and Heidegger perceive this sociality in a neutral or positive way, Sartre and Laing initially perceive it in a negative way as fundamentally being a matter of alienation and conflict. We establish our socialized subjectivity through negative relation to others.

There are variations in the projects of Sartre and Laing, and whereas Sartre sees conflict and alienation as general conditions of existence, Laing only examines the implications of negative sociality to certain people. However, from these diverse positions they each provide an option for the individual to transcend negative sociality through either an authentic choice or a true encounter and then engage in genuine relationships like the ones described by Heidegger and Buber. Sartre and Laing positively widen the existential approach to human reality by exploring the negative dimensions of sociality that are not properly covered within Heidegger's and Buber's attempts to transgress the existential isolation of solipsism. However, in order to present an appropriate existential theory of the phenomenon of negative sociality they both fail to provide a comprehensive elucidation of the positive forms of sociality and interventions.

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Existential Teleology and Ethics

From Aristotle to Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmy van Deurzen and Michel Foucault

Introduction

Since the 1980's, parts of philosophy has taken an interest in the revitalization of the ancient Greek teleological ethics as a response to the inability of modern moral philosophy – since Kant – to set concrete goals for life (Foucault 1997; MacIntyre 1997; Nussbaum 1993; Nussbaum 2001). The question of the good life was significant to ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy, but it has vanished from modern academic philosophy. Now the sciences and social institutions answer the questions of how to live and what the goal and purpose of life are, but they reduce the good life to a technological issue. Even though modern academic philosophy does not take an interest in the good life, the existential tradition has reflected on human life and living since the middle of the 19th Century. In this chapter, I will examine whether the existential tradition implies a teleological conception of the content and direction of the good life that can form an alternative basis for modern ethics. Based on an examination of Aristotle's ethics and the ethics of the technological age, I will therefore outline the implicit teleological ethics in Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmy van Deurzen and Michel Foucault.

From Aristotelian ethics to the ethics of the technological age
Philosophers and historians usually regard Aristotle's ethics as one of the best representatives of ancient Greek ethics. Aristotle's ethical approach base on a strong version of *teleology*. Teleology is an explanation for a phenomenon in function of its end or goal (Aristotle 1994: 1095a). Aristotle explains the end or goal (*causa finalis*) of human existence as human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Human beings achieve flourishing through a balanced use of human reason in everyday living as well as through the contemplation of universal harmony. According to Aristotle, the essence of human being is *reason*, and through the balanced use of reason in daily life, human being can cultivate a number of virtues and *bring forth* its substantial and universal form, which is already potentially present in the individual.

According to Heidegger, this bringing-forth is a concealment of something into unconcealment, which makes it appear as it is in itself (Heidegger 1977). Bringing-forth is essential to the teleological reason of ancient Greece philosophy, and Heidegger states that it differs from the *challenging* that rules in modern technology as a dominant way of revealing Being in modern times (Heidegger 1977: 14). Through this technological revealing, the human beings of modernity position themselves in the middle of the world and assume dominion over everything, including themselves. Thus, things and human beings only have meaning by becoming available as resources that are under control.

The revealing of modern technology contains the ethical belief that life is only significant and has quality in its readiness for use as a resource. This idea reflects in everything from human resource thinking in modern organizational theory to the notion that the goal of individual life is to develop skills and potentials and become a success through performance and achievements.

Foucault launched the equivalent term of *bio-power* to describe a form of power that takes human life as an issue, and this form of power emerges in the 19th Century (Foucault 1996: Ch. 5). In the 20th and 21st century, this power over life spreads, and the state and the individual human being become preoccupied with optimizing life (Rose 2006). Within this horizon, human beings conceive life as the essence of their Being, involving an essential functionality of life. Thus, the good life is perceived as a functional resource, grasped through terms such as quality of life, health and normality.

Vague teleology of authenticity: Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre

The existential tradition involves a rejection of the strong versions of teleology, viewing human nature as having an essence that defines the true end of human being (MacIntyre 1997: 54). However, the philosophy of Kierkegaard might be said to involve a vague teleology, because it conceives human existence as a process of *freedom* that involves certain choices as a condition for the goal of an authentic *coming into existence*. Furthermore, Kierkegaard describes this coming into existence as a dialectical progression of three *stages* on the way of life that involves different existential states. However, since this progression is wholly dependent on individual choice, it is also possible to live an unreal inauthentic life, where one does not come into existence and become oneself.

To live according to the ethics of the technological age is an expression of inauthenticity in the first stage of this process of self-realization. Kierkegaard describes this stage as involving the philistine and the aesthetic form of life. The philistine has an unreflective lifestyle and he or she just lives from a mainstream consciousness according to the norms and values that exist in society. The aesthetic lives with a multitude of possibilities and desires sensual goals that are external to the self and might provide empty experiences of success (Kierkegaard 1964: XXVIII, 153; 1988: 192). However, to exist in truth means that one enters the ethical stage by stepping out from the crowd and making a choice between the opportunities one faces, whereby one can find one's own vocation. Unlike the ethics of technology, this process is not about self-realization as performance and achievement but about finding oneself. Yet, the ethical stage contains the same anthropocentrism as the technological way of being. According to Kierkegaard, one cannot become truly oneself only by oneself. In the religious stage, one must go beyond human reason and open oneself to God by a leap into faith (Kierkegaard 1964: XXVI, 124): To achieve the highest existential stage involves transgressing the human, instead of pursuing the goals that human culture, technology or reason gives.

The idea of an authentic orientation in life as a goal of existence is a recurring theme in the existential tradition and found in Sartre's writings.

Sartre transformed Kierkegaard's ideas about the existential process of freedom into a secular theory of human being as an indefinite being that has no original essence but must create itself through choices. Thus, in 'Being and Nothingness', Sartre makes a distinction between the being of phenomena (*being-in-itself*) and the human being of consciousness (*being-for-itself*) (Sartre 2008: xii-xiii). The defining characteristic of being-for-itself is *freedom* and according to Sartre, this freedom equivalent to *nothingness* and as such transcendent negation of being. Being-for-itself is conscious of itself, and following Sartre, the consciousness of freedom involves the recognition by the Self of the responsibility of making choices and the discovery of facing nothingness in the past and the future. The consciousness of freedom is so anxiety provoking that the individual tends to direct negations towards itself as an attempt to avoid facing anxiety. This self-deceiving flight from anguish towards reassuring beliefs is an attitude that Sartre calls *bad faith* (ibid: 29, 49). Thus, through bad faith we seek to hide the truth from ourselves and escape the responsibility for making free choices by making our selves passive subjects of external forces or an inner essence. In an effort to deepen his conception of human freedom, Sartre describes how every human choice must be:

... explained within the perspective of a larger choice in which it would be integrated as a secondary structure (ibid: 455)

Thus, in order to ground itself, the individual self needs existential 'projects', which must be based in his or her choice of a fundamental project. This 'life project' constitutes a person's totality by expressing his or her fundamental attitude to life (ibid: 570). Sartre elaborates how this project involves the fundamental freedom of the Being-for-itself, perceived a pre-reflective project toward a goal that grounds all secondary motives and reasons (ibid: 463).

However, the individual is able to choose a project of self-deception in bad faith, whereby he or she hides his or her real nature as Being-for-itself and lives as a Being-in-itself (ibid: 615). This is precisely what is at stake in technological ethics, where the individual chooses to live and shape his or her Being from the idea that it has an essential function.

Yet, the self is able to avoid self-deception by choosing a project of authenticity in good faith, whereby one faces one's own freedom and seeks to become what one freely chooses to be. In this way, freedom is the telos of existence, and because the exercise of freedom creates values that all human beings could experience, this authentic project expresses a universal dimension in the singularity of a human existence.

The art of existence: Emmy van Deurzen and Michel Foucault

As a reaction towards the instrumentalism and reductionism of modern technology, Emmy van Deurzen has attempted to combine Greek ethics and existential therapy in an interpretation of living as an *art* in the classical sense. According to Deurzen, human beings live in a constant confrontation with existential challenges that lead to anxiety, and as with Kierkegaard and Sartre, they can handle this anxiety in two fundamental ways: They can flee it inauthentically and escape into cultural visions of the perfect life, or they can face it authentically and take responsibility. This authentic living involves engaging in all dimensions of life and following the direction in life that one's conscience dictate as the right, whereby one becomes author of one's own destiny (Deurzen 2009: 43).

Deurzen's approach is teleological, because she speaks of the *truth of life* as a guideline for practical living. However, far less than Sartre, she addresses human freedom as the essence of this guideline. According to Deurzen, the individual must balance freedom from a sense of necessity, since she perceives life as stretched between a series of poles, which one must learn to embrace.

The art of living is not an innate ability but a capacity that the individual must learn through experience and by help from wise mentors. Opposed to a modern conception of technological expertise, this art of living base on an idea of wisdom. Furthermore, the ideal of life is not a technological norm of normality or performance. The ideal to follow one's own path of openness in relationship to oneself, other people, the world and spirituality.

Most of Foucault's writings include a *negative teleology of freedom* that point to his investigation of how freedom in the modern age is dominated by technology, whereby ethics is linked to social, economic and political structures (Foucault 1997b: 261).

Against this background, in his late works Foucault studied ancient ethics, which he believed could inspire modern ethics. Similar to Deurzen, he thought that ethics should be an *aesthetics of life*, formed as an art of living. However, contrary to Deurzen, Foucault thinks that freedom should be the ontological condition of ethics. Thus, ethics must be a reflected practice of freedom, a certain conscious way of being and of behaving (Foucault 1997c: 284). Teleology is to be understood as a mastery of oneself and in this context, contrary to Kierkegaard, Sartre and Deurzen, Foucault rejects the notion of authenticity, because he thinks that this notion points to the idea of a true self (Foucault 1997b: 262). Instead, Foucault wants to link the theoretical insights of the existential tradition of a practice of creativity. Foucault is inspired by Nietzsche, and the self is perceived as a form that can be shaped and reshaped so that we can master ourselves and create ourselves as a work of art instead of being dominated technologically as resources (ibid: 262).

Conclusion

The existential tradition contains the teleological foundation of an ethical approach that may serve as alternative to the so-called technological ethics. The concept of authenticity from Kierkegaard, Sartre and Deurzen may serve as a response to the technological domination of individual existence, and the existential concept of freedom from Kierkegaard, Sartre and Foucault may serve as a response to the cultural and institutional colonization of existence.

This chapter has been interested in whether the teleological dimension of the existential tradition might serve as a guideline for an alternative way of living. Deurzen and Foucault makes the most explicit rebellion against the technological age and according to these authors, an alternative ethics should take the form of an art of living, an art of existence.

The teleological question is whether authenticity or self-mastery should serve as existential goals of ethical practice. Furthermore, what is needed to actually to rethink the teleological dimension of the existential tradition, to see how a conception of the goal of life goals may look like in the 21st Century.

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The Relevance of Aristotelean Ethics to the Conception of Existential Psychotherapy

Introduction

Existential psychotherapy attempts to challenge the technological understanding of psychotherapy and reductionist tendencies in modern medicine. It does so by developing a psychotherapeutic practice based on a more *holistic* understanding of human being, not aimed at curing or healing patients but rather at achieving authenticity for clients. The main theoretical problem for existential psychotherapy is that it wants to understand itself as a psychotherapeutic method, commonly understood as a form of medical technology. Yet, existential psychotherapy wants to distance itself from the medical and technological framework of understanding and practice. This paper tries to solve this problem by discussing whether and how it is possible to re-conceptualize existential psychotherapy as an Aristotelian practice of ethics.

Psychotherapy as technology and applied science

According to Martin Heidegger, modern technology is the dominant way of revealing Being in modernity and it is characterized by a *challenging* (Heidegger 1977: 14). Through this technological revealing, human being anthropocentrically positions itself in the middle of the world and assumes dominion over everything including itself. Human beings, then, only have the meaning of being available as resources. There is a widespread tendency to conceive psychotherapy as a form of technology and applied science. According to Joseph Dunne, in modern times, we tend to define rationality as coextensive with technology. We rationalize almost every domain of human engagement from an instrumental reason, concerned with instructional outcomes (Dunne 1993: 5). Likewise, Louis Berger criticizes this attitude in contemporary psychotherapy by addressing what he terms *techno-therapies*. According to Berger, these techno-therapies are characterized by a strong reliance on instrumental thought and by an attempt to establish empirical evidence for the efficacy of the instructional outcomes of therapies, especially in terms of symptom-reduction (Berger 2002: 9).

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