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From Anthropological (Dis)proportion to Eccentricity: the contemporary relevance of Ludwig Binswanger's thought

ARTICLE

Da (des)proporção antropológica à excentricidade: a atualidade do pensamento de Ludwig Binswanger

Pedro Vitor Barnabé Milanesi
Jean Ricardo Martin

Abstract

This article explores the contemporary relevance of Ludwig Binswanger's thought by focusing on his analysis of eccentricity as an approach to understanding human suffering. Beginning with a critique of the reductionist psychiatric models that objectify madness, this study analyzes the work Three Forms of Failed Existence to clarify how eccentricity (Verschrobenheit) presents itself as a mode of being-in-the-world. Based on a critical examination of Binswanger's Daseinsanalytic phase and his dialogue with Martin Heidegger's ontology—the source of concepts such as Dasein, world-design, and historicity—the core argument revolves around the notion of "anthropological disproportion." Binswanger posits this as a key to understanding failed existences (extravagance, eccentricity, and mannerism), defining this disproportion as an imbalance between the "height" (idealization, rationalization) and "breadth" (situated experience) of existence. Eccentricity is thus framed not as a deficit, but as a unique and insular organization of the world, marked by a rigidification of circumspection (Umsicht) and a loss of communication (communicatio) with one's community of reference. The paper contends that Binswanger's approach transcends traditional psychopathological categories by framing suffering as an ontological crisis, which can only be understood through the patient's existential unfolding within their specific community. This research highlights the richness of Binswanger's thoughts for current debates on health and care and calls for further translations and studies to connect his concepts to contemporary clinical practice.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Ludwig Binswanger; Psychopathology.

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Resumo

Este artigo investiga a atualidade do pensamento de Ludwig Binswanger, com foco em sua análise da excentricidade como via de acesso à compreensão do sofrimento humano. Partindo de uma crítica aos modelos psiquiátricos reducionistas, que objetificam a loucura, o estudo se propõe a analisar a obra Três Formas de Existência Malograda para elucidar como a excentricidade (*Verschrobenheit*) se manifesta enquanto um modo de ser-no-mundo. Por meio de uma análise crítica da fase daseinsanalítica de Binswanger, marcada pelo diálogo com a ontologia de Martin Heidegger, de onde derivam os conceitos de Dasein, projeto de mundo e historicidade, o argumento central desenvolve-se em torno da noção de desproporção antropológica, que Binswanger estabelece como fio condutor para entender as existências malogradas (extravagância, excentricidade e amaneiramento). Tal desproporção é definida como um desequilíbrio entre a "altura" (idealização, racionalização) e a "amplidão" (experiência situada) da existência. A excentricidade, especificamente, é apresentada não como falta ou defeito, mas como uma organização singular e isolada do mundo, caracterizada pelo enrijecimento da circunvisão (*Umsicht*) e pela perda da comunicação (*communicatio*) com a comunidade de referência. Defende-se que a abordagem binswangeriana, ao transcender as categorias psicopatológicas tradicionais, situa a compreensão do sofrimento como uma crise ontológica que só pode ser compreendida a partir do acontecimento existencial do paciente em sua comunidade de referência (que também precisa ser conhecida). A pesquisa ressalta, por fim, a fecundidade deste pensamento para os debates contemporâneos sobre saúde e cuidado e aponta para a necessidade de mais traduções e estudos que articulem seus conceitos à prática clínica atual.

Palavras-chave: Fenomenologia; Ludwig Binswanger; Psicopatologia.

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Introduction

We commonly understand madness and psychic suffering through their extraordinary characteristics—that is, through whatever manifests unexpectedly, unpredictably, and often mysteriously. Eccentricity is one of the terms we employ to designate modes of existence that diverge from what is customarily encountered in everyday relations. Throughout the history of psychiatry, as Foucault (1978) observes, ever since the convergence of the healing arts and the natural sciences (both still steeped in moral and religious frameworks), eccentric conduct was progressively categorized as a disorder, disturbance, or, in many instances, as merely ridiculous. Because the normalizing imperative of scientific psychiatry sought to control, counteract, and standardize behavior, an objective explanation of these phenomena became mandatory. Applying the categorical axioms of positive science—which demand that every explanation rest upon an objective, tangible, and verifiable substrate—psychiatry tasked neurophysiological processes with defining and governing these experiential anomalies.

Along an alternative trajectory, beginning with the pioneering works of Karl Jaspers (1997) aligned with phenomenology, a growing awareness emerged that human suffering possesses an irreducible subjective dimension accessible exclusively through phenomenological inquiry. It is within this phenomenological lineage that Ludwig Binswanger made his most enduring contribution, profoundly reshaping the clinical regard directed toward human suffering.

For the purposes of this study, our interest lies in Binswanger's reading of eccentricity. As he notes, the concept simultaneously bears the enigma of its intrinsic meaning, the uncommon quality of its manifestation, and a recognition of the derisive gaze habitually cast upon eccentric individuals. In Portuguese, *Verschrobenheit* has traditionally been rendered as "*excentricidade*" (eccentricity). Yet the German term conveys something more: it denotes something askew, loose, improperly fastened, or poorly screwed in. A fitting vernacular equivalent in Portuguese-speaking cultures is found in the colloquial expressions describing someone who "has a screw loose" or is "off their hinges" *[está fora do cabo].*

Precisely because Binswanger devoted decades to forging a rigorous phenomenological account of eccentricity, we regard his work as an indispensable guide for reading and comprehending human suffering. This article therefore examines

Binswanger's (1977) seminal work, *Three Forms of Failed Existence: Extravagance, Eccentricity, and Mannerism*, seeking to elucidate and expand upon eccentricity as an ontological foundation for understanding the phenomenon of suffering.

Binswanger and Phenomenology

Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966) was born in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland. Descended from a prominent dynasty of psychiatrists, he directed the renowned Bellevue Sanatorium in Switzerland, an institution that enjoyed international acclaim in its era. After completing his medical studies at the University of Zurich, he trained under Carl G. Jung at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Hospital, accompanying him to Vienna in 1907 to meet Sigmund Freud. This encounter inaugurated a lasting friendship between Binswanger and Freud, leading Binswanger to cultivate a psychoanalytically informed clinical practice, convinced that a substantial portion of his patients warranted psychoanalytic treatment (Alarcão, 2013; Cabestan & Dastur, 2015).

Nevertheless, alongside his profound esteem for Freud and psychoanalysis, Binswanger's clinical engagement was marked by substantial philosophical reservations. Trained in philosophy as well as medicine, Binswanger questioned Freud's model of the unconscious, the absolute primacy of sexuality, and the reduction of the human being to a psychic apparatus governed by deterministic natural mechanisms. This did not represent a clean break with psychoanalysis, as Binswanger's framework remained dialogically tethered to elements of Freud's premises. Rather, his medical path was shaped by a continuous critique of psychiatric epistemological foundations, giving rise to an urgent need for new conceptual frameworks capable of grounding psychopathology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy alike.

His philosophical inclination led him into a rigorous engagement with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, from which he formulated a phenomenological anthropology that underpinned his initial theoretical architecture. To trace the evolution of Binswanger's thought, Pita and Moreira (2013) delineate three major developmental phases, outlined below.

What is recognized as his first phase was defined by Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. In 1922, Binswanger published *Einführung in die Probleme der allgemeinen Psychologie* (Introduction to the Problems of General Psychology) and *Über Phänomenologie* (On Phenomenology). In both works, Husserl's concept of intentionality

plays a central role, directing Binswanger toward the intentional constitution of consciousness (Pita & Moreira, 2013). Husserlian phenomenology provided a methodological tool enabling psychiatry to understand psychopathology as a specific structural variation in the patient's intentional constitution of experience. Binswanger thus turned to Husserl to transcend the residual psychologism in psychoanalysis, treating phenomenology as an eidetic science equipped with a rigorous method for grasping madness. Several core foundations of his psychopathology emerged here, most notably the task of disclosing fundamental lived experiences by moving from the empirical clinical fact to the essential structure that transcends it (Binswanger, 1971).

Subsequently, Binswanger turned toward Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology, immersing himself in the newly published *Being and Time* as early as 1927. This decisive shift inaugurated his most prolific and influential period: the formulation of Daseinsanalysis (*Daseinsanalyse*). Indeed, many commentators identify Binswanger's oeuvre almost exclusively with this Daseinsanalytic phase, often obscuring his prior Husserlian and psychoanalytic allegiances (Pita & Moreira, 2013).

This second phase reoriented psychopathology around human distinctiveness—understood ontologically as *Dasein*—through an appropriation of Heidegger's existential analytic. Operating as an ontic science dedicated to an anthropological investigation of individual human existence in contradistinction to natural-scientific reductionism, Binswanger conceptualized the human being in its totality as being-in-the-world, responsible for its own existence. Drawing upon the existential structures of *Dasein*, Binswanger foregrounded the decisive concept of world-design (in German, *Weltentwurf*). Dasein is the disclosive openness that constantly projects a meaningful world.

Binswanger's Daseinsanalysis constitutes a rigorous investigative method aimed at reconstructing the inner structure of psychiatric suffering through the horizon of world-design (Holzhey-Kunz, 2018). In Binswanger's own words (1947/2019a, p. 90):

> With the recognition that it is world-designs as such that distinguish the ill person from the healthy person, making mutual understanding with the former difficult, the question of attributing pathological symptoms to particular cerebral processes also takes on a new light. For what is now at issue is not locating particular psychic symptoms in the brain, but asking, first and foremost, where and how we must locate the fundamental psychic disturbance: namely, in the alteration of being-in-the-world as such.

Furthermore, in *Dream and Existence*, Binswanger (2013) demonstrated how the dreamer inhabits a private, non-communal sphere of meaning divorced from shared interpersonal reality. This insight led him to theorize the presence of singular world-designs,

and his clinical writings from this period—especially his landmark case studies—are characterized by meticulous structural descriptions of his patients' lived worlds.

The crowning achievement of this Daseinsanalytic period is precisely the text analyzed here: *Three Forms of Failed Existence* (hereafter *Three Forms*), published in 1956. In this work, Binswanger (1977) establishes the concept of anthropological disproportion as the guiding thread for deciphering human suffering. As Machado (2019, p. 14) observes: "This notion is perhaps Binswanger's greatest contribution to contemporary psychopathology."

These three foundational pillars—human existence conceptualized as *Dasein* (being-in-the-world); the primacy of world-design and the emergence of idiosyncratic lived horizons; and anthropological disproportion—will be examined in depth below to elucidate how Binswanger grounds eccentricity as an essential structural possibility of madness.

Although outside the primary scope of this article, it is noteworthy that in his final intellectual phase, Binswanger returned to Husserlian phenomenology via Wilhelm Szilasi's hermeneutics (Pita & Moreira, 2013; Machado, 2019). Furthermore, his Daseinsanalytic appropriation was famously challenged by Heidegger himself in the *Zollikon Seminars.* Heidegger raised forceful objections, arguing that Binswanger had anthropologized the ontological analytic, mistaking an investigation into the meaning of Being for an ontic study of human nature (Heidegger, 2021; Loparic, 2002). This philosophical critique contributed significantly to Binswanger's late methodological return to Husserl.

Nevertheless, just as his transition from psychoanalysis to phenomenology did not erase Freud's clinical discoveries, Binswanger's late return to Husserl did not forfeit the ontological gains of his Daseinsanalytic period[1] (Pita & Moreira, 2013). Instead, it established Binswanger as a clinician-thinker ultimately more answerable to psychiatry than to pure philosophy, uniquely navigating "both worlds" between Heidegger and Husserl (Machado, 2016). His final major treatises, *Melancholie und Manie* (1960) and *Wahn* (1965), deploy Husserl's genetic phenomenology—especially the synthesis of inner time-consciousness—to analyze melancholic, manic, and delusional modes of consciousness. Here, his objective was no longer merely to describe the thematic contents of the patient's

[1] It is worth noting that the clinical cases published by Binswanger, compiled in his major works, evidence the integration of his thinking across different periods. We highlight here the Ellen West case (Binswanger, 1958) — originally published between 1944 and 1945 in the *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie* and later compiled in the volume *Schizophrenie* (1957) — and the Suzanne Urban case (Binswanger, 2012), first published in 1952 in the same journal prior to its discussion in *Wahn* (1965).

world, but to interrogate the constitutive dynamics of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) within which singular clinical modes unfold (Pita & Moreira, 2013; Machado, 2019).

A concise historical retrospective demonstrates that Binswanger's psychopathology weaves together psychoanalysis, philosophical anthropology, existential ontology, and phenomenology, establishing a rigorous counterweight to biological and neuroanatomical reductions. Charting the entirety of Binswanger's theoretical path is no small undertaking, given the vast philosophical heritage that nourished his clinical thought. Yet his historical significance is unmistakable: in confronting the mechanistic psychiatric hegemony of the twentieth century, Binswanger revolutionized both the epistemology of clinical practice and the philosophical comprehension of the human condition.

We now turn to an analysis of the phenomenal structures of existence in *Being and Time*, before exploring *Three Forms* to demonstrate how anthropological disproportion provides an indispensable horizon for understanding eccentricity and the phenomenon of madness.

The Analytic of Dasein and World-Designs

Given the absolute centrality of *Dasein* for Binswanger, it is essential to trace how Heidegger formulates this concept. In section nine of *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/2012, p. 139) articulates the foundational principle of his analytic: "The entity we have the task of examining is, in each case [*je*], ourselves. The being of this entity is in each case mine [*je meines*]." Through this concise definition, Heidegger foregrounds the ek-static character of human existence. Ecstasis (the condition of standing outside oneself) serves as Heidegger's response to a perennial philosophical challenge: the intrinsic mutability and historical contingency of human existence. As Casanova (2017) emphasizes, the ek-static nature of human existence renders any rigid categorical definition or essentialist reification of its being impossible. The emphasis on *je*—crystallized in *Jemeinigkeit* (mineness, or being-in-each-case-mine), signifying "each time" and "in each case" (Borges-Duarte, 2003, p. 88, n. 3)—formally conveys this open-endedness. Heidegger continues: "[...] in the being of this entity, it has to comport itself with its being. As an entity of this being, it must answer for its own being. Being itself is what is in each case [*je*] at stake for this entity" (Heidegger, 1927/2012, p. 139). Because a static categorical essence cannot be posited, *Dasein's* being is disclosed solely through its temporal unfolding—its existence. Moreover, in a fundamental sense, every *Dasein* exists

in an ongoing relation to the Being of entities in general.

Two fundamental implications radiate from this existential unfolding: first, the impossibility of a predetermined nature, which assigns to *Dasein* the open task of having-to-be (Heidegger, 1927/2012, p. 139); and second, the condition that its own being is perpetually at issue in its being (p. 141). This constitutes *Dasein'*s definitive character:

> The 'essence' of this entity resides in its having-to-be. The what-being (essentia) of this entity, insofar as one can speak of it at all, must be conceived from its being (existentia). Here lies precisely the ontological task of showing that, in choosing existence as the designation for the being of this entity, the term does not and cannot have the ontological meaning of the traditional term existentia, which, according to tradition, ontologically dignifies, as much as presence-at-hand, a mode of being that is essentially inappropriate to an entity having the character of Dasein. (Heidegger, 1927/2012, p. 139).

This formulation by Heidegger (1927/2012) restricts the concept of existence (*Existenz*) exclusively to the human being, departing decisively from classical metaphysics, which conflated existence with being present-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*). Existence is reappropriated in its etymological radicality as *Ek-sistere*—a standing-outward that corresponds directly to *Da-Sein* (being-the-there). Heidegger (1927/2012) further clarifies:

> The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence. The characteristics that can be exhibited in this entity are therefore not present-at-hand 'properties' of an entity that is present-at-hand with this or that 'aspect,' but modes of being that are possible for it in each case, and only that. Every being-thus of this entity is, primarily, being. Hence the term 'Dasein,' by which we designate this entity, does not express its what, as in the case of table, house, or tree, but its being. (p. 141).

Because *Dasein* possesses no fixed nature, it cannot be grasped through an inventory of static attributes or an a priori essence. Instead, Heidegger demonstrates that *Dasein* can only be understood through a structural analysis of its temporal and historical existence, for it realizes itself solely in concrete modes of being.

Human existence can never be comprehended generically, because each *Dasein* is characterized by its own unique mineness. Heidegger elucidates the structural ways in which human existence realizes itself in distinct modes of being[2] (Casanova, 2014; 2017). While these modes are multifaceted, they fundamentally coalesce around two existential possibilities: being unreflectively absorbed in the historically sedimented public world (inauthenticity), or existing authentically in the face of one's own radical indeterminacy and finitude. In both orientations, temporality constitutes the decisive horizon for making sense of existence.

[2] It should be emphasized and recalled that Heidegger's interest in *Being and Time* is fundamental-ontological; that is, the analysis of *Dasein* is the necessary path for phenomenologically posing anew the question of being in general and reorienting philosophy as a whole. Here, we have emphasized Dasein's existentiality, since this is what is of greatest interest to Binswanger.

As an astute reader of Heidegger, Binswanger embraces the premise that *Dasein* is the entity that understands its being by projecting toward the future. Consequently, his clinical evaluation of suffering operates not with static symptoms or neurochemical deficits, but with existential forms of being-in-the-world. For Binswanger, as for Heidegger, *Dasein* constitutes and realizes itself through meaningful relations within a world. Everything *Dasein* is manifests as possibilities assumed more or less explicitly within its temporal openness.

This provides the groundwork for understanding how Binswanger integrates Heideggerian ontology into Daseinsanalysis—conceived as a "third" etiological field for psychopathology, independent of both somatic-neurological and purely psychological models. In Heidegger's existential analytic, Binswanger discovers a framework capable of investigating human existence in its constitutive indeterminacy (desubstantialization and desubjectivation), anchored in the existential notion of projection (*Entwurf*) (Binswanger, 1977).

For Heidegger (1927/2012), *Dasein*'s lack of fixed properties asserts the absolute primacy of history. As Casanova (2014; 2017) emphasizes, existing as *Dasein* involves relying on precarious points of reference; hence, historical tradition carries immense weight, operating initially and for the most part as our shared horizon of orientation. Within this field, *Dasein*'s indeterminacy requires it to constantly project (in the etymological sense of *pro-icere*, casting forward). Every occurrence opens up a field of meaningful possibilities, sustained by the historicity of the shared world—its factical situatedness. In other words, for Heidegger (1927/2012) and Binswanger (1977; 2013) alike, *Dasein* is always already discursively open to history and experience, yet never definitively sealed. Thus, to understand (*Verstehen*) is always already to appropriate something as an existential possibility of being, where understanding, interpretation, and application form an indissoluble hermeneutic unity (Gadamer, 1999).

Furthermore, as noted earlier, his studies on dreams led Binswanger (2013) to posit the existence and primacy of a singular world (*Eigenwelt*) that articulates specific world-designs, whether in healthy individual traits or in clinical symptoms. Binswanger's clinical proposal is that psychopathology must regard and comprehend symptoms from the progressive disclosure of the world-design that each patient fundamentally is, thereby delineating the structural architecture of human suffering.

Binswanger's engagement with *Dasein*'s existentiality (the primacy of existence

over essence) and Heidegger's concept of projection (*Entwurf*) leads him to pose a fundamental clinical question when encountering suffering: *what world-design and what existential project made this specific mode of being possible?* For Binswanger, the answer can emerge only through reconstructing the singular existential history that each patient embodies, undertaken collaboratively with the patient in view of their ontological nature as openness and project (Holzhey-Kunz, 2018; Binswanger, 1935/2019b).

This phenomenological focus on modes of being enables Binswanger to conceptualize existence along the spatial-existential axes of ascent and fall. Initially formulated in *Dream and Existence*, where Binswanger interprets oneiric imagery through classical Greek thought (e.g., Werner Jaeger) combined with Heideggerian ontology, ascent and fall represent movements of existential attunement or estrangement (Binswanger, 2013). Ascent denotes an authentic, creative appropriation of *Dasein*'s singularity, finitude, and temporality; fall signifies an alienated, unreflective collapse into the public world, or a destructive, disjointed relation to one's existential coordinates.

This framework inaugurates a method for grasping existence in its primordial historical unfolding (*Geschichtlichkeit*). The three forms of existential failure analyzed by Binswanger (extravagance, eccentricity, and mannerism) each display distinct structural trajectories of ascent and fall. While an existence that unfolds authentically maintains a dynamic equilibrium between these vectoral tensions—what Binswanger designates as the anthropological proportion of existence—failed existences suffer from structural distortions in their fundamental coordinates of time, space, corporeality, and relationality (Chamond, 2011). When such anthropological disproportion takes root, *Dasein* becomes trapped in an atypical relation to its lived world, as seen prototypically in schizophrenia (Pita & Moreira, 2020). By tracking these vertical and horizontal axes of existence rather than relying on external categories of normality, pathology, or biological dysfunction, psychopathology can more rigorously decipher the lived experiences of human suffering.

From Anthropological Disproportion to Forms of Failed Existence

Three Forms of Failed Existence was published in 1956. The monograph is divided into three main sections exploring the failure (*Missglücken*) of *Dasein*. The first section (on extravagance) offers a concise phenomenological analysis, expanding upon Binswanger's earlier publications (Machado, 2016). Eccentricity and mannerism receive exhaustive Daseinsanalytic scrutiny in sections II and III, where Binswanger examines both

phenomena through a unified methodological progression: tracing their etymological roots, their colloquial idioms and cultural periphrases, their historical psychiatric classifications, and ultimately their anthropological and ontological structures, illustrated through extensive clinical case material.

The very title, *Three Forms of Failed Existence*, announces the ontological possibility that human existence may realize itself in a failed manner. Conceptually, the presence of a failed mode presupposes a successful one. Binswanger locates existential success within the harmonious realization of "anthropological proportion," whereas extravagance, eccentricity, and mannerism represent modulations of a failed "anthropological disproportion."

Because the work was written in German, careful attention to Binswanger's conceptual vocabulary is paramount. The original title, *Drei Formen missglückten Daseins*, identifies the structural modes of being (*Formen*) of human existence (*Dasein*) in its potential failure (*Missglücken*). In Portuguese scholarship, rendering *missglückt* as "malograda" (failed/miscarried) is conceptually illuminating. Morphologically, *missglücken* combines the privative prefix miss- with *Glück/glücken* (fortune, success, flourishing), denoting a venture that has miscarried. In Portuguese, the term *malogrado* evokes a compelling spatial resonance—heard as *mal-logrado*, 'badly sited' or 'without a place.' This evocative wordplay points toward an interpretive reading: what lies at the heart of the psychopathological experiences described in the book is a radical spatial and relational disproportion between the patient's lived world and their community of reference—an existential miscarriage, in other words.

The three forms are specified in the subtitle. 'Extravagance' (*extravagância*) translates the German *Verstiegenheit*, which in ordinary usage denotes audacity, high-flown exaggeration, and literally extra-vagating—straying excessively beyond bounds. 'Eccentricity' (*excentricidade*) renders *Verschrobenheit*, which colloquially describes an idiosyncratic, twisted, or distorted disposition, drawing upon the figurative sense of the verb *verschrauben* to indicate someone who 'has a screw loose.' Finally, mannerism' (*amaneiramento*) translates *Manieriertheit*, denoting an artificial, stilted adherence to formal etiquette. Both *Verstiegenheit* and *Verschrobenheit* share the German prefix *ver-*, which conveys intensification, deterioration, entanglement, or misdirection. In Binswanger's phenomenological usage, these substantives function as qualitative descriptors of modes of being.

Among the profound insights of *Three Forms*, Binswanger's formulation of anthropological disproportion stands out. As Messas and Fukuda (2018) point out, this concept provides an indispensable heuristic and clinical tool whose relevance continues to expand. What this concept offers is an insightful account of the ontological conditions underlying psychiatric suffering—a dimension largely neglected during the historical development of psychiatry as a natural science (Kendler, 2016).

Anthropological disproportion describes a structural possibility of human existence wherein the existential spatiality of *Dasein* becomes displaced[3] (Binswanger, 1977). Binswanger uses this to designate a distortion in how an individual structures their lived relationship with the world across meaning, existential horizon, and organizing circumspection (*Umsicht*). The term *Verstiegenheit* was deployed by Binswanger precisely to characterize a disproportion wherein *Dasein* has overextended its mode of being in height relative to its breadth.

Following Machado's (2018) formulation, it is vital to clarify the dialectic between height and breadth. Height corresponds to the capacity for an overarching perspective, constructive synthesis, idealization, and the theoretical concepts that inform our modes of being; for Binswanger (1977), it directly shapes the constitution of the personal world (*Eigenwelt*), encompassing self-perception, identity, and personal aspirations. Breadth, conversely, encompasses our situated perceptual, embodied, and relational encounters—having one's "feet on the ground"—wherein our horizons are continuously tested and enriched by concrete situations. Anthropological proportion consists of the dynamic equilibrium between these two polarities: when the height of conceptual ideals elevates and enriches situated encounters, while the breadth of concrete experience anchors, corrects, and resituates ideals.

Geometric metaphors clarify this dialectic. Proportion can be visualized as an upright cone: rising toward a defined height while remaining firmly grounded upon a wide base. Disproportion in height resembles an inverted cone or an ungrounded cylinder, where towering abstract ideals maintain negligible contact with lived reality. Binswanger (1977) illustrates this dramatically through the case of a father who presented his daughter with a burial coffin as a Christmas gift shortly after she received a terminal diagnosis.

[3] For a fuller account, see *Three Forms*, where Binswanger initially describes anthropological disproportion as the basis of extravagance, before showing, in the sections on eccentricity and mannerism, how anthropological disproportion is the guiding thread of his understanding (Binswanger, 1977).

Conversely, disproportion in breadth resembles a flat disc, where existence is entirely submerged within the immediate demands of each transient moment, precluding enduring reflection, narrative continuity, or future projection. Binswanger (1977, p. 61) exemplifies this with the case of a schoolteacher who strictly forbade his pupils from reading Joseph von Eichendorff's famous poem containing the line "it was as if the sky had silently kissed the earth," dogmatically asserting that "it is as clear as day that the sky cannot kiss the earth."

Throughout the work, Binswanger demonstrates that these threats to human existence emerge from structural modulations of being-in-the-world. While authentic existence is sustained by mutual communion and sharing (Machado, 2018), anthropological disproportion isolates the individual from the shared social horizon:

> Deprived of communio and communicatio, Dasein can now no longer expand, revise, or examine its 'horizon of experience' and remains trapped in a 'narrow-minded,' strictly circumscribed perspective. Thus, Dasein has stalled, it is true, or grown obstinate, but it has not yet strayed into extravagance. For the condition of possibility of extravagance requires, furthermore, that Dasein climb higher than is warranted by its breadth, by its horizon of experience and understanding; or in other words, that breadth and height fail to maintain a proportional relationship. (Binswanger, 1977, p. 17).

The qualitative manifestation of psychic suffering involves an ontological-anthropological essence accessible via phenomenological reduction. Consequently, every lived reality traditionally labeled as madness or psychiatric disorder reflects an underlying disproportion that paralyzes the free, authentic unfolding of existence (Messas & Fukuda, 2018). Binswanger operates upon this plane to broaden the clinical horizon beyond the mechanical nosology of conventional psychiatry.

Evidently, Binswanger refuses to restrict clinical reality to biological or neurophysiological findings. Suffering originates fundamentally in a distorted constitution of meaning within *Dasein*'s horizon of lived possibilities. The concept of anthropological disproportion thus serves as a powerful heuristic enabling clinicians to perceive psychopathology in its authentic ontological-existential reality.

Eccentricity: Between Extravagance and Mannerism

Binswanger's conceptualization of extravagance, eccentricity, and mannerism—as structural modes of being that are not purely biological defects, but failed existences relative to their community of reference—radically challenged the psychiatric paradigm of his day. In *Three Forms*, Binswanger reorients psychopathology toward an existential comprehension of suffering through the transformation of world-designs. He critiques

classical psychiatry for adopting external impressions of madness derived unreflectively from colloquial language[4], resulting in diagnostic classifications that merely institutionalize lay prejudices (Tamura & Messas, 2023).

The structures proposed by Binswanger illuminate how an individual's relationship with the world can approach or withdraw from communal reality (defined as the public horizon of being-in-the-world governed by the shared interpersonal world, *Mitwelt*, and the surrounding world, *Umwelt*). Anthropological proportion is enacted whenever an individual dynamically "ascends" toward transcendent possibilities and "descends" to ground themselves in shared factical encounters.[5] This dialectic of ascent and fall is intrinsic to the human condition: every human being experiences momentary disproportions. To elucidate this dynamic, Almeida (1977) provides an essential gloss regarding extravagance:

> To understand it in its full sense, one must bear in mind the connotations it retains from its derivation from the verb (sich) versteigen. Sich versteigen (which in turn derives from steigen = to climb) means, in its proper and primary sense, to lose one's way, to go too far, and to get lost while climbing—such as, for example, the mountaineer who, daring to scale a perilous passage, finds himself lost and trapped in a cul-de-sac from which there is no possible return, and from which he can only be saved through the intervention of others. Figuratively, sich versteigen signifies to overreach (with audacity), to exceed all bounds, to transgress the limits of reason, to go beyond what is reasonable in one's ideas, judgments, or conduct. For example: 'er verstieg sich zu einer übertriebene Forderung…' [he went too far with an exaggerated demand…] (p. 13, translator's note).

Binswanger (1977, pp. 11–12) defines the existential structure of extravagance as: "[…] a disproportion between the 'breadth of existence' and the 'height of the problematic' of human existence, or, to speak with Ibsen, the disproportion between the height of the capacity to build and that of the very capacity to climb". Extravagance is not primarily an anomalous thought or behavior, but an a priori structural disproportion of being-in-the-world. Existence ascends into dizzying vertical abstraction while its experiential breadth constricts, culminating in an entrapment—an extra-vagating—from which *Dasein* cannot extricate itself unaided. This establishes a pathological mode of being marked by the radical curtailment of *Dasein*'s authentic possibilities (Gonçalves & Messas, 2015).

Mannerism, on the other hand, is characterized by the mechanical, ritualized

[4] Binswanger shows the various terms through which psychiatric practice in the early twentieth century understood madness according to colloquial language. This is an important factor that the author highlights when subsequently reflecting on the importance of the ontological and anthropological meaning of mental illness, whose openness makes possible certain steps toward a Daseinsanalytic investigation.

[5] Anthropological (dis)proportion can be explicated through the relationship between the three domains of the world described by the young Heidegger (1922/2002): the surrounding world (*Umwelt*), the common/shared world (*Mitwelt*), and one's own world (*Eigenwelt*). Although the philosopher revised the relationship between these domains in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1927/2012), insisting on their mutual determination, Binswanger's reading can be considered illuminating.

repetition of behaviors devoid of authentic self-involvement. Here, *Dasein* remains trapped in ungrounded routines that conceal rather than disclose freedom. In dissecting mannerism, Binswanger investigates colloquial speech to trace the lived origins of psychological descriptions:

> The plural manners designates the way of dealing or interacting in general within the context of the environmental, social, or private world, from both a sociological and a psychopathological standpoint. With the expressions mannered and mannerism, colloquial language, in turn, designates a schematically exaggerated manner. [...] the words used to signify extravagance and eccentricity refer merely to the effect exerted on the spectator, listener, or reader (in the sense of astonishment), or, in other words, to the impressions aroused by whatever attracts attention, surprises, perplexes, or disconcerts—by the strange, odd, unusual, eccentric, etc. (Binswanger, 1977, pp. 108–109).

Binswanger underscores the prominence of imitation and mimesis in mannerism. It manifests as a lack of reflective awareness, existential meaning, and authenticity, wherein *Dasein* becomes frozen in hollow behavioral patterns. This constitutes an existential self-deception in the face of angst (Kierkegaard's "dizziness of freedom"), wherein the mannered individual assumes artificial masks in a desperate effort to secure existential stability through total absorption in everyday inauthenticity (Tamura & Messas, 2023).

Finally, eccentricity articulates and consolidates the core elements of these clinical configurations. Binswanger emphasizes the imperative to comprehend existential phenomena from the situated standpoint of the individual embedded within their relational world[6]. While these structures are interrelated, they display distinct ontological architectures. Binswanger (1977) explains that eccentricity presents as odd, bizarre, and estranged through an existential dynamic of twisting, skewing, or deviating away from a shared communal center.

To comprehend the structure of eccentricity, we must recognize that such failed modes remain authentic, singular modes of being-in-the-world. Crucially, as Rodrigues (2015) notes, there is no destruction of *Dasein*'s a priori ontological structure, but rather an anomalous modulation in relation to the communal horizon (*communio*) to which Dasein belongs. The German term *Verschrobenheit* derives from *verschroben*, historically a strong participial form of *verschrauben* (to screw awry, to twist or misalign). Colloquially, *verschroben* describes an individual whose behavior is askew or mismatched—analogous to having a "screw loose" (Binswanger, 1977). While eccentricity is conventionally dismissed as bizarre withdrawal into fantasy, Binswanger reveals that this disorganization

[6] The "surrounding world" (*Umwelt*) marks Dasein's constant need to orient itself in and through its environment, its context. Always historically constituted (also by Dasein), the surrounding world provides all of us with a point of reference that, initially and for the most part, guides our behavior, our ways of organizing, and our practical (tacit) sense (Heidegger, 1927/2012).

is actually a peculiar, insular reorganization of the surrounding world (*Umwelt*), whereby entities are assigned idiosyncratic meanings. The eccentric structure is fundamentally characterized by a breakdown in organizing circumspection (*Umsicht*) relative to the shared norms of the community of reference, as Binswanger demonstrates across his five clinical cases in *Three Forms.*

In eccentricity, *Dasein* becomes disconnected from the common orientations of the shared world, withdrawing into an isolated private sphere. Binswanger (1977) compares this to the radical freedom of the creative artist yet marked by the tragic inability to achieve communicative expression. The progressive restriction of communicative attunement (*communicatio*) becomes the decisive key to understanding its pathology. In relinquishing its authentic possibilities, *Dasein* deviates from its own potentiality-for-being. Although *Dasein* is historical movement projected across time, in existential failure it suffers stagnation—manifesting as psychosis or schizophrenia. Thus, the miscarriage of *Dasein* emerges as an ontological crisis defining the very essence of madness. This reveals that all psychiatric suffering—whether physical, psychological, or social—is simultaneously and fundamentally existential-ontological suffering.

For Binswanger, a rigorous psychopathology must transcend external behavioral taxonomy. It is imperative to analyze the lived being-in-the-world of madness from the patient's own perspective, granting them sovereign voice to articulate their unique apprehension of entities (Tamura & Messas, 2023).

By Way of Un-Closing

In broad terms, Binswanger (1977) critiques the inability of conventional psychiatric language to capture the ontological complexity of human suffering, while defending the ethical necessity of allowing eccentric individuals to speak for themselves (p. 82) so that their condition may be understood through their situated historical unfolding. Through this critique, Binswanger establishes an autonomous, unified foundation for psychiatry and psychopathology. Guided by Heidegger's existential analytic, Binswanger demonstrates that human existence itself—as situated being-in-the-world—must serve as the ultimate foundation of clinical knowledge.

Eccentricity transcends trivial clinical descriptions; it represents an essential existential modality of human dissonance and vulnerability. It discloses a singular way of being-in-the-world that challenges instrumental societal norms of utility, adaptation, and

functionality.

Undeniably, *Three Forms* represents a monumental effort to ground psychotherapy in an authentic philosophical anthropology. While Heidegger formulated his analytic as a fundamental ontology of human existence, Binswanger transforms this framework into a clinical axiom for understanding the specific phenomenon of psychiatric suffering.

Living between the two worlds of psychiatry and philosophy, Binswanger offers an enduring lesson: it is impossible to evaluate psychopathology in abstraction from the situated lives that are existentially at stake. This insight is exceptionally fruitful for contemporary debates on healthcare, such as those advanced by Ayres (2007; 2008) and Almeida-Filho and Ayres (2025). As these authors observe, modern healthcare is increasingly dominated by instrumental rationality—which measures clinical efficacy solely by standardized technical problem-solving—thereby obscuring the human complexity disclosed in each clinical encounter. Contemporary hermeneutic approaches call for harmonizing technical efficacy with practical wisdom (*phronesis*)—success achieved through human responsiveness and interpretive dialogue. In harmony with Binswanger's (1975) thesis, the concept of failed existence reminds us that while existence carries the perennial possibility of stagnation, this very vulnerability constitutes the primary opening for authentic clinical care (Morato & Milanesi, 2022).

By advancing a phenomenological comprehension of suffering, this article offers a compelling alternative to traditional biological models. Today, this perspective is vital for humanizing clinical care, urging practitioners to look beyond observable behaviors to the lived forms of existence of patients with severe mental disorders. Amid contemporary debates surrounding medicalization, *Three Forms* offers a profound, communal, and contextual vision of human suffering that remains vibrantly alive.

Nonetheless, Brazilian scholarship on Binswanger remains scarce, largely due to the dearth of direct Portuguese translations. Scholars without German proficiency remain reliant on secondary literature, hindering a comprehensive appreciation of his thought. Furthermore, translating these rich phenomenological insights into everyday clinical practice remains challenging within clinical environments dominated by biomedical pragmatism.

Future research must address these deficits. Recognizing that the lack of primary translations impedes scholarship, future efforts should prioritize translating Binswanger's foundational texts. Moreover, empirical and clinical investigations connecting *Three Forms*

to contemporary clinical realities are urgently needed. Such endeavors will demonstrate how Daseinsanalysis can enrich current mental health practices. Especially within the Brazilian context, whose sociocultural conditions differ markedly from Binswanger's historical setting, clinicians face the vital challenge of establishing a truly situated psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychopathology.

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