HEIDEGGER UNDISCLOSED:
Is Heidegger and Phenomenology hiding or hidden from Solution Focus?

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Abstract

This paper explores Heidegger's relevance to SF and proposes links between his philosophy and SF approaches. It also explores phenomenology as a useful concept for SF.

Introduction

Heidegger appears only once in de Shazer texts (1991, p. 79). His use is limited to a justification of the writing technique adopted in Putting Difference To Work (de Shazer, 1991) of striking a line through a word to infer its meaning as being "not fixed". This was a technique de Shazer used in this book and then subsequently abandoned. Whilst the title 'Putting *Difference* to work' can be seen as an homage to Derrida's Writing and Difference (1978), Derrida is only a footnote in the text and the brief reference to the work of Martin Heidegger is not in the form of a direct reference but is a secondary reference via the American introduction to post structuralism by Sarup (1989). De Shazer never cited Heidegger directly nor used any of his ontological concepts or frameworks beyond this brief acknowledgement.

How could Heidegger be useful to SF?

Heidegger would seem even at a casual reading to be inspirational philosophy for the SF practitioner. Heidegger's Being and Time (1962) provides exciting and relevant statements

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that embrace time distortion and the concept of non-linear time, future orientation and the fundamental issues of multiple possibilities and multiple ways of being. It could be argued that discussions in SF practice focused on how to *be* different and how being different presents itself *through experience* and outside criteria (noticed during changes made to our way of being, the world around us, and by our workmates, bosses, probation officers, families and friends) is an ontological exercise and therefore *is* the stuff of Heidegger's Being and Time.

A cursory reading of Being and Time produces quotations that support SF interventions and concepts. "Dasein (being in the world) is in each case essentially its own possibility (and therefore one possibility among others) (Heidegger, 1962, p. 68). This concept maps with de Shazer's ideas that there are always exceptions, other ways of experiencing the world that may lead us to solutions (de Shazer, 1988, 1985, 1994, 2007) and O'Hanlon's descriptions of "possibility land" (O'Hanlon and Beadle, 1997). Heidegger suggests "in determining itself as an entity, Dasein (there-being) always does so in the light of a possibility which it itself and which in its very being it somehow understands" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 69). This naturally supports de Shazer's calls for the client to be seen as the expert, that the person has already alternative ways of being and solving problems and that it is our job to uncover these a priori alternative possibilities and explore these successes and skills "our job is not to think up the right solutions for our clients and convince them to accept them. Our job is to create the conditions under which clients find their own solutions," (de Shazer et al., 2007, p. 156). Milton Erickson said it even more succinctly: "You know what to do but you don't know that you know." (Haley, 1985). De Shazer states that the main intervention in SF is "A positive, collegial, solution – focused stance (. . .) A general assumption that people have within them strong resilience and can utilize these to make changes (. . .) That most people have the strength, wisdom and experience to effect change." (de Shazer et al., 2007,

p. 4). SF explores alternative ways of being as its main topic of conversation both to promote choice and agency (Hawkes et al., 1998) and to explore alternative futures and possibilities (O'Hanlon and Beadle, 1997). There are always alternative possibilities: according to Heidegger (1962) Dasein is in "a state of becoming".

Heidegger's key concept of non-linear time, that the present contains traces of the past and future and that the future pushes its past along ahead of it, should be essential reading for those interested in crystal ball technique or future focused questions. It may also allow us to revisit the idea of a future past split in SF and answer some critics who state that we are "ignoring the past". In non-linear time, miracle questions and future questions are also working on traces of what has gone wrong in the person's past, on problems and on the past. Through asking what will be better we are also discovering what has gone wrong, and interviewing about a preferred future also contains some traces of the past. SF is not a superficial activity as some may consider it to be. Heidegger's philosophy would allow us to focus on the future which is also a representation of the past and the here and now.

Heidegger's handling of "average everydayness" in Being and Time includes the statement that this mode of Dasein "must be made accessible by a positive characterisation" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 64). Heidegger's need to deal with the complex and esoteric nature of being leads him to resort to describing outward criteria, a phenomenological exercise. Heidegger's method and comments about the need for such outward criteria closely echo de Shazer's discussion of the use of conversations in therapy that make use of "doing" or "being" verbs for example "what would you be doing at 4 on the scale that would tell us you have changed and were being more like your old self". These questions must be translated into a positive new possible behaviour or way of being rather than an absence of a feeling or current symptom and explored through relationship questions such as "what would your boss see differently about you?" (de Shazer, 1991,

Hawkes et al., 1998). Heidegger puts the need for outward criteria and positive characterisation just as eloquently (Heidegger, 1962, p. 64).

Heidegger's concept of "Aletheia" - the light that conceals as well as unconcealing - could be a fascinating concept for SF. The idea that our being focuses on different elements and experiences "illuminated" by our experience and focused against a backdrop or horizon of possibility is the stuff of future orientation, miracle questions and the movement/shift in perspective possible through the use of scaling. That our view of the world is always changeable but often unimaginatively fixed or "stuck" by the beliefs, predominant social and political paradigms and wishes and opinions of others in the everyday world is part of Heidegger's exploration of Aletheia and search for what happens in moments of enlightenment. Mostly we are influenced by and focused on the world of "Das Man", "The They" or the everyday moving amongst the grey of daily toil and task, limited in our view to that part of our being illuminated against this backdrop. Enlightenment comes when we can find or create a space (Heidegger likened it to a "clearing" in the woods and explored the art of clearing away everyday-ness to make space for a new idea). This space allows us to reflect and contemplate other less ordinary possibilities and "illuminate," or unconceal them. Heidegger also considers "thrown-ness", that we are thrown into the everyday world and that we may need to be thrown into the other possibilities of our being by meditation or contemplation or spiritual reflection etc. I would argue that this "clearing" can be created by miracle questions and a future focus as well as a focus on difference and exceptions in SF. In other words Heidegger's analysis of being, concealment and unconcealment through the light of our focus of attention and the need to be thrown out of this state of "Das Man" by having a new experience which lights the possibility to be different is SF. Furthermore that Aletheia is an exciting concept that supports the creativity of SF language structures and techniques.

These few examples suggest that Heidegger can be just as

applicable as Wittgenstein to SF and his work in Being and Time could be seen to mirror the techniques (not just the philosophy) of SF approaches. The question emerges "why was Heidegger not used in support of SF?"

The development of a "philosophy" of SF

To consider this we can explore the period when de Shazer and others were exploring its philosophy. The period concerned begins with Putting Difference to Work (de Shazer, 1991), which saw extensive use of Derrida and Wittgenstein, Words Were Originally Magic (de Shazer, 1994) which saw the use of Wittgenstein coming to dominate all other philosophers in de Shazer's work (but there were still some citations from Derrida and De Saussure) and finally the posthumous More than Miracles (De Shazer et al., 2007), which saw a whole chapter on Wittgenstein entitled ironically "Private Experience and the Verb "To Be" (de Shazer et al., 2007, p. 133–142) by which time not only was the European philosopher most responsible for work on the nature of the verb "to be" and "being in general" uncited but Derrida had also fallen by the wayside.

Philosophy did not come first in the development of SF at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee. SF had been developed along clinical and pragmatic lines prior to Putting Difference to work. De Shazer's first exploration of exception questions accompanied an advocacy of Erickson's crystal ball technique, the confusion technique and a general discussion on Ericksonian trance (de Shazer, 1985). The miracle question appears initially in Clues (de Shazer, 1988) and was formalised at more length by De Jong and Berg (1996) as an extension of future oriented crystal ball technique. The story of the miracle question was that the miracle question came into being "by happenstance" (de Shazer et al., 2007, p. 37). Insoo Kim Berg first used a miracle question in response to a client, who said in despera-tion, "maybe only a miracle will help" (Berg & de Jong, 1996, p. 77). De Shazer formularised the first wording of it

in Clues (1988, p. 5) and Berg and De Jong in Interviewing for Solutions (De Jong & Berg, 2002, p. 77–78). The questions were not initially shaped by philosophy but de Shazer made a choice of applying the philosophers to the technique after the event.

By the time of Words Were Originally Magic (de Shazer, 1994) de Shazer was allying himself closely with Wittgenstein's concepts of language games.

SF as a phenomenological exercise

Heidegger, after moving away from his mentor Husserl's views, positioned himself as a hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenologist. SF can be seen as a phenomenological exercise. Phenomenology's context-bound real world nature would also be very conducive to SF practitioners' views. It may be helpful to visit Glendenning's phenomenological theses (Glendenning, 2007, p. 14–23) to look at connections with SF:

a) There is no universal theory
   In phenomenology the construction of a transferable freestanding theory applicable out of this context in a universal manner is not on the agenda. The focus is on puzzles and descriptions that are context bound and on describing them and reflecting on them rather than identifying the cause and effect relationship behind them using hypothesis or interpretation.
   De Shazer mirrored this position suggesting the primacy of transcripts as a way of describing and seeing what was actually discussed in the "real world" of the therapy room with a focus on description rather than analysis (Hawkes et al 1994, Foreword by de Shazer). "What is developed in this book is certainly not a Theory with a capital T, rather, the analysis leads away from such a grand design, emphasising instead the variability of events and the variability of problems and solutions" (de Shazer, 1991, p. xx).

b) Description, not explanation or analysis

Glendenning suggests "What the phenomenologist aims at, then, is not a theory of this or that phenomenon - a theory that would be characterised by its distinctive positions and extractable theses - but an effort to come reflectively to terms with something that is, in some way, already "evident". It is in this sense a work of explication, elucidation, explicitation or description of something we, in some way, already understand, or with which we are already, in some way, familiar, but which, for some reason, we cannot get into clear focus for ourselves without more ado" (Glendenning, 2007, p. 16).

This is a useful way of describing the techniques of SF and supporting the descriptive and collaborative nature of the endeavour. The person knows what they need to do to solve the problem, but they "don't know that they know" as Erickson said. The client already has strengths and abilities resources and histories of solving issues. They just need to get a clearer focus on what they want and how they can get it. De Shazer states that we must listen to and cooperate with the client's frame as far as is possible (not interpret it or persuade the client to adopt a free standing frame such as psychiatry or diagnostic symptom otology). "If the client says it is sleep, then it is sleep" (de Shazer, 1991, analysis and discussion on published video tape).

c) Re-look at the world without blinkers

Husserl's original ideas of bracketing were ways of trying to achieve a view in research not already blinkered by previous hypotheses and assumptions. That we "re-achieve a direct and primitive contact with the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii).

This mirrors Insoo Kim Berg's calls to "stay simple" and to take a "not knowing stance" into the therapy room (Berg and Miller, 1992, Berg video tape working with "Poly Substance Misuse", 1994).

d) No view from the sideways perspective

Phenomenology challenges the idea that there is a privileged objective position. Phenomenology does not separate the researcher or philosopher or therapist from the person also involved in the activity. The search for a firm footing "outside the world of the real" from which to neutrally observe and record human activity is not part of phenomenological research. "The objectivity required of philosophical investigations is, on this view, achieved only by starting with a dehumanised representation of the phenomenon. This standpoint, so the ordinary philosophers' thought goes, is one that "we philosophers" need to occupy if we are properly to assess the credentials of our unreflective thought and talk about the world." (Glendenning, 2007, p. 19).

In a similar vein the expert stance is undermined by SF where the theory is not free-standing. The therapist is not an "expert" and the material for exploration and discussion is generated by the client in the room and is not part of a pre-emptive history or diagnostic past (as per "the notes"). The present and future focus and the focus on what the client wants "steers away from elaborate descriptions of inner negative states (. . .) Paradoxically this challenges the therapist to stay on the surface in order to develop a deep understanding of the client's life and desired outcome. Doing so is difficult because we have a culturally and professionally entrenched vision that actions in the world spring from separate, inner, private states of the individual. Not only does SF dispute this assumed connection, it also disputes the distinction between inner and outer and between emotion, cognition and action." (de Shazer et al., 2007, p. 162). SF can be seen to share phenomenology's suspicion of Cartesian dualism and of "natural" empirical scientific ways of knowing or concepts of general laws or "truths".

These ideas are found frequently in Being and Time. Concepts such as authentic and inauthentic, Dasein and

Das Man, blend and blur the more traditional stand-points of objective reality. The notion of cause and effect is challenged by non-linear time. This blurring is encouraged and explored by Heidegger through his development of Aletheia, the clearing and the idea of a horizon upon which possibilities can be explored. We can see a connection between phenomenology and SF over these three fundamental ideas and it is a puzzle that this has not been more widely considered by SF therapists.

e) Go back to the things themselves

Evidence in phenomenology is the material itself. There is no focus on a balance of proof, or on the researcher's interpretations and arguments, but on the data or material itself that is presented clearly and imagina-tively but may not necessarily constitute an argument in the way a quantitative researcher may present data or argue the "proof" of a hypothesis. This links very closely to de Shazer's call for each session to focus on what the client says they want and to take the content seriously and at face value. "To me, however, the danger of reading between the lines is that there might be nothing there. So, you've just got to listen to what the client says. Just stick on the lines of things. The client says that getting out of bed on the south side makes for a better day than getting out on the north side. Well then, Goddammit, tell him to get out of bed on the south side! As crazy as that might sound." (de Shazer, 1994, p. 109).

Why would Heidegger be hidden?

Even though there are no written references to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger in Steve de Shazer's work, there is a possi-bility that he had at least learned about Heidegger as a student. In one of his recorded seminars (Ways Words Work) he tells the following anecdote. As a young man he was in a bar with his father. His father asked him what he was studying, and as a

"dutiful son" he started to describe to him the work of Martin Heidegger. "The more beers we had, the better both my explanations and his understandings got. And at the end of the evening my father said to me: "OK I got it now, philosophy does to a man's mind what an eggbeater does to eggs." He mentions that this was "30 years ago", so de Shazer must have been a student at that time and not at all involved in developing SF. Only later on, when SF was already starting to develop, he turned to philosophy again, to get a better understanding of what they were doing in the therapy room. The anecdote does not prove that he did read Heidegger, let alone that his thinking played an important role in the development of SF.

The absence of Heidegger in de Shazer's written work may be explained by the fact that the works he used to get grips with the contemporary European philosophies did not mention the German philosopher. The American therapeutic literature does not reflect European moves towards phenomenology and adopts the term "co-constructivism" and "post-structuralism" rather than exploring the more European and wider reaching "post-modernism". As a result de Shazer focuses on post-structural thinking and its application to SF.

One of his sources was Staten's Wittgenstein and Derrida (1984). Staten is very direct on the subject: "I have tried to bring Derrida's project into relation with Wittgenstein's in order to suggest an Anglo-American context within which deconstruction makes philosophical sense. The predecessors who provide the philosophical context of Derrida's project in France - Heidegger, Levinas, Bataille – are not well known in this country (America) and that is an important reason why Derrida has found almost no philosophical audience here." (Staten, 1984, p. xiv). Heidegger is therefore underplayed in order to appeal to an American audience.

The second text used extensively by de Shazer during his initial explorations of philosophy and SF is Madan Sarup's An Introductory Guide to Post Structuralism and Post Modernism (1989). Sarup links Derrida to Heidegger briefly during a discussion on Nietzsche and metaphor then centres exclusively on Nietzsche.

Sarup emphasises almost every other philosopher linked with Derrida and post modernism except Heidegger. In his introductory name check Levi Strauss, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard Althusser, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Saussure, Comte, Durkheim, Baudrillard, Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva, Guattari, and Marxism are listed. (Sarup, 1989, p. 1–4).

The two texts used most by de Shazer therefore leave Heidegger and phenomenology sidelined, perhaps as Staten stated so clearly because they were not seen as being accessible to an American audience. It is not surprising, then, that de Shazer did not appear to make links between Heidegger's work and SF.

Heidegger, Wittgenstein and SF

Heidegger has a lot to contribute to the ideas of SF and to the justification for the miracle question in particular, the concept of non-linear time, of "there being" or Dasein as "stretching itself towards its own future" of Dasein as its "own possibility" of looking towards its own death, of interpreting past, present and future in the now, and the idea of a disclosure of alternative ways of being via a "clearing" or space regulating our perceptions of the world and allowing authenticity, disclosure and reflection to take place (which could be seen as a function of asking a miracle question, to create space to disclose or uncover possible alternative ways of future being). The concepts of authentic and inauthentic modes of being and what triggers each and the idea of "Das Man", "The They" (Blattner, 2006, prefers "The You" to prevent any subject/object division) and the influence of "the they" on our ways of being and thinking about being, also provide a platform to think about society and popular psychology's predominant paradigm of problem-focused and past-focused therapy. Heidegger argues as convincingly as Wittgenstein using the same examples for the idea that we already have traces of solutions and ideas to puzzles such as "what is being" and Wittgenstein himself acknowledged Heidegger's position as similar.

Wittgenstein respected some of Heidegger's positions (Monk, 1990, p. 283). Glendenning links Derrida, Heidegger and Wittgenstein closely in his work On Being With Others (1998) and says his treatment of Wittgensteinian criteria "with which this book concludes, develops from and out of the examination of Heidegger and Derrida which precedes it" (Glendenning, 1998, p. vii). He also sees Wittgenstein's position as "fundamentally phenomenological" (Glendenning, 1998). The two appear closely in tune over beliefs that philosophy leaves everything fundamentally unchanged, that "nothing is hidden, everything is open to view," as Wittgenstein put it. Wittgenstein shares and directly refers to Heidegger's assertion that it is impossible to frame a philosophical question without some trace of an answer. We already have an idea of what "being *is*" before asking the question "what is being?" but when we focus on it, it is elusive. Wittgenstein not only supports and refers to Heidegger's argument but uses the same references to Augustine to illustrate the same point (Glendenning, 2007, p. 65, Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 36).

Summary

It appears a link to Heidegger and his ontology has not been made because the original texts were not accessible to an American audience who wrote from secondary source material. The concept of language games (one attractive to an Anglo-American audience and culture exposed to Wittgenstein via Staten, Sarup and popular media such as Derek Jarman's 1993 film) pushed Wittgenstein to the fore in SF.

I would suggest that Heidegger could be "unconcealed" and explored in relation to thinking about and structuring a future focused, post modern view of therapeutic engagement. SF could be seen as phenomenology "in action" and miracle questions as hermeneutic phenomenological dialogues and not simply as language games.

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