

COMPREHENDING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING ANXIOUS

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*My life is my project of affirmation and
actualization.*

William Fischer (1988, p. 165)

Resumen

En este artículo, se ofrece una reflexión teórica sobre la experiencia de ansiedad, la cual está basada en los resultados de una investigación cualitativa de corte fenomenológico sobre el tema en cuestión y en los planteamientos teóricos de la perspectiva fenomenológica existencial en psicología. En este sentido, éste artículo ofrece una alternativa de entendimiento que enfatiza y apunta a la necesidad de comprender la experiencia de ansiedad, antes que buscar explicarla teóricamente. La idea es que seamos capaces de captar el sentido de esta experiencia para la persona que la está vivenciando, desde su estructura de existencia y desde su propia perspectiva experiencial, para poder así, entender la forma en que la asume y enfrenta. De esta forma, se

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asume que al estar plenamente contextualizados en la experiencia de la persona, podríamos formular y desarrollar teorías, explicaciones y técnicas que apunten a sus necesidades particulares, en vez de atender a nuestras propias necesidades teóricas y técnicas.

Palabras clave: Experiencia de ansiedad; estar ansioso; psicología existencial; psicoterapia existencial; sentido.

Abstract

In this article, it is offered a theoretical reflection about the experience of being anxious, which is based on both the results of a qualitative research with a phenomenological orientation about the same theme, and the theoretical ideas of the existential phenomenological perspective in psychology. In this sense, this article gives a possibility of understanding that emphasizes and point out to the need of comprehending the experience of being anxious, before looking for a theoretical explanation about it. The main idea is that in order to understand the way people assume and confront the experience of being anxious, we have to be capable of grasping the meaning of this experience for the person who is experiencing it, from both her/his existential structure and her/his own experiential perspective. In this way, it is understood that if we are totally contextualized about one person's experience, we could offer and develop theories, explanations, and techniques that attend and are specifically focused on that person and her/his concrete needs, instead of attending to our own theoretical and technical needs.

Key words: Experience of anxiety; being anxious; existential psychology; existential psychotherapy; meaning.

This paper is a theoretical reflection inspired and based on the results and conclusions of the independent research "Comprehending the experience of being anxious when the most important personal values are threatened," which from January to May of 2003 as was carried out the final project of the required course *Qualitative Research* in order to get the M.A. in Psychology at University of Dallas, Irving, United States. This project was a case study carried out under the existential phenomenological approach, in which two experiences were analyzed according to the Amedeo Giorgi's method. Its final goals were comprehending both the meaning of the experience of being anxious for the person

who experienced it and the way these persons assumed and confronted this experience of being anxious. Even though this theoretical reflection about the phenomenon of the experience of being anxious is based on the mentioned research, I will just present an approximation to the theoretical understanding of this phenomenon that emerged from that research, instead of presenting the results of that research as such.

Generally speaking, and based on the bibliographic study I made about the experience of anxiety for this research, I would say that when researchers talk about it, they are used to do a great effort focused towards detailing the internal and/or external situation of the person being subject of study in the most evident terms. The idea is to validate anxiety in the light of objective considerations related to it. Then, research on anxiety usually detail variables referring to the relation between anxiety and a lot of characteristics, such as psychophysiological symptoms, environmental determinants, personality types, past and/or unconscious influences, and beliefs and cognitive strategies.

It should be clear that it is necessary to study all of these objective aspects when we are trying to comprehend anxiety. However, it is also true that by focusing *only* in these objective characteristics, any understanding about anxiety will have sense in terms of the theoretical assumptions that we have about it instead of having sense in terms of the existing and living person who is experiencing anxiety. In this way, researchers would only be validating their assumptions about anxiety, and at the same time that they would be refuting theories that do not fit into their ideas about anxiety. This situation implies that we would be ignoring the concrete meaning that the person who is experiencing anxiety is trying to affirm in/with that experience, because we would be focused in adjusting every person to our idea or preconception about anxiety, instead of comprehending her/his experience of being anxious. Boss (1979, P. 145) supports this idea when he affirms, "It never happens that in a particular human behavior only one piece of a person's being is engaged, for the simple reason that human being-in-the-world is by nature indivisible."

The comprehension of the concrete meaning that the person is trying to affirm or preserve is also the basis to comprehend her/his experience of being anxious, which is one of the most important findings I gathered in my research. This means both that the experience of being anxious is based in the existential structure of each person and that we are going to try to describe and grasp the meaning of that experience of being anxious for the person who is experiencing it before trying to make any explanation about that experience. In other words, we should begin to understand any experience of being anxious according to the particular or specific meaning that a concrete person is trying to affirm or preserve in that experience, and not according to our abstract theory about anxiety.

In that light, Yalom (1980) says that it is very difficult to capture the meaning and the vital energy of a person, when we are only studying the parts that compose that person (for example, the conscience, the unconsciousness, the super ego, the ego). Even more, he emphasizes that with the empiric approach we will never discover the meaning any structure has for the person to whom it belongs, because the meaning of every person can not be deducted from the study of the components, because it is not a product of a causality, but it is a creation of man, who is superior to the sum of his/her parts. Binswanger (1958) clarifies and supports this panorama when he says:

Like the biologist and neuropathologist, we (Existential Psychologists) do not stop at the single fact, the single disturbance, the single symptom, but we keep searching for an embracing whole within which the fact can be understood as a partial phenomenon. But this whole... is no objective whole at all but a whole in the sense of the unity of a world-design (p. 205).

In this way, when we talk about the concrete person who is experiencing anxiety, we should not only be concerned with some details of the subject under study such as age, sex, socioeconomic level, and education level among others, but mainly with the comprehension of that concrete person who is anxious and the meaning of her/his experience of being anxious for her/himself. From this perspective, anxiety always

refers to the experience of being anxious, which belongs to somebody's experience. Fischer (1988, P. 96) comments: "Only from the perspective of the person living the particular affect can that affect be completely understood."

Based on this, we should leave aside the "blind" dispute between the purely objective tendency and the purely subjective tendency in order to keep the scientific rigor by comprehending and explaining the experience of being anxious in the concrete situation in which a given person experiences it. This implies that we should not formulate a theory about anxiety before placing and understanding it in the concrete situation and context in which it occurs. Indeed, Binswanger refers to this subject-object dichotomy as the "fatal defect of Psychology", and May calls it the "cancerous zone" where Psychology itself gets lost. That is why Binswanger says that the relation between a subjective experience and objective explanations has a common point in the concrete existence of human being. Ferro Bayona (1998) says:

This concordance is not possible if not built over the basis of a new explanation where man is not taken as an object but as an existence, that is, that takes man as being-in-the-world, that is, with others, with the world and with himself. (p. 3)

In this way, in order to understand the experience of being anxious, before opposing the tendencies and attitudes oriented to the objectivity and subjectivity, and pretending to vote only for one of them, we should realize that they are aspects of the same experience of being anxious, but that they function at different experience levels (and the error consists in confusing them and deny some of them). Because by means of the former we pretend to explain the human experience of being anxious contributing with valuable technical and diagnostic considerations, and by means of the latter we try to comprehend the human being who is anxious starting from his concrete situation in the world and his relationship with it.

Fischer (1988, p. 135) suggests that any theory about the experience of being anxious has to be an attempt to approach the experience of

the person who is anxious as a whole, in order to make an adequate sense of her/his experience. The reason of this is that every theory of anxiety already presupposed a specific definition of it. As Fischer says, every theory of anxiety has already decided what anxiety is. Then, this also demands that we must clarify our preconceptions about anxiety before trying to understand and comprehend it.

According to this, it will be impossible to comprehend the experience of being anxious of any living person if she/he is not thought starting from her/his concrete existence, and not starting from an abstract generality, as May (1961, p. 18) suggests: "The more absolutely and completely you formulate these forces or drives, the more you are talking about abstractions and not the existing, living human being." I addressed this idea in the conclusions of my research when I said:

Apparently, the experience of being anxious is related with the way every person confronts and develops her/his general and whole project as human being. When people feel that they have not been able to preserve or affirm their concrete meanings, or develop their specific projects, nor reach their particular goals, the experience of being anxious is not a constructive experience, but a very painful experience. According to what I have seen here, it seems that every value is placed in a general project of life, and when people feel that they cannot affirm or preserve those values, they feel that is their whole project and meaning as human beings what is threatened, and not only a particular and isolated value.

The central point of what is here exposed is that the comprehension of the experience of being anxious must precede any explanation of it. According to the existential perspective, although there is a unique objective world with which we interact, finally, each human being creates and constitutes her/his own world starting from how her/himself is experienced in her/his relation to this. According to this, May (1958, p. 59) defines world in this way: "The world is the structure of significant relations in which a person exists and in whose configuration he/she takes part." This means that we have to always bear in mind both the meaning of the experience of being anxious for the person who is

living that experience in her/his relationship with the world and comprehend the way the individual has structured her/his world to, as from there on, give the pertinent interpretation about how that experience of being anxious is created.

According to the above stated, the world is not only a mere external and isolated reality that exists by itself and which is necessary to contemplate from outside, but it is also something that we always create and constitute. In other words, the world is always co-constituted. Then, we should attend every human being as someone that constructs and is capable to constitute her/his own world. This is only to assist each human being as a being-in-the-world, as suggested by Heidegger, by which we can understand the concrete way every human being takes care of her/his creation and development as a person in her/his relationship with the concrete elements of the objective world that she/he faces in order to form and give life to her/his actions and project of life. According to Heidegger (2001, p. 138), human beings cannot be separated from their world because they always create their experience in their relationship with their world, which, in turn, leads them to constitute their world, too. He affirms that there is a "composition" of human beings and world. This is the context in which the experience of being anxious should be understood.

Thus, if we want to know and comprehend the concrete person who is living or creating her/his own experience of being anxious, we should begin by comprehending her/his experience as being-in-the-world, instead of beginning to understand her/his experience from our standpoint. We should try to understand the way the experience of being anxious emerges before trying to know the causes of that experience. The former leads us to comprehend who the person is, what she/he wants or tries to be, and how her/his experience emerges. The latter only leads us to be worried about questions related to causality, which according to Boss (1979, p. 150) does not make us comprehend meanings, because causality is only a description of a simple time relationship. In other words, we have to worry mainly to discover the existential center of the person and the concrete and particular values in which it is centered, and understand the experience of being anxious

from this point. May (1967, p. 88) supports this idea when he says: "The question of *why* one is what one is, does not have meaning until we know *what* one is."

This means that only when we comprehend and understand the *what* of the existence structure of the other and her/his vital project in the world, we will have enough and real information in reference to the causes of being anxious (*why*) and to the mechanisms and means used by her/him (*how*) to explain her/his existence and her/his experience of being anxious. In this way we will understand the concrete content of her/his world, her/his project of life and its intentionality, and his/her experience of being anxious in the world, which is what we finally want to reveal.

According to Yalom (1980, p. 8), the principal point here that we have to keep in mind if we want to comprehend someone is that, "The existential position emphasizes a different kind of basic conflict... That flows from the individual's confrontation with the given of existence." This means that to comprehend the experience of being anxious we have to comprehend the relationship of the individual who is experiencing anxiety with his/her existence and his/her life conditions, in which the experience of being anxious is placed. I support this idea with what I say in my research, "The experience of being anxious seems to be an ontological aspect of human being's existence because it is implied in every moment and experience of every human existence. However, we could say that before making some general statements about the experience of being anxious, there are a lot of aspects that have to be clarified in the ontic level..."

Some of the first and most important questions we should ask ourselves are related to the question Who is the person that is experiencing anxiety? These questions are: Who does she/he want to be? What project of life is she/he trying to affirm or develop and with what purpose? How does she/he experience anxiety in that situation? What value is she/he trying to preserve in that experience of being anxious? What is her/his intentionality in that experience? In other words, it is necessary to make very concrete questions: Who is this concrete being and what

project of life does she/he pretend to affirm or develop? The idea is to find out what and how is her/his experience of being anxious in that concrete process of creating a project of life. Any theoretical interpretation about anxiety should be conceptualized and built only from the knowledge of the existential situation of the human being who is anxious.

Then, before developing any technique, diagnosis or theoretical construction about anxiety (which works at the explanation level, in the search of *why*), we must comprehend the meaning of the experience of being anxious for the person who is experiencing it (which operates at the comprehension level, in the search of *what*). Consequently, May (1961, p. 18) says that the problem is to apply any *why* to the concrete situation of the person, "The mechanism has meaning in terms of the person".

In other words, anxiety must have sense in terms of the person who is creating, experiencing or confronting it. This implies that we should not generalize and validate only one rigid theory about anxiety and try to fix everybody into that theory. For example, W. Fischer (1989) comments that when he is researching about the experience of being anxious:

I seek to comprehend the concrete interrelated meanings of subject and situation as they are actually lived and experienced. Hence, I solicit subjects' descriptions of particular situations in which they actually experienced themselves as living through this phenomenon. Moreover, in keeping with the phenomenological imperative to let that which one is studying show itself in its own terms, I do not tell subjects what to focus upon other than the situation, as they experienced and lived it, including their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, actions, and the like. Nor do I suggest to them how to describe the interrelations of what they experienced and lived. For example, I do not ask them what caused or made them feel anxious (p. 135)

However, if we are sharp we will appreciate that in data on the explanations offered by traditional and objective psychology to diagnose

anxiety, at every moment they refer in detail but strictly to the criteria and characteristics to diagnose it. I mean these explanations refer to the symptoms related to anxiety that the individual suffers and how these symptoms evolve, to the statistics related to the prognosis and the prevalence of it, to the associated disturbances to it, and to the criteria to make a differential diagnosis.

And truly, as I have said, it is very important to have details about these objective aspects, but it is also important to note that, while the explanation about anxiety is only given based on statistical criteria, the human experience of being anxious is generalized up to such a point that a breach is created (the same that May calls “cancerous” and Binswanger calls “the fatal error of psychology”) between the person who is anxious and her/his concrete experience of being anxious, and between this state of being anxious and the world in which she/he is, as well as between the person who is anxious and the person who tries to understand her/him. In this way, instead of trying to comprehend the experience of being anxious, this experience is only separated in “pathologic” and “sane”, which limits the vision of the person who is trying to comprehend the other one. May (1958) comments that the fundamental question is to know how a patient faces and/or reacts when facing a given experience, and not if it is true or false, which would be an interpretation based only in statistical information.

In this way, we would lose the comprehension of the other as being-anxious-in-the-world at the same time that we would leave aside the understanding of the whole of her/his experience. Namely. We would separate the experience of being anxious from the particular context, project of life, and person who is experiencing anxiety. As a consequence, we would reduce the experience of that particular person into a mere abstract idea based in our particular theory, instead of being based on the experience of that person and the meaning that she/he affirms. Marianne Boss-Linsmayer (2001) has also emphasized the idea of comprehending a person’s experience without separating the person from her/his world:

In this alternative way, human existence in its unique way, like everything else in the world, no longer appears as something present as an object within a pregiven world space. Rather, human existence can be viewed as being, which cannot be objectified and which consists of an openness to the world and of the capacity to perceive what it encounters in that world. Through this openness, human existence itself, as well as any other given facts of the world, can come to their presence and unfolding. The proper task for human *Da-sein* is the event of letting-be what emerges into the openness of being. (p. X from the preface)

In addition, Binswanger (1958, p. 192) suggests, "Instead of reflecting on something we should let the something speak for itself." If we do not do what Binswanger suggests, we will never be able to grasp neither the general meaning that the person is trying to affirm nor the meaning of the experience of being anxious for her/him, because we will just be worried in fixing the person in our theoretical system. According to Dreyfus (1996, p. 51), when we act in this way, we are stepping back in our comprehension of the other: "We convert ourselves in reflexive and disinterested observers, and we do not have any other chance than to see ourselves as subjects observing objects." In consequence, the "sane" observer is going to be far away from the experience of being anxious of the other person.

Thus from this attitude, we have to understand that human beings do not *have* anxiety, but they *are* anxious. This means that their anxiety is not an object or something strange to them, but it is an experience created by them from their particular existential structure, which is created and/or based in their experiences as being-in-the-world, namely, their relationship with the world, with others, and themselves. Here, we could say, as Boss (1979, p. 112), "Remember that existence consists solely in its possibilities for relationships." In other words, to understand the experience of being anxious, it is necessary first of all (and mainly) to grasp and clarify the structure of the existence of the other as being-in-the-world. Binswanger (1958) said that this implies to observe:

The ways in which it designs world and builds world (in short, the ways of world-design and world-images); the ways in which it, accordingly,

exists as a self (i.e., establishes itself or does not establish itself); but also the ways of transcendence as such, that is, the ways in which the existence is in the world (e.g., acting, thinking, creating, fancying) (p. 198).

As a result, before understanding anxiety as a symptom of any disease or illness, we should comprehend it as an ontological characteristic of human beings always present in our experiences because of the uncertainty always present in our lives, which means that human beings are always facing the possibility of death and the threat of not being able to develop their projects of life authentically. Heidegger (1962, p. 288) affirms, "Correspondingly, as long as any Dasein is, it too, is already it, *Ônot-yet*.'" In other words, the experience of being anxious confronts us with both the possibility of not being here anymore and the possibility of perishing into emptiness by losing an authentic meaning of life. Then, death should not be seen as a mere fact that will happen sometime in the future, but as an ever present possibility in our everyday experience. This understanding enables us to orient our lives in an authentic way and care for ourselves accordingly.

Psychologically speaking, the experience of being anxious is part of every human being's project and choice because there is neither any absolute security that we are going to be able to reach what we are looking for, nor any total certitude that we are going to be able to develop our project of life in an appropriate and/or authentic way (this means that our project of life fails), or even more, that the project we are developing and the choices we are making are not going to give us an authentic meaning of life nor make us feel as well as we had wished or thought. Medard Boss (1979, p. 113) summarizes this idea when he says that, "In the very act of entering into its possibilities, existence enters danger." I also found this idea in my research, which I explained in this way:

There also seems to be a strong relation between the experience of being anxious and facing the uncertainty toward the future. Apparently, the experience of being anxious emerges when people feel the possibility of not being able to reach their goals and affirm their projects

toward the future. We could say that by reaching those goals and affirming their projects of life, people find meaning in their lives, which makes them feel they are valuable people. Then, the experience of being anxious seems to be an always present and natural reaction against the possibility of not being who we want to be, which is what gives us the sense of being a valuable person.

Now, according to Existential Phenomenological Psychology, the experience of being anxious is always present when the meaning of human existence is concerned, which implies that when a person perceives something as dangerous for her/him, what she/he feels threaten is her/his whole project of life, and not only an isolated part of her/himself. This is why William Fischer (1989, p. 135), based on what he has found in his research, describes an anxious situation as: "An ambiguous and contradictory state of affairs that subjects live as signifying the problematic uncertainty of at least one of the projects upon which their perspectives self-understandings are founded."

According to this, we must clarify that the experience of being anxious does not need to be seen, at least at first instance, as contrary to health, but as a human condition of life that every human being has to assume or confront because it is always present in every decision. Then, because anxiety is not only and/or always a mere symptom of a given illness, the way anxiety is going to be experienced depends on how we assume or confront it. As a result, if we confront anxiety constructively we are going to be able to reach a healthy state of being.

In this way, May says that if we accept anxiety as always present in our experience, we are going to be capable of seeing it as nature's way of indicating us that there is an unresolved project, situation, or conflict within us that we need to solve. In other words, the experience of being anxious is an evidence that there is a psychological battle that is going on inside a person and has to be resolved. Paradoxically, anxiety could show us what we have to confront to be healthy, or even more, we could say that a healthy person is the one who confronts anxiety constructively. As Kierkegaard once suggested, anxiety is our best professor because it is a sign that is pointing out to us what we have to

confront and resolve. May (1953, p. 35) says: "Anxiety is the human being's basic reaction to a danger to his existence, or to some value he identifies with his existence."

May says that depending on how we confront anxiety, there are at least two general possibilities in which anxiety can be experienced: in a constructive or a destructive way. Then, according to May (1950), what we should always do is to face anxiety as conscious as we can, if we want to assume it constructively:

Normal anxiety is that reaction which (1) is not disproportionate to the objective threat, (2) does not involve repression or other mechanisms of intrapsychic conflict, and as a corollary to the second point, (3) does not require defense mechanisms for its management, but can be confronted constructively on the level of conscious awareness or can be relieved if the objective situation is altered (p. 194)

It seems that a person would be prepared to face anxiety constructively only when she/he is convinced that the values she/he will affirm are going to make her/him feel really well. If a person does not believe that when she/he confronts anxiety she/he will gain some positive meaning for her/his life, she/he will not be interested in facing anxiety constructively. Then, as I found in my research, there is a strong relationship between facing anxiety constructively and consciousness, as I said:

Finally, the experience of being anxious only seems to offer the possibility of being a constructive experience when people try to be conscious of that experience and all what it implies in their lives. In other words, consciousness or self-awareness seems to have a very important, necessary, and determinant role in transforming the experience of being anxious from a painful experience to a very constructive experience. This is reflected in the transformation from guilt to responsibility

Thus, anxiety will be a negative symptom only when we avoid confronting it consciously or when we assume it destructively. Mays (1950) says:

Neurotic anxiety, on the other hand, is a reaction to threat which is (1) disproportionate to the objective danger, (2) involves repression (dissociation) and other forms of intrapsychic conflict, and as a corollary, (3) is managed by means of various forms of retrenchment of activity and awareness, such as inhibitions, the development of symptoms, and the varied neurotic defense mechanisms (p. 197)

According to the above stated, the person who experiences anxiety destructively, in some way experiences her/his existential and original project of life frustrated, and because she/he is not capable of confronting the resultant experience of being anxious, she/he experiences much more frustration and paralysis of her/his authentic project and vital sense, and as a consequence the person applies to any other inauthentic project that allows her/him, although restricted, to feel like somebody with some value, and at the same time she/he keeps away the experience of being anxious that makes her/him feel menaced. May (1990, P.54) explains it when he comments that for any person, "His/her symptoms are his/her way to choose the field of his/her world for his/her center to be protected from the menaces."

May offers an example of this situation when he shows how neurotic people, in our current historic period, do not confront anxiety constructively, and try to avoid its confrontation by hiding themselves from it in their relationships with other people (which Heidegger would call the they-self). This situation makes neurosis, more than a failure in adaptation, precisely a desperate intent of adaptation. May (1961, p. 77) says, "An adjustment is exactly what neurosis is; and that is just its trouble. It is a necessary adjustment by which centeredness can be preserved; a way of accepting non-being." Medard Boss (1979, p. 112) also refers to this situation when he comments, "Anxiety is the attunement in which existence is both opened up and restricted to perceiving the possibility of losing its hold on all other being, of being thrown back entirely upon itself, and ceasing to be, in total isolation."

At this point, we should clarify that every human being has the potentiality and possibility to develop her/his vital project authentically, but in case she/he does not affirm herself authentically as a person, it is

probably that if she/he does not assume consciously and constructively such experience, which is influenced by what the person seeks and her/his mode of being, some pathologic project and symptoms could arise, with which she/he would pretend to recover the lost security he could not get by her/himself (authentically).

Thus, we should always keep in mind the relationship and interdependence between the personal project of life and the experience of being anxious because the way we assume one of them influences the other one. For example, Erich Fromm (1960) in his book "Escape from freedom" (Chapters I and II), comments that human beings, since childhood, must be cutting the primary entails with their mothers to "throw" themselves to confront the anxiety of being alone in the world, looking for and obtaining freedom and independence. However, as this starts to be blocked by not confronting the anxiety involved in this experience, the child will stop looking for her/his freedom and will continue close to such primary ties to obtain security, as by her/himself, she/he feels impeded and impotent to confront the world, and anxiety constructively.

In this way, we are only going to be able to understand that the experience of being anxious could be related with health (in terms of using the experience of being anxious as an internal stimulus in order to develop our potential authentically), if we care about the experience of being anxious starting from the questioning by the being, of her/his project in the world and of the structure of her/his existence. Only then, we are relating to the concrete person that creates the experience of being anxious according with her/his own existential needs, with which we break the barrier that impedes us to comprehend the person who is having the experience of being anxious. Giorgi (1970) says:

Psychology must be based upon phenomena that are given in experience. To be human, it must have as its subject matter the human person and he must be approached within a frame or reference that is also human, one that does not do violence to the phenomenon of man as a person (pp. 224 - 225)

The above mentioned refers now more precisely to what was commented at the beginning of the article when I said that the theoretical constructions and the technique itself should have a sense starting from and in function of the existing person. We must always have present that there is no human experience and creation separated from the total orientation of the person in the world and from the meaning that she/he pretends to affirm or preserve. As Fischer (1988, p. 96) has said in reference to Heidegger, "Human beings are related not only to particular objects and events, but also that they are continually related to the whole, to the world as a totality." If this would not be true, we would be capable to answer the following question: ¿how could anxiety exist without somebody being anxious? Every experience of being anxious always points to a particular meaning, and the starting point to comprehend any experience of being anxious is to be focused in finding out both who is the person that creates or tries to create such meaning, and what is her/his purpose and intentionality. It is precisely the starting point of every psychological comprehension.

Consequently, before caring about anxiety as having autonomy and being separated from the concrete person who is experiencing it, we must ask ourselves about it starting from the person who is creating the experience of being anxious. This means that although the experience of being anxious has part of its content in the relationship of the person with her/his past or in any other type of determinism, we have to keep in mind, above all, that it has been created, and is still being created in the present experience with a concrete purpose (rooted in the concrete existence and the relationship with life conditions), which allows the person to keep the position and posture that she/he is trying to preserve in the world, and to develop its particular potentialities. Fischer (1988) says:

Being anxious is something that can only happen to a being who is the project or actualize simultaneously a to-be-realized identity and a lived-for-and-toward-world. In other words, being anxious is a possibility for an unfolding identity-world project that has been guided beforehand by that which is to-be-actualized. As much, it involves having a future, as one's own, envisioning and living for that future, accepting the task

of making that future an actuality, and experiencing the uncertainty of one's ability to realize that task successfully (p. 166)

In conclusion, we must not separate the experience of being anxious from the concrete person who is experiencing it; as if the experience of being anxious did not belong to someone in concrete who creates it with a specific intentionality. We must also guard against granting power to anxiety, or to any psychological mechanism, structure, drive, dynamism or impulse, as if it had its own autonomy. Instead of looking for the cause of anxiety, we should look for the structure of being-in-the-world as a whole and the concrete mode of experiencing of that person, in which any experience of being anxious is based.

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