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Chronopathological Phenomena in Psychiatric Illness

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Abstract

Typical chronopathological phenomena from a study about altered experiencing of time of 59 patients of a psychiatric practice in the small north German town of Schleswig are presented.

There is an accelerated perception of time as well as a decelerated feeling of time and finally a qualitative distortion of subjective perception of time.

Although these phenomena occur in all fields of diagnosis and all age groups, they are to be found in different numbers depending on the extent of the impairment of the perception of reality.

These results are presented against the background of the theorem of phenomenology founded by Edmund Husserl.

Keywords: time; perception of time; experience of time; alteration of time perception

Methods

A hundred patients of my psychiatric-psychotherapeutical private practice, selected at random, got a questionnaire. They were all asked if they ever had any experience of changed time or otherwise remarkable time experiences.

From the 100 questionnaires which I had handed out I got back 95.

Figures 1 – 3 show the distribution of sex, age and diagnoses of these 95 patients. The analysis is semiquantitative as I classified the answers in well distinguished items. Each patient could give more than one answer due to more than one or quite a lot of experiences with time. So the number of statements is larger than the number of persons.

Results

56 times an accelerated perception of time was described.

80 times a decelerated feeling of time was described.

Figure 4 shows different descriptions of situations with accelerated perception of time. The most frequently mentioned phenomena are growing older during life, being very busy and going through important life events.

Figure 5 shows different descriptions of situations with decelerated feeling of time. The most frequently mentioned phenomena here are psychic illness, especially depressive disturbances, time spent waiting, memories of being young and serious somatic illnesses.

Some remarkable descriptions of time experience are shown word by word in figure 6.

Conclusions

The results agree with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl and his phenomenological studies, especially his “Lectures on the Phenomenology of Inner Time – Consciousness”, edited 1928 by Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger.

Husserl believes that science should describe as exactly as possible the different ways in which all “regions of being” as material objects, persons but also numbers, time and space are given to us. Husserl carried out many analyses distinguishing between the object given and the subjective conscious activity must perform to let it be given.

One very important example of the differentiation is the one between objectively meant time in the sense of Newtonian physics and the

subjective time perception, but also between the time perception of one person, compared to that of another person and the time perception of the same person being psychically healthy or psychically ill.

The small study described above is an example of such a distinguishing description.

Literature

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