Making sense of the subjective experience of others*1

A apreensão da experiência subjetiva de outros

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In this article, we address some conceptual issues that are logically prior to the constitution of any psychopathology. We explore ontological and epistemological aspects of subjective experience, rejecting both Cartesianism and behaviorism, and favoring the Wittgensteinian notion of criterial support instead. Then, we discuss the disanalogy between knowledge of other minds and our knowledge of anything else. Based on the arguments by Eilan's that the "communication claim" should replace the "observation claim," we defend that there is a kind of knowledge that is irreducibly founded on intersubjectivity (that is, knowledge of persons is knowledge for two) and point out to implications it may have for psychopathology.

Key words: Psychopathology, knowledge of persons, intersubjectivity, criterion

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The chief danger to our philosophy, apart from laziness and woolliness, is *scholasticism*, the essence of which is treating what is vague as if it were precise and trying to fit it into an exact logical category. (Ramsey, 1929/1931, p. 269)

Psychopathology is often said to be the "basic science" of psychiatry. In a way, this is the received view, with implicit underlying assumptions that bring about far-reaching consequences. We think that both words of the expression need to be briefly analyzed to clarify what is packed within the received view. "Basic" is meant to indicate that psychopathology deals with the simplest and most fundamental morbid subjective phenomena and provides them with its first-order organization and conceptualization, producing thus the very building blocks upon which psychiatry will then set up its nosology and semiology. Science, on the other hand, is used to describe the systematic and critical investigations, typically empirically grounded, in the pursuit of objective and epistemically warranted knowledge about the world, including human-related affairs. The term "science" also has a normative ring to it to the extent that a given ideal of precision, objectivity, and groundedness remains necessarily operative. It presupposes that the boundaries of the object of a given science can be defined with stability. So, we argue that, when applied to psychopathology, "basic science" may turn out to be somehow misleading, and perhaps it would be more accurate to call psychopathology the core discipline of psychiatry instead of its basic science. However, our aim goes well beyond the mere dispute of words on what would be the role of psychopathology in psychiatry (which is a practical, modificatory enterprise); what we want to address here is how we make sense of the subjective experience of others and, with this goal in mind, we initially raise some conceptual issues that are logically prior to the very constitution of any psychopathology. They refer both to ontological and epistemological aspects of subjective experience, such as its nature, its stability, and the ways it can be accessed. The very possibility of a science of subjectivity is thus challenged.

Our intent is not to review the perennial philosophical debate on this subject matter (even though, of course, we feed on it), but to present a perspective that, we believe, would avoid certain dichotomic pitfalls that mar the conceptual refinement of psychopathology. In contrast to these pitfalls, the view in question is meant to be metaphysically deflationary; that is, it does not claim to be built upon any supposedly absolute foundation. From the outset, we dismiss the views of the mind as something *inner* and *hidden* to others; like some sort of *private theater* accessible only to oneself by *introspection*; as a *disembodied organ* of psychological activity; or conversely as something actually located *inside one's head*; as a self-contained repository of meanings; and as unknowable darkness within (black box). The chosen path, it should be clear by now, rejects both Cartesianism and behaviorism.

Since Kant, the limits of introspection are well recognized. Internal observation yields only items that have no independent existence or real distinctions separating each other, but conversely, these items remain closely contingent on the very act of observation by that single thinking subject at a given moment. In other words, no stable partitions or "joints" of the mind should be postulated on the grounds of introspection. From our perspective, mental states are not to be conceived as discrete "buildings blocks" or "bearers" of specific meanings. At the same time, we also reject the assumption that clear-cut mental objects underlie and translate into particular (corresponding) bits of behavior. So, we contend, the quest for "essences" or "invariants" of subjective experience would be a vain one.

Wittgenstein insightfully pointed out the grammatical asymmetry between third and first person perspectives regarding the present tense of psychological verbs. While we are tempted to conceive first-person statements as descriptions of the state of the mind of the speaker, we should resist that, as they are more suitably seen as expressions that provide a specific type of information, criterial support, which is linked to the use of language itself. The notion of "criterion" is, as Hacker (1995) wrote, "a standard by which to judge something; a feature of a thing by which it can be judged to be thus and so" (p. 171). In Hacker's words:

Unlike inductive evidence, criterial support is determined by convention and is partly constitutive of the meaning of the expression for whose application it is a criterion. Unlike entailment, criterial support is characteristically defeasible. Wittgenstein argued that behavioral expressions of the "inner", e.g. groaning or crying out in pain are neither inductive evidence for the mental (Cartesianism), nor do they entail the instantiation of the relevant mental term (behaviorism), but are defeasible criteria for its application. (p. 171)

Defeasible is the critical term here. It means that criterial support can fully obtain even when the claim for which it provides support is false. In order to know that, we may pay close attention to the context. Hacker's example is illuminating:

If someone hits his finger with a hammer and screams, assuages his finger, etc., that establishes that he has hurt himself. However, if all this takes place in a play, then this behavior counts as acting as if he had so hurt himself. But the defeating evidence is itself defeasible [...]; for if the actor leaves the stage with a bleeding finger, groaning, etc., then he has obviously accidentally hurt himself. (Hacker, 1990, p. 553)

As Thornton (2017) explains, the definition of criteria of a so-called inner state like pain is fixed by convention and is constitutive of what we mean by the word pain. The criteria of pain are defeasible, i.e., the criterial support that apparent pain behavior gives for a judgment that a person in pain can be overturned. An occasional behavior that resembles pain behavior is not necessarily the expression of pain, being, for example, the acting of pretense. The opposite way, genuine underlying pain may sometimes be kept out of expression. In this scenario, one sign of pain may or may not "actually means that the person is in pain" (Thornton, 2017, p. 130). So, there is an essential underdetermination in the support that criteria offer for judgment about mental states.

From a Wittgensteinian point of view, the tendency to take first-person statements as descriptions of the state of the mind of the speaker has deep roots in our linguistic habits. We are inclined to treat all the words as if they were names and all sentences as if they were descriptions, not to mention our common bias of looking for a substantive behind every name. The mistake would be to apply to the expression of subjective experience the same rules that apply to the description of, say, a room. It misleads us to search for a hidden "internal" reference for the subjective experience. As Hacker (1990) aptly puts it: "It is a synopsis of grammatical rules that determine what we call 'the inner" (p. 546). One should always keep in mind that concepts (including the one of "description," for instance) are not uniform across language-games. They vary to a great extent, and this is crucial. Eilan (s.d.) also helps us understand this viewpoint. As the author points out, there is a "fundamental disanalogy between our knowledge of other minds and our knowledge of anything else for which there is no possibility of shared knowledge" (Eilan, s.d., p. 9). Furthermore, she adds: "Knowing people requires communication, in a way that knowing facts about them doesn't" (ibidem, p. 15).

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Thus, it is essential to understand what description means within the field of descriptive psychopathology. In his seminal General Psychopathology, Jaspers focused on the pathological psychic events that are conscious. Nevertheless, in order to be able to grasp them, it would be necessary "to know what human beings experience generally and how they experience it." (Jaspers, 1913/1997, p. 2) Following his footsteps, Stanghellini & Broome (2014) define psychopathology as "the discipline that assesses and makes sense of abnormal human subjectivity" (p. 170). Descriptive psychopathology would represent the first move towards that end, attempting to capture in categories pathological phenomena either experienced and referred by the patients or observed in their behavior. The set of psychopathological categories would become a technical language of sorts, with its nomenclature and grammatical rules. Nothing short of a perfectly legitimate convention, therefore. What is at stake here, however, are the connected assumptions that subjective experience is stable and general.

Eilan (s.d.) pointed out the strong influence of what she called "the observational claim" and the problem it creates. Assuming that other people have mental states like our own, that our knowledge of our minds is based on introspections (first person introspection claim), and the knowledge the minds of others on observation through a combination of perceptions and inferences (third person observational claim). Then, in order to make sense of other minds, it would be necessary that our mental concepts work the same way in first and third person perspectives (the unity requirement). The resulting philosophical problem is the gap between first and third person conditions of application/acquisition of these concepts (the bridging challenge).

A key aspect of subjective experience is that it entails the ascription of meaning, as to experience something is in itself an attempt to make sense of the subjective occurrence in question, either to oneself or others. That is to say, experience and meaning would be inextricably intertwined in their expression. Maybe the very attribution of meaning somehow stabilizes the experience, making it potentially conveyable in words. However, we may ask what kind of reference subjective experience offers, if at all. Moreover, how is it supposed to work? If the claim of privileged access is dismissed together with the goal of a clear and distinct apprehension of what goes on on one's mind, then we are left with no friction with reality. Unless, conversely, the anchorage is to be found elsewhere, not in anything "inner," but in the language, having, therefore, an intersubjective nature. There would be no such thing as a "private" meaning prior to a linguistic account of the experience. Thus, the constitution and apprehension of meaning cannot be separated.

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We suggest that a great deal of the psychopathological enterprise, from Jaspers onward, falls under the spell of the observational claim. The idea that we hold the key to understand others is hard to resist. As if there were a stable psychological matrix within us, which we employ to interpret the statements and behavior of other people. Observation of others would be based on and somehow mirror introspection. In this scenario, the bridging challenge is underplayed or even completely overlooked.

Often coupled with the observation claim, there is the assumption that the commonsensical description and explanation of the behavior of others capture something that, though necessary to the intelligibility of a phenomenon, is just superficial. The narrative would be just an initial approach. As if it were soft data waiting to be replaced by hard data. The elucidation of a given mental phenomenon would be considered complete only when it is described in the language of the laboratory, in physiological terms. Such a view is entirely wrong, according to Lewis White Beck (1975/1998): "[...] in people, physiology is not the whole story, not because there is a soul or entelectly or élan vital in the presence of which the laws of physiology break down; rather it is because there is another story to which physiological knowledge is almost wholly irrelevant. (Notice that I did not say physiology is irrelevant, but only physiological knowledge; physis is relevant, but not our knowledge of physis)" (p. 50). Miller & Keller (2000), in their defense of a nonreductive approach to neuroscience, elegantly denied the precedence of biology over psychology: "It is not a property of biological data that they 'underlie' psychological data" (p. 213).

A crucial distinction here is between function and action, borrowed from Fulford (2001, p. 84), the former being the "doing" word associated with parts and the latter the "doing" word associated with agents — paradigmatically, persons. For Hamlyn (1974), "in order to construe a facial expression as one, say, of joy one would have to know first that the expression was one manifested by something that could indeed manifest joy — by, that is, a person" (p. 2). Furthermore, the same would apply to the construal of bodily movements as actions. The person needs to be presupposed. According to Hamlyn, the key feature of the relationship between persons is that reciprocity must always be possible. In the process of understanding another person, personal relationship plays a critical role in the sense that the understanding of what it is to be a person and the attitude of taking other persons as persons are tied since early development. The necessary possibility of reciprocity tells much about the concept of person, as it is rooted in what Wittgenstein would have called features of our form of life.

Drawing from Martin Buber's work, Eilan (s.d.) is very precise when talking about reciprocity as an essential feature of the knowledge-ascommunication model: "When one says You, the I of the You is said too." (p. 18). As she points out, if someone tells me that she is sad, I gain some knowledge about her by her telling me so. If I was told about something, the speaker comes up to know something about me, since she knows that I know how she feels. Knowing and being known by others have a reciprocal structure, which is a remarkable difference from the unidirectionality of the observation-based knowledge model. "You are only aware of her as 'you' when she reciprocates — 'you' thinking is a kind of thinking about a person you can only engage in when that person thinks about you in the same way [...]." (p. 16)

Thus, being a person and treating others like persons are two sides of the same coin. There is a kind of knowledge that is founded on intersubjectivity. Instead of the two-stage process implied by the observational claim, inward and outward observation (that is, introspection and the combination of perception and inference), we have, according to Eilan (s.d.), the one-stage communication-as-connection, which underpins the communication claim. In her words: "They are in this sense instances of knowledge that is essentially and irreducibly 'knowledge for two'" (p. 10). According to this author, these foundational forms of communication would represent the kind of episteme required for our knowledge of other minds. It starts with the understanding of meaning, and the understanding of meaning goes all the way down. Quoting Eilan once again: "[...] with persons, unlike with physical objects, one's knowledge of them is bound up, in its foundation, with making sense of them through making sense of their communications with oneself" (p. 19).

The idea of the communication model is supposed to be an alternative form of episteme from the scientific one in general, and an alternative to the observation-based knowledge, in particular. It is fair to say that the idea of communication, in this case, goes beyond the concept of transmission of information between people. It offers, in its place, an inherently relational model in which the mutual address requirement would allow mutual knowledge itself, or a "communication-as-connection" (Eilan, s.d., p. 25). So, reciprocal communication is considered as the foundation of both self and other understanding.

When I register the other's awareness of me as "you", in the first person, I am aware of being an addressee for the other, and in virtue of that a subject, an "I" for the other. Or, more accurately, I am simultaneously aware of myself as addresser and addressee, a partner in dialogue, so aware of my being treated

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as a self-conscious subject (by you). That is what being treated as "you", as opposed to an observed "it" involves. So, it is, if you like, I-as-subject rather than I-as-object that is being claimed to come into being, or be founded on, standing in a relation to another. (p. 22)

We think that the adoption of what Eilan (s.d) calls "communication claim" is fully consistent with Pereira's recent proposal of a (psycho) pathology of the subject. For Pereira (2019), drawing from von Waizsaecker, the subject is already implied in the notion of pathology. Thus, psychopathology is never just about a thing, say, a disease. On the contrary, it is always about a singular subject, within the social bond, and the subjective pathos has inherently multiple semantic dimensions of passivity, suffering, and passion.

Thornton (2017) sheds light on the application of the idea of criteria to the more general problem of other minds in the context of psychiatric diagnosis. According to this author, it raises a specific realm of issues made prominent in recent editions of the D.S.M. and the I.C.D. with their emphasis on the reliability of observation and correlated assumption of a fixed valence of signs and symptoms. "Since the standard model of criteria (as defeasible behavioral types) makes knowledge impossible, it cannot be the basis of our knowledge of other minds" (p. 134). In some contexts, the sign is indicative of (that is, it counts for) something, but not in others. So, the effectiveness of the sign is context-dependent. "Excluded from context, as it is in the criteriological approach, the sign is vague" (p. 124). Through these arguments, the author points out the problems of the vagueness and indeterminacy of the criteria in psychiatry based on criteriological models of diagnosis, which undermines the specificity of their connection to diagnostic judgments. Drawing from John McDowell, Thornton states: "experiencing the satisfaction of criteria cannot legitimize a claim of knowledge" (p. 131). Thus, this vagueness can be understood as the isolation of signs and symptoms from their context if compared with the context-dependent discriminations of skilled clinicians made in the presence of their patients who should be able to reveal their mental states through speech and action within a personal interaction — so that "what they say and do makes their mental lives available to others in a way that requires no inference" (pp. 133-134) or "the direct expression of complex psychological wholes" (p. 136).

If criteriological descriptions of symptoms are vague, what kind of information could they convey? Perhaps, it would be interesting to bring together the communication-as-connection model with the powerful notion of tacit knowledge (Banzato & Zorzanelli, 2017). For Thornton, diagnosis

based on gestalt judgment is the kind of context-dependent practical skill that underpins one model of tacit knowledge. This model of diagnosis would require thinking of psychiatric symptoms "as abstractions from a diagnostic whole rather than built up from neutral — or more neutral-criteria whose obtaining does not strictly imply the presence of the psychiatric syndrome for which they are supposed to be signs" (Thornton, 2017, p. 135). As a consequence, it would require a skilled clinician that could understand diagnosis as an integrated whole, in which different aspects are considered as abstractions from that whole rather than as its basic building blocks (p. 125). The vagueness would be compensated by experienced psychiatrists in their diagnostic judgments addressing particular patients who express and embody particular signs and symptoms "even in cases where one recognizes a particular as an instance of a general kind" (p. 127).

We wonder what would be the impact on descriptive psychopathology of abandoning the observational claim and alternatively embracing the communication claim as its basis. If we take the I-you relatedness seriously, we should drop the model of observation and inference plus theory and adopt an approach that acknowledges the role played by social interaction from the inception, that is, the second-person perspective. Knowledge of persons should not be thought of as unidirectional, as meaning is a necessarily joint and interdependent product. Acknowledging the pivotal role played by tacit knowledge in the clinical realm, always within the context of personal interaction, should mean dropping a strongly appealing, but profoundly misleading, ideal of precision that has been driving the development of psychiatry in the last decades.

So, where do the rejection of essences or invariants within subjective life and the abandonment of the observation claim leave us? Though descriptive psychopathology is not merely common sense, it remains strongly dependent upon it. Psychopathology is not a bridge between common sense and physiology, either. We instead prefer to conceive it as a pragmatic attempt to provide patients with a framework to make expression and communication of odd and uncanny experiences possible. It would be a conceptual toolkit to try to reach the other person. In sum, all psychopathological effort would spin round meaning, which necessarily results from personal interaction within a context

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Resumos

(A apreensão da experiência subjetiva de outros)

Neste artigo, abordamos algumas questões conceituais logicamente anteriores à constituição de qualquer forma de psicopatologia. Exploramos, ontológica e

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epistemologicamente, aspectos da experiência subjetiva, e rejeitamos tanto o cartesianismo quanto o behaviorismo em favor da noção wittgensteiniana de apoio criterial. Assim, discutimos a dessemelhança entre o conhecimento de outras mentes e o conhecimento de qualquer outra coisa. Baseados nos argumentos fornecidos por Eilan, segundo os quais o "modelo da comunicação" deve substituir o "modelo da observação", defendemos que há um tipo de conhecimento que é irredutivelmente fundado na intersubjetividade (isto é, o conhecimento de pessoas é conhecimento a dois) e apontamos as implicações que isso pode ter para a psicopatologia.

Palavras-chave: Psicopatologia, conhecimento de outras pessoas, intersubjetividade, critério

(L'appréhension de l'expérience subjective d'autrui)

Dans cet article, nous abordons quelques questions conceptuelles qui précèdent logiquement la constitution de toute forme de psychopathologie. Nous explorons les aspects ontologiques et épistémologiques de l'expérience subjective en détriment du cartésianisme et du behaviorisme, nous privilégions la notion wittgensteinienne de soutien critériel. Ainsi, nous discutons la disanalogie entre la connaissance des autres esprits et notre connaissance de toute autre chose. Sur la base des arguments proposés par Eilan, selon lesquels le « modèle de communication » devrait remplacer le « modèle d'observation », nous défendons qu'il existe un type de connaissance irréductiblement fondé sur l'intersubjectivité (c'est-à-dire que la connaissance des personnes est une connaissance partagée) et soulignons les implications que cela peut avoir pour la psychopathologie.

Mots clés: Psychopathologie, la connaissance d'autres personnes, intersubjectivité, critère

(La aprehensión de la experiencia subjetiva de otros)

En este artículo, abordamos algunas cuestiones conceptuales lógicamente previas a la constitución de cualquier forma de psicopatología. Exploramos ontológica y epistemológicamente aspectos de la experiencia subjetiva, rechazando tanto al Cartesianismo como al conductismo (behaviorismo), favoreciendo, en cambio, a la noción wittigensteiniana de apoyo de criterio. Así, discutimos la desanalogía entre el conocimiento de otras mentes y el conocimiento de cualquier otra cosa. Basándonos en los argumentos proporcionados por Eilan, según los cuales el "modelo de comunicación" debe sustituir al "modelo de la observación", defendemos que hay un tipo de conocimiento que es irreductiblemente fundado en la intersubjetividad (es decir, el conocimiento de personas es conocimiento para dos) y señalamos las implicaciones que eso puede tener para la psicopatología.

Palabras clave: Psicopatología, conocimiento de otras personas, intersubjetividad, criterio

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