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# The Development of Binswanger's Daseinsanalysis

Shoji Muramoto

## **Daseinsanalysis as the Quest for the Identity of Psychiatry**

Daseinsanalysis (*Daseinsanalyse*), called existential analysis as well in the English speaking area, has been said to owe its development to philosophical works by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), especially his main work *Being and Time*. (1927/1967), though it needs to be evaluated in the wider context of modern Western intellectual history. Dasein is Heidegger's technical term for ontologically designating human being, the only being that is by nature concerned in his existence with the meaning of Being. Daseinsanalysis must be distinguished from *Daseinsanalytik*, Heidegger's fundamental-ontological analysis of human existence as a way of elaborating the question of Being. Based upon the latter, it claims to be an empirical discipline of psychiatry, psychopathology, psychology and psychotherapy. It was founded by a Swiss psychiatrist, Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) and later modified by another, Medard Boss (1903-1990), in a way more faithful to Heidegger.

Daseinsanalysis was introduced to the English-speaking countries first by Rollo May, Ernest Angel & Henri Ellenberger (1958) and then Needleman (1963). Though both books include translations of Binswanger's several important articles, most of his major works are still to be translated into English like Boss' ones. The main intention of this article, therefore, is to draw an outline of the development of Daseinsanalysis, mainly focusing on Binswanger's ideas.

In the world today increasingly dominated by science and technology as well as commercialization and bureaucratization, Daseinsanalysis,

known to be the most philosophically conscious of all the schools in psychotherapy, may look like an object of merely historical curiosity. But it is the more worthwhile to be presented because of the light it sheds on what tends to be overlooked in dominant trends in today's psychology and psychiatry, namely human existence.

Far from being a new approach in psychotherapy, Daseinsanalysis is intimately linked with the identity and developments of both clinical psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Important is also the tradition of Binswanger's family. Both his grandfather of the same name (1820-80) and his father, Robert Binswanger (1850-1910) ran an internationally renowned mental hospital called "Bellevue" beside the Lake of Boden. The founder of Daseinsanalysis was born and raised there and spent most of his life as its director without becoming a university professor despite enormous scholarship. Just as Christianity, or religion in general, was a destiny for Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) as the son of a protestant pastor, so was psychiatry for Binswanger.

Psychiatry was struggling to establish itself as a natural science under the strong influence of the Zeitgeist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century featured by materialism and positivism. So, mental diseases were understood to be nothing other than brain diseases according to the constitution of psychiatry by Wilhelm Griesinger (1817-1868), and were systematically classified in terms of etiology by Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926). Each mental function was localized somewhere in the brain by Wernicke (1845-1905) and others.

Still active since Philip Pinel (1745-1826), however, was also a humanitarian tradition of treating patients as fellow humans. It was practiced at the Bellevue as well as at the Burghölzli hospital in Zurich managed by Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) with whom Binswanger studied and worked as a young psychiatrist. Binswanger sensed therefore in psychiatry two seemingly opposing strands not easily reconciled and later to be elaborated in the form of Daseinsanalysis.

Decisive in the development of Binswanger's ideas was a fortune offered by Jung, his senior colleague at Burghölzli, to accompany the

latter's 1907 visit to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in Vienna. He was fascinated by both Freud's personality and his discipline called psychoanalysis.

It would be interesting to compare Binswanger and Jung in the stance toward Freud as well. Despite being more radically different from Freud in theoretical orientation than Jung, Binswanger maintained his academic, professional and personal relationship with him until his death while Jung broke both professional and personal relationship with him. Binswanger's lifelong commitment to Freud is witnessed in *My Memories of Freud* (1956), "My way to Freud" (Binswanger 1957b), and his correspondence with his teacher (Fichtner 1992/2003).

Being early influenced by Kant and neo-Kantians, Binswanger's primary concern was the philosophical foundation of his clinical experiences (1922/1965, p. v), which necessitated the clarification of psychiatry in its proper object and methodology. The task then was how psychoanalysis was to be meaningfully integrated into clinical psychiatry. Psychoanalysis had been regarded as a suspicious discipline by prevalent clinical psychiatrists at the time because its object was the mind, especially the unconscious, and its method was psychological interpretation both of which had to be principally denied by them. But that is also just the reason why it was for Binswanger a promising discipline in humanizing his destined science and profession.

### **Methodological problems in psychiatry: Jaspers or Binswanger?**

In the expression "phenomenological anthropology", another designation of Daseinsanalysis by Binswanger, "phenomenological" refers to its methodology, and "anthropology" to its object, namely human being. As is the case with every science, the object and the method in psychiatry are not separable from but intimately connected with each other; the method must be adequate and coordinated to the object. Bearing this in mind, and only for convenience, we treat problems of methodology in psychiatry before those of its object.

As Binswanger himself acknowledges (1922/1947, p.13; 1927/1947,

p.55), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) was the first to have raised methodological questions in psychiatry in his major work, *General Psychopathology*, by introducing the distinction between meaningful and explanatory connections (1913/1997, p.302). Both shared the dissatisfaction with the currently prevalent natural-scientific psychiatry as well as the aspiration for the epistemological foundation of their discipline.

Binswanger, however, sees in Jaspers limitations determined by neo-Kantian philosophy which he first shared with the latter but was later to leave in favor of Husserl (1859-1938) and Heidegger. Jaspers, on the one hand, remained in his own phenomenology content with describing patients' subjective experiences. Drawing upon Dilthey's distinction between understanding as the method of the humanities and explanation as that of natural sciences, he attributed unintelligible symptoms to some supposed pathological process in the body beyond the reach of phenomenology.

Binswanger, on the other, in a lecture (1922/1947) as the fruit of his study of Husserl's pure or eidetic phenomenology, suggested beyond the level of description the possibility of intuitively knowing essences, in his case, essential features of psychoses like schizophrenia. Characteristic in his presentation of phenomenology is his effective use of artistic works by van Gogh, Debussy and other artists as examples of essence intuition. The affinity of phenomenology with art in Binswanger is also revealed in his case studies of schizophrenia (1957), which Boss compared with Dürer's paintings (1957, p.100).

The distinction of Binswanger from Jaspers in the conception of phenomenology is also due to his practice of psychoanalysis. For Jaspers, Freud's interpretive system was epistemologically suspicious along with brain mythology, and he criticized the procedure of interpretation in psychoanalysis as "pseudo-understanding" (1913/1997, p.306).

Contrastingly, Binswanger (1926/1955) locates psychoanalysis in the tradition of hermeneutics, and also positively evaluates it as the first attempt to provide the act of understanding humans with empirical-scientific-systematic basis. Further, unlike the psychiatrist influ-

enced by Max Weber, he finds it possible to know the other person not only as an example of an ideal type but directly as the individual. For him, therefore, understanding the other person, especially in the practice of psychoanalysis, is not a merely subjective construction on the therapist's side but an existential-historical event of his interpersonal encounter with the patient.

However, the principal contradiction implicit in psychoanalysis between its scientific theoretical system and the interpersonal reality of therapeutic relationship, was not radicalized until his later lectures (1936/1955; 1936/1947). This problem in itself dates back to the opposition between Goethe and Newton, but in a lecture after the designation of his standpoint as *Daseinsanalysis* Binswanger does not characterize this tension as "either-or" but as "both-and" (1945/1947, p.191). That is the point where Boss later parts with Binswanger. While Binswanger somehow managed to maintain the validity of Freudian theory, Boss (1957), relying upon Heidegger, firmly believed that psychoanalysis as a therapy does not work because of but despite its theory, and insisted on the renunciation of its theoretical part.

Jaspers (1914/1997) seems to share Binswanger's attitude of "both-and" but treats this relation more systematically. He locates psychology of meaning (*verstehende Psychologie*), between two extra-conscious poles beyond psychology (p.310). The one is physical processes studied by natural sciences seeking causal connections, and the other existential illumination and communication (*existenzielle Erhellung und Kommunikation*) focusing upon the meaning of life and absolute freedom which is in turn ultimately comprised by some transcendental being. In Jaspers' view, psychology of meaning, while claiming its relative autonomy, is an intermediary discipline between natural sciences, on the one hand, and existential philosophy and spirituality, on the other. That is the main reason why he, being not content with remaining a psychiatrist, became a philosopher. Binswanger hardly addresses the existential aspect in Jaspers' whole thought, but, in his consistent effort to restore specifically human elements to psychiatry, seems to have integrate it in his

psychiatry. In fact, the expression of “existential illumination and communication” as one of two main forms of psychotherapy (Binswanger 1934/1947, p.155) may derive from Jaspers.

### **From the mind to the person**

Against the dominant trend in the contemporary scientific psychiatry, Binswanger at first did not consider the primary object of the discipline to be the brain but the mind, and was convinced that it needed the development and elaboration of general psychology as its theoretical foundation. Written out of this academic concern in service of clinical practice was his first major work, *Introduction to Basic Problems of General Psychology* (1922/1965). It is a massive but preliminary work for establishing a non-natural-scientific psychology for psychiatry and psychoanalysis, as suggested in its dedication to his two teachers: Bleuler and Freud. The author counts unique features of mental phenomena and describes the mind as function, act or experience. Especially the last chapter dedicated to the problem of the person shows how his way of thinking was shifting from Neo-Kantian philosophy to phenomenology and similar or related lines of thought. While being still concerned with the epistemological question of how the other is perceived or constituted by the subject, he, quoting Max Scheler (184-1928) and Henri Bergson (1859-1941), clearly points out the necessity to start with phenomena in which it does not make sense to distinguish the mind from the body, or the ego from the other (pp.234-5). In sum, what is to be primarily studied is now not so much the mind but the person as a unity who finds himself or herself in relatedness to others.

The shift in the focus of psychiatry from the body to the mind and from the mind to the person is more clearly evidenced in Binswanger's article on “Vital function and inner life history” (1927/1947). The mind is now, together with the body, subsumed under the category of vital function as the object of natural-sciences like biology since Aristotle. And the concept of the organism as the bearer of these vital functions is contrasted by that of the individual or spiritual person with its own in-

ner life history as historical connections between the person's unique unrepeatable experiences. In Binswanger's view, the latter is the primary focus of psychological understanding that is only open to phenomenological approach. But he also stresses that both concepts are inseparable, so believes the one is impossible without the other and *visa versa*.

In this paper Binswanger criticizes Jaspers' concept of meaningful connection as a merely auxiliary tool having nothing to do with psychology and lacking the person as the core element of psychiatry. Jaspers, however, would make a counterargument that what Binswanger characterizes this way is restricted to rational understanding, one of two modes of understanding, and that another, empathic understanding, leads to psychology itself (Jaspers 1913/1997, p.304). For Jaspers, it is the person that is "metaphysically experienced" in the presence of the psychotic patient. In his view, however, it does not belong to psychopathology but to a philosophy ultimately concerned with the illumination of existence (Jaspers, 1913/1997, p.310). This difference in the place of the person within the whole system of knowledge between Jaspers and Binswanger is perhaps due to those in the concept of phenomenology as well as the stance toward psychoanalysis between both, as mentioned earlier.

### **From the Subject to Dasein**

The same year when Binswanger's paper on "Vital function and inner life history" appeared also saw the publication of Heidegger's groundbreaking work, *Being and Time*. The first result of the deep impact it gave upon the development of this psychiatrist's thought is "Dream and Existence" (1930/1947), his second work on dream following *Transformations in the Conception and Interpretation of Dream* (1928).

Characteristic in this paper is not a mere adoption of Heideggerian terminology but the author's firm aspiration for unity in his way of thinking. He introduces a new concept of general direction of meaning (*allgemeine Bedeutungsrichtung*) (S. 74) to overcome duality or plurality in various terms: mind and body; form and content; joy and sorrow; sub-



ject and object; dream, event and cult; inner and outer; night and day; vital function and inner life history. But he is no monist because he maintains a primary polarity in this new concept: ascent and descent, which respectively correspond to states of being awake or communal and asleep or alone, as further elaborated in “Heraclitus’ View of Human being” (1935/1947) .

The subject is now no more called the person but existence (*Dasein*). Binswanger suggests that the meaning of life is always something super-subjective, in which we today would find some affinity with Viktor Frankl’s concept of super-meaning (*Übersinn*) as the metaphysical basis of each possible concrete meaning of one’s life (Frankl 1946/1983, p. 43). Denying the subject’s omnipotence as claimed by modern science and technology, Binswanger also places humans in the world or cosmos as interpreted by the ancient Greek philosopher from which the most inner and secret decision, done in states of being either awake or dreaming, cannot escape (1930/1947, p.85-6).

### **Existential conception of psychotherapy**

The article “Dream and Existence” is also important in being the first to give an existential interpretation of the nature of psychotherapy. The goal of psychoanalysis formulated so far as “making the unconscious conscious” was principally an event within the patient’s mind, and the therapeutic relationship with the analyst only served as the facilitation of the process in the patient. But, inspired by the new conception of human existence presented in Heidegger’s work, Binswanger suggests that in every psychoanalysis comes a point where the patient must decide either to remain within his private isolated world or to live anew or again in the communal world shared with others (ibid., p.94). Curiously enough, this point resembles the opposition of the private logic and the social interest (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) in Alfred Adler (1870-1937). But Binswanger stressed the spiritual aspect of interpersonal relation. In other words, the true goal of psychoanalysis is spiritualization in the sense of the change in patient’s general direction of meaning from fall-

ing to rising, or from dream to awakening.

In "Dream and Existence" Binswanger also criticizes Jung's ideas such as individuation, the collective unconscious, the self and compensation for making invisible the basic opposition of the private world and the communal world and enclosing the patient in the former. This negative evaluation of Jungian psychology was echoed in the criticism of it as a form of modern Gnosticism by Martin Buber (1875-1965), one of Binswanger's friends (Buber 1951).

In a lecture "On Psychotherapy" (Binswanger 1936/1947) psychotherapy is more clearly understood to be an existential communication, and it is emphasized that healing only takes place in the context of the patient's trust as a gift and the therapist's responsibility for having made the patient trust him. So the patient must not be treated as an object but as a person (pp.138-9).

Further, developing the line of thought in "Dream and Existence", Binswanger believes that the patient is speaking not only in articulated words but also in images and body which all are equally based upon human existence (ibid., p.147).

The therapist is no more considered to be a mere mirror of the patient's life history so far but a basically new person with whom the patient forms a new bond. Accordingly, therapeutic relationship is no more regarded as a mere repetition of the patient's relationships in the past but as a chance for him to initiate a new way of living, or to change his general direction of meaning. The success or failure of a therapy is therefore understood to depend not so much upon the resolution of resistance and transference on the patient's side as understood in classical psychoanalysis but upon the encounter with the historical unique person of the therapist. So Binswanger further suggests that the failure in psychotherapy may be attributed to the therapist's inability to kindle "the divine spark" in the patient's mind (ibid., p.143).

Daseinsanalysis did not develop from practical but from theoretical concern, but in postwar papers, Binswanger counts its unique merits for psychotherapy. Because of its phenomenological approach which needs

the distance from any particular theory and so its openness to any aspect of one's life as well as its philosophical insight into the apriori structure of human existence, it can make the least intellectual and cultivated patient feel understood, often with the shocking experience of his being-in-the-world so far, and invited to overtake his existence as his own and to choose the authentic way of life (Binswanger 1950/1955; 1954/1955).

### **Options in the further development of Daseinsanalysis: Binswanger or Boss?**

An impetus for the turning point in the further development of Daseinsanalysis was given by Medard Boss, a Swiss psychoanalyst who was analyzed by Freud, studied with Bleuler, collaborated with Jung, and found an important clue in Binswanger for humanizing psychiatry and psychoanalysis. More decisive for his career, however, was his discovery of the unison of Heidegger's thought with experiences in the practice of psychoanalysis, which resulted in the postwar initiation of his friendship with the philosopher.

We must be careful not to be one-sided in understanding Boss' stances toward Binswanger. Boss acknowledges Binswanger as the first to clarify the anthropological foundation of and natural-scientific assumptions in Freud's system, and to see in Heidegger's works the immense potential for the possible contributions to the radical innovation of psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy (Boss 1957, p.88). Interestingly enough, even after his harsh criticism of Binswanger (pp.89-99), Boss does not fail to return to the admiration of him (pp.99-112).

Which points in Binswanger did Boss find unacceptable? In *Basic Forms and Knowledge of Human Existence* (1942/1962), a voluminous book of more than seven-hundred pages, Binswanger points out the insufficiency and narrowness of Heidegger's basic concepts, and proposes that "being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*)" be complemented by "being-beyond-the-world (*Über-die-Welt-hinaus-sein*)", and care (*Sorge*) by love (*Liebe*).

Supported by Heidegger's own review of Binswanger's writings and even inviting the philosopher to seminars for his younger psychiatric colleagues (Boss 1988), Boss points out that Binswanger, because of his still remaining subjectivism, failed to understand that being-in-the-world, or care, is a formal ontological structure, or mode, of human being that is true of any possible concrete existence, in other words, irrespective of being healthy or sick, so does not need any complementation as proposed by Binswanger. Consequently, it would not be correct to speak of deviations (*Abwandlungen*) of being-in-the-world in psychoses, as Binswanger believes. It is not that there are as many worlds as human beings but that there is one and the same world in which they exist in their relation with one another. In Boss' view, Dasein neither rises nor falls, and it is impossible for any therapist to draw the patient out of the private world into the communal world; materiality, illumination, consistency and others are no apriori-categories but only what corresponds to the patient's being-in-the-world at a given time (Boss 1957, pp.89-98).

Boss' prescription as a consequence of the critical confrontation with scientific and subjective psychologies so far including Binswanger's psychiatric Daseinsanalysis is the strict practice of phenomenology in the Heideggerian sense. All that is expected of the therapist in psychotherapy is now repeated attempts to let the patient become aware of what appears, or does not appear, and how it appears or does not appear in the patient's life including his dream, as well as how he does or does not respond to it (Boss 1971/1975; Boss 1975/1978). We may also see in this apparently phenomenological approach to human experiences the existential deepening of resistance analysis advocated by Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) before leaving Europe, an excommunicated psychoanalyst with whom Boss earlier studied in Berlin.

In the preface to the third and the fourth edition of *Basic Forms and Knowledge of Human Existence*, Binswanger acknowledges his misunderstanding of Heidegger's ideas but at the same time refers to its productive aspects (Binswanger 1942/1962, p.12-15). So, at least from

Binswanger's position, the real problem would never be who more correctly understands Heidegger's philosophy, Binswanger or Boss, but how productively it could be utilized for psychiatry. Further, Heidegger was for Binswanger only one of important resources for his anthropological exploration, as is clear from the extensive discussions of other European thinkers such as Goethe, Hegel, and Dilthey.

Finally, unlike Binswanger, Boss was in the 1950s given the chance to directly touch Eastern thoughts such as Hinduism and Buddhism in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka through conversations with sages, and found some affinity in non-objectifying way of thinking between them and Heidegger (Boss 1958/1987).

The Binswanger-Boss controversy is going on beyond their death and the institutionalization of Daseinsanalysis on the international level.

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