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Diagnosics as a form of “sensible” knowledge and its transformation to therapy

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1. Overview of relevant articles

I will try to substantiate my understanding of diagnostics based on the article of Robbins B. D. (2005) «New Organs of Perception: Goethean Science as a Cultural Therapeutics», article of Carina Henriksson C. (2012) «Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Pedagogical Practice» and Curative Pedagogik Kurs of Steiner R. (Russian translation, 2015).

The first article is based on Goethe's phenomenological approach to the study of nature. Robbins considered it as a therapeutic approach, that is potentially transformative for the scientist, «who in the process of clear and careful description of the object under investigation, is in the process of schooling his or her faculties of observation» (p.114). Emphasis is done by Robbins on the metamorphosis of the scientist, as a scholar, which stands in stark contrast to the concept of Francis Bacon about science as means to gain mastery and control over the natural world (p.115).

Robbins also found important that Goethe relates to the nature as sacred and found that «Natural objects should be sought and investigated as they are and not to suit observers, but if they were divine beings», or, in Reason words, “based on reverence, in awe, love for creation, valuing it for its sake, in its right as a living presence.” (cited in Robbins, p. 118). Thus, Robbins described Goethe's sacred investigation as “delicate empiricism.” It is an «empiricism» in the sense that it gives primacy to perception and it is «delicate», as it has ethically responsive obligation to the observed (p.118).

Robbins agreed with Goethe in giving primacy to the perception and fundamental faith in experience. Goethe found that «the human being himself, to the extent that he makes use of his senses is the most exact physical apparatus that can exist » (cited in Robbins, p.120). And here Robbins emphasized method of so called «exact sensorial imagination», when observing a phenomenon we are grasping its temporal structure. This means we are not only observing past forms of the phenomenon but also anticipating imaginative future possibilities (p. 120). Thus, structure grasped by the exact sensorial imagination «leads eventually to an insight into the essential structure of the phenomenon», which Goethe called the Ur-phenomenon (cited in Robbins, p. 121), which according to Lehrs «cannot itself be explained, which is in fact not in need of explanation, but from which all that we observe can be made intelligible» (cited in Robbins, p.121). And for Goethe the disclosure of the primordial archetype of the phenomenon is fundamentally an aesthetic experience (quoted in Robbins, p. 122), a marvellous creature in

the world (quoted in Amrine, 1998, pp.39-40), encounter with which is a kind of experience most appropriately called «joy» (Robbins, p. 122).

And another important accent in the article is the ethical, responsive obligation to the observed. As Merleau-Ponty wrote, «consciousness, from the phenomenological perspectives is always turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all relation to the world» (quoted in Robbins, p.119). This relation to the world should be ethically responsive. If not, as Shotter has asserted, we «cut ourselves off from the very spontaneous calls and invitations phenomena exert upon us in their way of coming into being» (quoted in Robbins p. 123)

If yes, we come to understand a world composed of beauty which obliges us to moral action to protect and care for it. We come to better understand ways that we can live harmoniously with the world (p.123-124), as Seemon founded, «to find ways of becoming increasingly “at home” with the world of phenomena» (quoted in Robbins, p.118).

The article of Carina Henriksson was inspiring already in Maori song, given in the introduction. “If you asked me what is the greatest thing in the world, the answer would be: it’s people, it’s people, it’s people”.

Thus, Henriksson has extended the ideas of phenomenology to relations between people. Her article is mostly about school teacher-student relations. She researched the role of phenomenological method in school where both teacher and student as developing human beings are considered as «greatest thing in the world» (p. 119). It’s well known that «teachers often discard academic knowledge about teaching as theoretical nonsense, which does not help them to cope with their everyday mission» (p.119). They realize that «being in the classroom cannot be reduced to technical or intellectual endeavour». It involves the ability of «intuitive sense of the world, the state of mind and a way of feeling and acting» (p.120).

Demand for the teachers is to suspend taken-for-granted, natural attitude and move to phenomenological attitude, as Husserl called it (quoted in Henriksson, p.123), which has potential to create a sense of wonder, openness, change and readiness to reflect on pedagogical matters (p.123).

Henriksson has spoken about “teachers eyes, special eyes, pedagogical eyes, which can see, what the child has to offer, what the child is, and how the teacher can make each child grow (p.124). And further - about real pedagogy, which “begins with a meeting of looks, an encounter between

the eye of teacher and eye of the child, thus creating a place and grounding for the children growth” (p. 126).

This is phenomenology, which Merleau-Ponty identified as «a manner of thinking»! (p.120). Thinking which potentially can be lived through and cultivated into “mood and atmosphere of security, trust, hope, cheerfulness, joy, love, confidence, serenity and goodness” (p.124). These qualities construct a relation between teacher and student. “These relations are reciprocal but asymmetric, - found Henriksson,- as a teacher is responsible for student’s intellectual and emotional growth.” Extremely important for Henriksson is the “child’s trust in the teacher, as later it enters deeply into the trust in the world.” And this trust is also reciprocal. That is the teacher must concurrently trust in the child, his/her abilities to learn and develop (p.127).

One of the most important accents is done by Henriksson on the Buber`s words: «The only thing that may influence the student as a whole being is the teacher himself as a whole being» (cited in Henriksson, in her translation, p.133).

The role of speech and talk is also greatly valued by Henriksson; according to Gadamer «the word becomes binding, as it were: it binds one human being to another. This occurs whenever we speak to one another and really enter into genuine dialog with another» (quoted in Henriksson, p.135). Language should be innovative and lead us back to forgotten meanings. Language needs to have a verve, i.e., it must show energy and enthusiasm in its expression of ideas; it has to show vitality and liveliness it needs to have a sparkle (p.135). And last important emphasis Henriksson has done on the thought of French philosopher phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who asserted that «the real phenomenologist must make it a point to be systematically modest» (quoted in Henriksson, p.135).

As for Steiner’s Curative-Pedagogical lecture course, here it carries phenomenological approach on to the diagnosis and pedagogical work with children with special needs. The course contains both general provisions and consideration of individual cases of children with specific recommendations.

Early in the first lecture, Steiner pointed to a necessary condition, which will be the basis of the approach of the teacher to a child in need of special treatment. Namely, the teacher should carefully observe the ordinary life of the soul (whose if not his own in the first place?) and notice the variety of delays, frustrations, obstacles, i.e. "abnormalities." Then it will be completely clear

for us that all we call "abnormality" «can be observed in so called normal psychic life in a lighter form» (p.15).

Steiner founded remarkable that Goethe, who can rightly be considered the father of phenomenology, himself suggested studying archetypal plant as an example of natural deformities. He founded that study of various abnormalities in a plant is the best way to get to the idea of archetypal plant, as it is believed that the idea of archetypal plant demonstrated itself in such deformities, abnormalities, when a principle for some reason is unbalanced by other principles, and this is expressed in a deformed, exaggerated way (p. 211). Interestingly, in Goethe's Weimar notes Steiner found records about the expansion of his theory of the metamorphosis of the human body, but Goethe himself very discreetly published his ideas about man.

Steiner in his Heilpädagogische Kurs also has spoken about the ability not only to observe symptoms of soul and will disorders, but also to penetrate through these symptoms to the essence of the disorder (p.16). For this, the teacher has to cast away criticism, abstract himself from the manifestation of psychic life and «then behind corporeality he will detect mentally -spirit person who come down of the spiritual world» (p.17).

To cast away criticism, Steiner urges us «to lovingly look into details of what lives in so-called madness, to have real deep interest to this details» (p.46), to feel the situations, to develop compassion for failures and disabilities of the child or youngster (p. 42). And then he will develop qualities necessary for teaching the child. Steiner was sure that «authentic contemplation of the so-called psychic disorder will certainly lead to the finding the starting point of the treatment» (p. 73). Steiner asserted:

People always prefer to act on prescription. To educate children with special needs, one should never stop learning. Each child for him is a new problem, the new riddle. But he will be able to find the way of acting in each concrete case only if he follows the essence of the child. This is not an easy job, but the only true one. That is why it is so important for educators to be engaged in self-education. (p. 89)

In Steiner's opinion, it is, in fact, irrelevant what the teacher says, important is what he is, and if he develops deep interest to the mystery of the human body as a whole (p. 43). Thus, we meet the same thought as that of phenomenologists: **only developing human being can affect human being.**

For Steiner there one thing can become a serious obstacle for the researcher: It is vanity (p.183), which we can see in facial expression of importance, seriousness. «Enthusiasm in experience of the truth» should not make us stand firmly on foot, asserts Steiner, but to dance, be dancing teachers, as Nitsche advised through his Zarathustra (p.188).

2. Life lessons

Once, wondering why I became a teacher, and then a curative educator, I remembered my childhood, the happiest days of which I spent in a boarding school, the director of which was my father's friend, Alexander Tamanyan. A man with three higher education, he was sent to the forests of Dilijan, Armenia, pine air which was prescribed for his unhealthy lungs. He became director of a boarding school, where the majority of children were either from dysfunctional families or had serious developmental problems. Tamanyan transformed the school into a paradise. None of the capital's schools had such equipment in the classes, such serious teachers. And the authority of the kind, yet very strict director was indisputable.

In summers, when children who had parents, were leaving, Tamanyan used to ask his friends to send their children from Yerevan city for holidays. He wanted his children to communicate with ordinary children. And so we, well-groomed and well-off, looked down on them with some arrogance, saw them as provincial, distrustful, ugly by our standards. But only the first day. The only thing which united us was his indisputable authority. He took care that our relations build up. He walked with us in the forests, taught to collect berries and mushrooms, brought us the best films. And the rest of the time we just played wildly, and in the evenings gathered around the campfire, telling stories. We were looking forward to next summer when we parted.

These were my first lessons in life. I learned to appreciate people not by their well-being, the veneer, and the IQ, but by the ability to make friends and play together. For the first time, I realized that under an awkward body there could hide an astonishingly beautiful soul, which seeks to meet you.

And the image of the teacher, who sees through and knows each of his students, who can create an environment where all show their best qualities and develop as human beings, who with all his being has a beneficial effect on children and colleagues, also imprinted for life.

2.2 From experience of diagnostics in curative pedagogy

Often children come to us with a diagnosis, devoid of any individual approach: autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy. The impression is that this area is also under the influence of Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm, and as Frankl determined it, is ill with "reductionism disease of nothing-but-ness" (quoted in Robbins, p.116). Nothing is more than ... autism, for example. Behind these words are children or young people with rich biographies, sometimes too rich for their age.

Referring to the roots of the concept of diagnosis, we see that the word comes from dia, which is translated as "through, throughout" and Greek gnosis "knowledge," especially "special knowledge of spiritual mysteries," (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001- 2016) Thus, already in the etymology of the word we find not final deduction about the person, but a path, which we have to walk through with him.

Now, three years after founding Mayri center of curative education and social therapy, I can say that I would not trade all my years of teaching in a regular school with the deepest, most sacred moments of meeting with those who came to Mayri. For some of these meetings, my young colleagues and I had to make deep excavations in our psychic life and to change many things in it.

Every new child/youngster brought his plea, his invitation to meet him and help to solve the problem. Each child or youngster took his place in our soul and really opened, as Goethe said a «new organ of perception» (quoted in Robbins, p.123). From another side, each child challenged us for the next change, transformation in ourselves, which permitted us to grow beyond ourselves. If we managed, we always could notice development in our ward-friend, we could help.

We have to be thankful to our people with special needs as they never allow us to fall in false pride. As soon as we fall into vanity, next child dethrones us demanding to go deeply to his/her problem, to meet them, thus doing the next step in our development and hopefully helping them to treat their problem.

In my practice, there were cases when no diagnostic examination, no reflection and numerous attempts of therapy did not help to find the key to the person, and he left, not understood. There were also cases when we joyously observed a result for which there is no more accurate word for "magic." But more often, it is a patient work, the results of which can not be rushed. Yes, we

must admit that in our emphatic feeling of «Other», we enter his space. We have to be just extremely ethically responsive and to accept time flow rate of «Other», which is very personal. Yes, you can enter this flow and even change the rate, but you have to do it with patience, respect and without violation.

3. An attempt to formulate understanding of diagnosis

In the second lecture of his Curative Pedagogik lecture course, Steiner speaks about the magical effect on the child with disability, which requires courage (p.48). However, so that this idea does not lead us into the dark occult research, we should refer to etymology of the word “magic”. In Old Iranian, it probably derived from Proto-Indo-European *mehgh- ("to be able to, to help), and in Sumerians, it goes back to the word imga (emga) («wise»). Plato meant it as "witchcraft, sorcery”; Aristotle already used it in negative meaning γοητικὴ μαγεία (literally: "magic deception») "(Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001- 2016). Thus roots of the word bring us to the kind of wisdom in thinking that can lead to the ability to help.

3.1 Role of thinking in diagnostics

More and more I come to the conclusion that the question of diagnosis is a question of worldview, and every worldview responds to the question in its way. Both phenomenology and anthroposophy define diagnosis as a process of observation and learning that lead to the wise guidance of the person who, because of his special needs, comes to us for help, becomes our object of observation. The problem seems to be how the worldview answers the following question: what is our thinking? What is its role in the diagnostic process as acquiring knowledge about the person?

Let us try to follow our thinking in diagnostic process. First of all, we should understand the importance of eradicating sympathies and antipathies. This eradication is a completely conscious process (only in early childhood we live in awe and openness to the world!). If this fails, our likes and dislikes immediately enter into perceived with their familiar "like" or "dislike," and diagnostic process is doomed. However, forcefully, by just a will effort these reactions cannot be eradicated. Here we should understand the nature of thinking as an activity that "takes me beyond myself and connects with objects" (Steiner, 1993), then if we manage to experience this openness, to have real interest in the world and really to think, liking and disliking retreat, and

we can in detail, with interest in the smallest, to observe and describe symptoms. Furthermore, seeing the symptoms (as consequences) leads us to their causes, and thinking holds the thread from one element of observation to another, connecting those elements with certain concepts, thus carrying out the act of knowing, which is a synthesis, a reunion of perception and concept (Steiner, 1993). Thus, thinking weaves understanding of the problem, the essence of the disease, which can be expressed by this symptom. Up to this point, we deal, with the past of the observed person.

Such comprehension of the essence of the disease cannot but be accompanied by joy of learning (representatives of the phenomenological direction and anthroposophy all agree about this). On the other hand, understanding, if it gets the duration, the persistence of experience in the soul, can not but arouse the moral attitude, compassion for the soul, which happened to be in the bonds of the disease dictating its pattern. It unites us with the person. It also fills us with a sense of responsibility towards him, and now our thinking, that has experienced through feeling, penetrated into sphere of the ideal (Steiner, 1993), transformation, rushes forward to anticipating imaginative future possibilities (Robbins, p. 120). Thinking continues its work to develop the goals and methods of therapy, develops detailed steps to achieve them. Thus, diagnosis is transformed into therapy.

3.2 Learning features

In the case of ordinary children, we are dealing with a simplified scheme of learning. If we manage to create training material based on the knowledge age characteristics of a healthy child, then the material becomes transformative knowledge, contributing to the regular development of the child, since the digestion of the material obtained has no serious obstacles by the physical and mental bodies.

In the case of a child or youngster with a problem, we have to deal with overcoming the pattern, imposed by the problem, “with breaking down an existing scheme and pattern, and transformation so that new situation can be linked in; or even with personality change, with restructuring in the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions” (K. Illeris, 2004). Here we face the resistance of the child (or his mask, pattern?), without which as Biesta asserts, education becomes the monolog of the teacher (2012). Now they appear in front of us, not as objects of

teaching, but as subjects of relationship “in their right “ (Biesta, 2012, p. 13), demanding us to develop as whole human beings.

And the question arises when we manage to transform ourselves when we manage to transform diagnostics to therapy, where transformation happens? In us only, in our mind and soul and way we act? But if it works, then we can probably confirm that it also happened in our student, didn't it?

3.3 Meeting with «Other»

Let us return to Merleau-Ponty quoted by Antonio Strathy in his article “Sensible Knowledge and Practice-based Learning” (2007).

My sensible knowledge of the Other concerns also the aspects of his/her person which I can not see. These hidden aspects I nevertheless grasp “perceptively ” as present because I feel that they are close by, and I “feel” (beyond ratiocinative thought of my knowledge of geometry) that I can reach out and touch them - just I “feel” the side that I can not see of a cube or a lamp.

If for the meeting of two ordinary people, this intimate meeting with Other, whom you "do not need to dissociate from his / her corporeality", is probably enough. In case of people with special needs, in the way of the meeting is a pattern, a mask (Konig, p.22-23) which often becomes an insurmountable gap between man and the world.

To extend phenomenology to diagnosis of children and young people with special needs is not easy if we stand on the positions set out in the first two articles. We cannot do without a deeper knowledge of the human being that was given by anthroposophy.

If the "what" of the symptoms can be explained by phenomenological comprehension of the nature of disease, "Why?" can be understood only if we look at the life before birth. One could argue that often the cause of problems are fatal, but, at first glance, random events that caused the symptoms. Everything in the person can agree with randomness of the fatal accident, except... thinking. It always looks for the true reasons.

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