

How phenomenology and existential hermeneutics can improve outreach from an ethical perspective

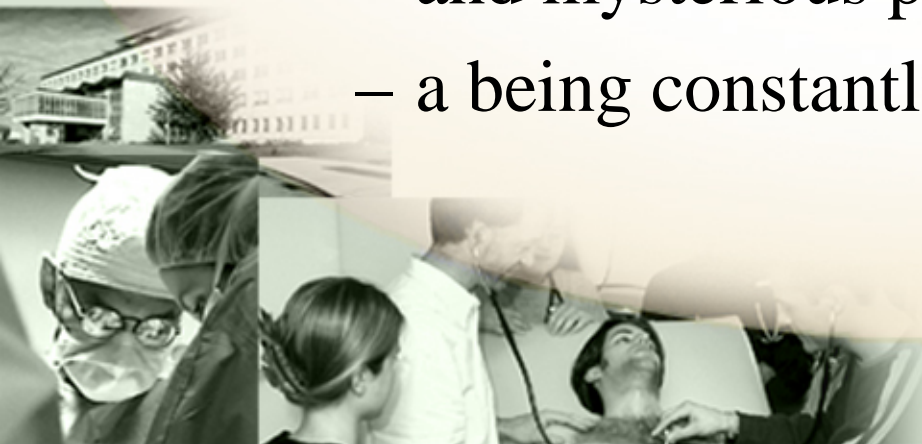
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Introduction

I suggest to start with the idea that human being is:

- a being that has something in himself
- a being constantly in a research operandi,
- a being in research of himself, of this secret and mysterious part of himself
- a being constantly trying **to become oneself**,



Our task as human being is:

- To arouse, support and accelerate this process of development
- To let in this process into a narration
- What is playing out: the question of meaning
- To be **homeless is an answer**, may be inadequate, to a questioning
- Homelessness becomes an answer to a need: **to go away of oneself**

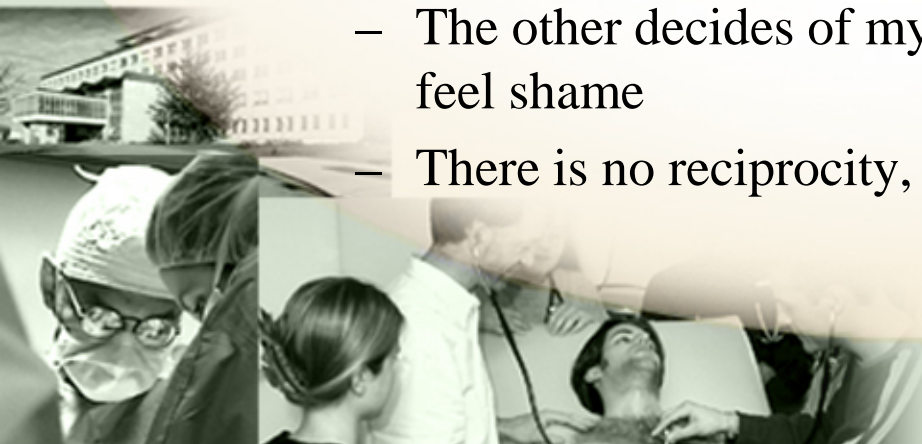


- Human being is a social animal (Aristotle)
- Since our childhood, we depend on others
- These relationships are not reducible to simple assistance and material caring
- The kind of contact with oneself is conditioned by the contact with others
- **We need others to become oneself** (theory of attachment)



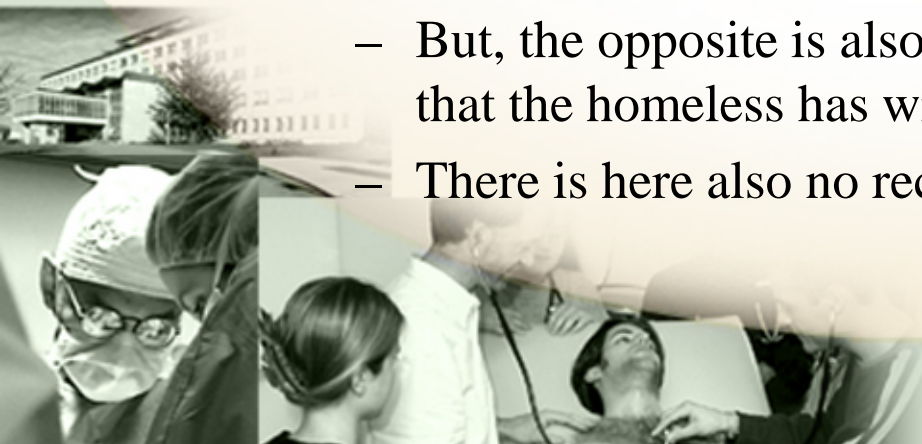
But who is this other person?

- Sartre (1905-1980) thinks that human being develops his own consciousness only through the contact with another person
- But the appearance of another person in my life is lived as a profound turmoil, because I am not anymore the master of the situation. **Someone thinks differently than me.**
- The experience of encounter becomes for Sartre a traumatic experience
- I become an object, someone who is looked at and judged
- The other decides of my value (“Hell is other people”), I could feel shame
- There is no reciprocity, **the meeting is one way**



The point of view of Levinas (1906-1995)

- The other is not this one who judges me, but this one who asks me help and assistance
- The other is without protection and defence like the widow and orphan
- This is a request in front of which I cannot escape
- During the meeting, the other has priority on me
- **The other breaks the unity of myself.** Nothing is like before the advent of the other
- But, the opposite is also truth. The caregivers break the unity that the homeless has with oneself
- There is here also no reciprocity.



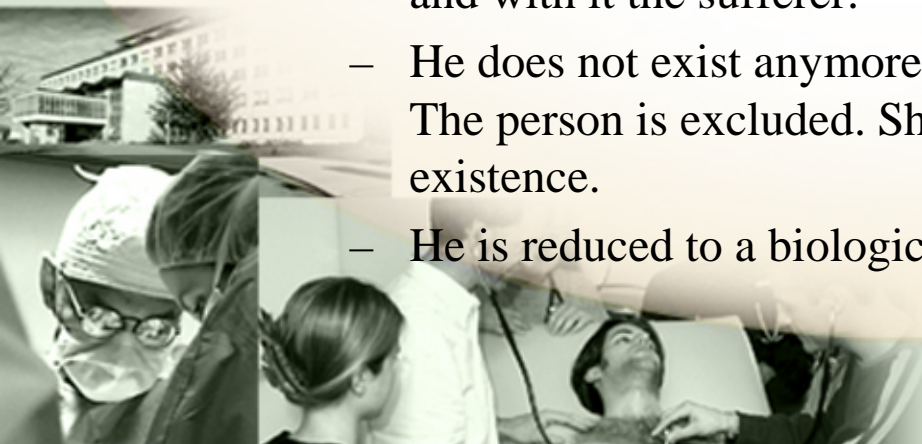
The case of Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)

- The experience of the other is an **experience of reciprocity**
- I am always with other people.
- It is this co-existence that allows the self-fulfillment of everyone
- Sometimes, this experience of reciprocity is impaired



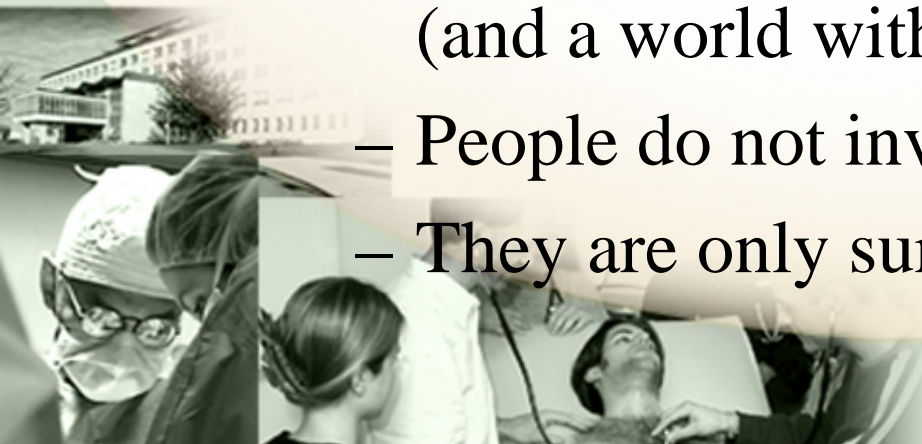
The phenomenology of depression and schizophrenia

- We observe an impairment for interpersonal relatedness
 - The person feels separated from other people and the feeling of connectedness and mutual openness is diminished.
 - The world of the sufferer is closed with no possibility to change it meaningfully.
 - **The world is impoverished** (Toombs) or **shrunk** (Binswanger (1881-1966))
 - Time is shrinking with no future
 - Nothing matters so the world has no value. The world disappears, and with it the sufferer.
 - He does not exist anymore. Agamben (*Homo sacer*) speaks of nudity. The person is excluded. She is in exile. I would add in exile of existence.
 - He is reduced to a biological live. Not anymore a citizen.



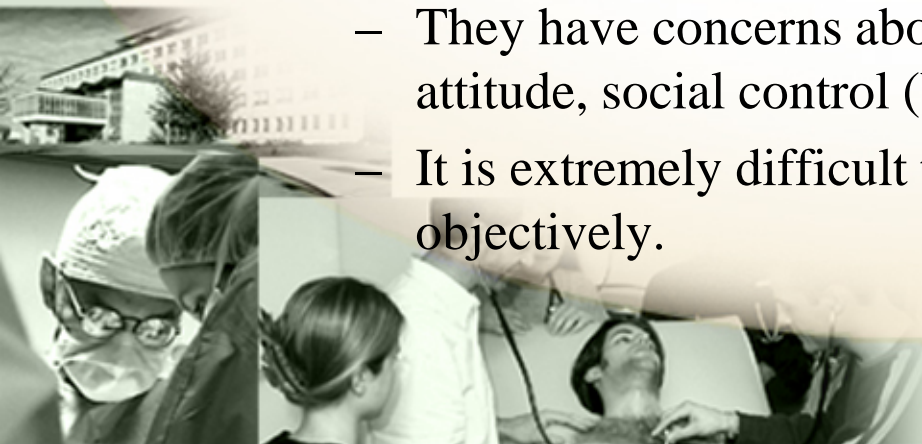
To be homeless

- According to phenomenology, to be homeless is **to be without a world** or with a reduced world
 - **A world without language** (or with a poverty of speech), mainly a world without an opportunity to speak, to be listened to, (and a world without silence).
 - People do not invest the world
 - They are only surfing on it



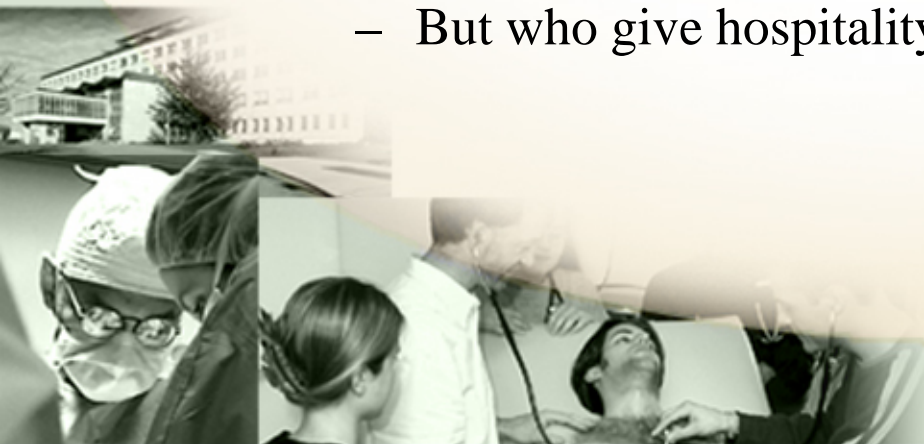
In this case, the interveners have to go out to meet other people.

- They would like to give to the sufferer an opportunity to get a world full of meaning, a world in which the sufferer can appear to himself and to others.
- The question is: to what extent can the interveners impose their presence facing indifference and hostility?
- The interveners are confronted with the limits of their commitment.
- They are caught between the respect of liberty and caring.
- They have concerns about consent, coercion, paternalistic attitude, social control (Williamson, 2002)
- It is extremely difficult to determine a course of action objectively.



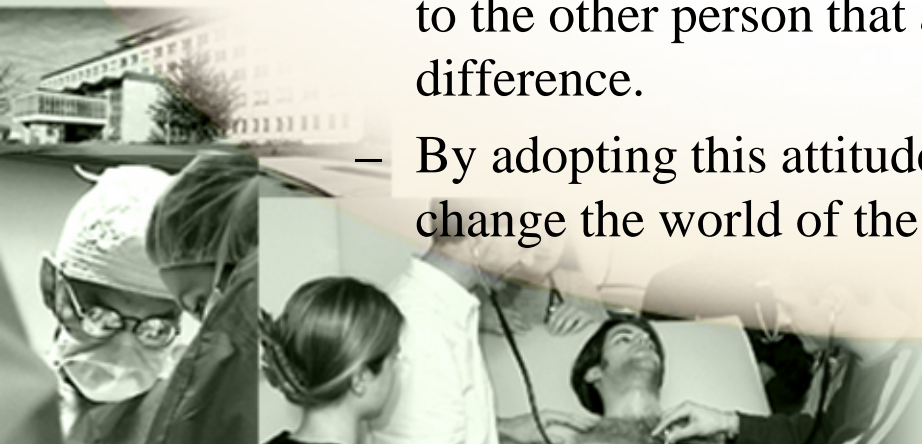
The first step

- Consists in giving **unconditional hospitality** (Derrida 1930-2004)
- The goal: to arrive at the point of no regret to be born
- Hospitality becomes a battle against inhospitable environment that are the street, environment in which people fall in a void, a no man's land
- The goal consists to transform a situation into a desire to live in spite of adversary
- But who give hospitality: the homeless or the care giver?



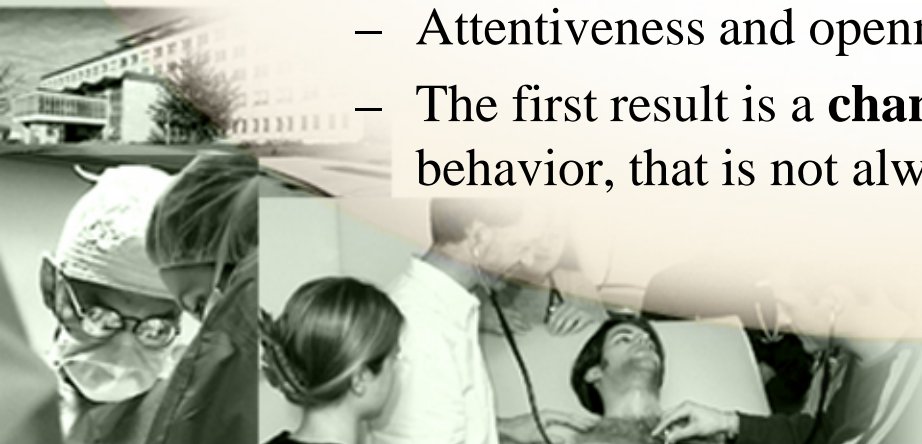
The second step

- What people need most: a human being “**being there**” for them
- Caregivers in “being there”, in “**listening to**”, create an opportunity for the people to deposit their lived experience, their being
- “Being there” and “listening to” become the condition in favor of a subjective appropriation
- The first two caring attitudes are **attentiveness and openness** to the other person that allow the sufferer to exist in his difference.
- By adopting this attitude of friendship the intervener helps change the world of the sufferer.



Change of being

- There is an effect (placebo effect). Just to know that somebody thinks and cares about me has a powerful effect on my life and my health
- Ethics of care: to show that the other is important, being there for the other,
- To tame or to become accustomed to each other (St-Exupery: *The Little Prince*)
- Creating a good ambiance (humor), no agenda,
- Attentiveness and openness are processes that demand time.
- The first result is a **change of being** instead of a change of behavior, that is not always observable and measurable.

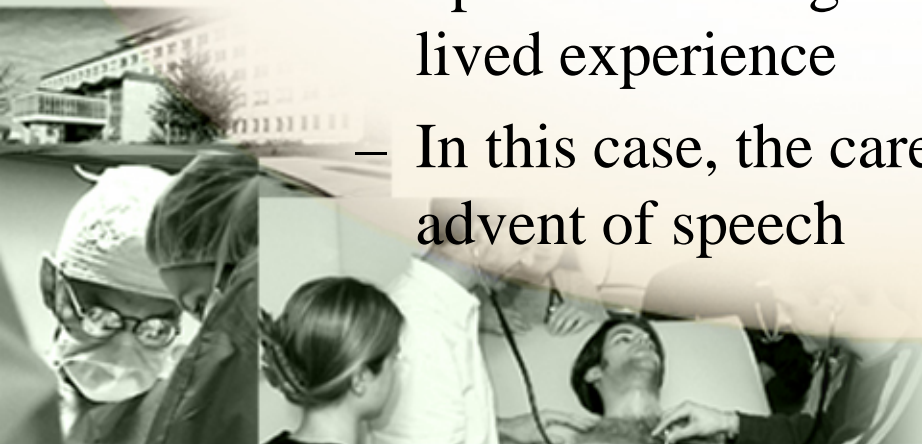


The third step

- Giving a house, the **house of language** in which people try to understand their life according their own experience
- “Language is the house of being” (Heidegger 1889-1976)
- Talking, listening and silence, i.e. speech, are the most essential part of language.
- Human beings dwell in language before anything else
- Language is the first housing for human beings



- It consists in **giving a voice** to people without voices
- It consists in letting the others speak according to his own words
- It means don't speak according to a discourse that comes from medicine, psychiatry, psychology, etc.
- Speak according a discourse that is derived from lived experience
- In this case, the caregivers give a space for the advent of speech



The fourth step

- As care providers, our goal is to bring help for touching the catharsis point of life: **thinking about oneself**
- People are suffering because there is a lack of symbolization
- Because persons become themselves through symbolization, reflexivity
- The challenge consists to give meaning to something that has no meaning, or a poor meaning



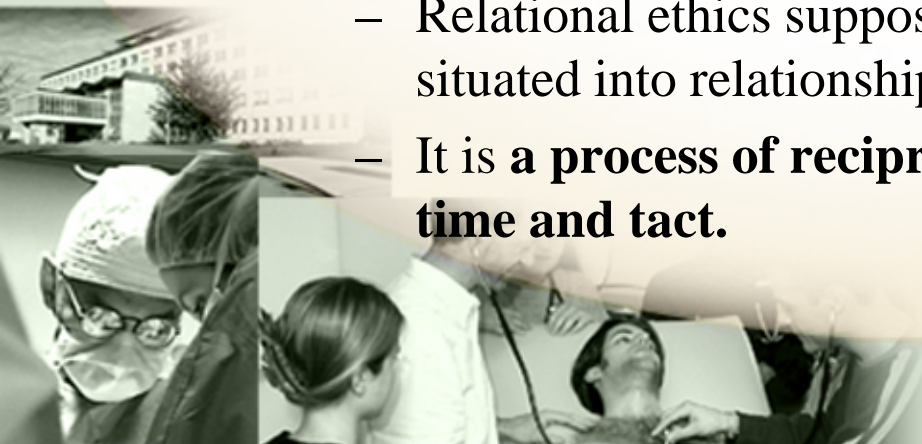
Bioethics

- Traditionally, medical ethics has been heavily influenced by bioethics (Gastmans, 2013)
- According to this model, ethical problems are related to rights and responsibilities expressed through 4 principles: autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice
- Emphasizing on obligation and responsibility towards the patient, people do not recognize what are the stakes of the ethical process of making decision related to the relationship between a care provider and a care receiver.



Relational ethics

- Is a contemporary approach to ethics
- That situates ethical action explicitly in relationship (Austin, 2008)
- Is more than resolving ethical dilemmas through good moral reasoning
- It demands attentiveness and responsiveness to our commitments to one another
- It involves finding the fitting responses to our ethical questions
- Relational ethics supposes that the practice of ethics is always situated into relationships (Bergum, 2013).
- **It is a process of reciprocity and interactivity that requires time and tact.**



Fundamental ethics

- Is a question:
- **How to live well** with **the desire to fulfill oneself** and others according to the human condition
- One of the meaning of ethics according to etymology is:
- **To live well**
- **To dwell**
- The question: how to dwell with the world?



Questioning our world

- We live well with the world when we dwell in language
 - by interpreting what we are, our relationship with our own life, our family, our friends, with the care providers, etc.
 - by giving it a meaning to the point that the world becomes my own world
 - To appropriate his world, it is to make it his own, it is to be able to engage in this world



- Human being is essentially a being that thinks about his life and who deliberates in favor of a better life, a life fulfilled
 - In this case, a life fulfilled is not reduced to any idea of utility, but accomplishes itself through the mediation of significant activities
 - Intervening is to introduce oneself into the process of deliberation by **questioning the meaning of experience**



- The ideal consists of making that reflection and deliberation becoming a shared work, a common endeavor and a shared world (Gadamer 1900-2000).
- We become “we” (Binswanger: Wirheit)
- What unites us, is our reflection about the good life
- It is trying to see in human life other things than facts: ex. A diagnostic
- It is **trying to see towards what this life, my life, your life is trying to open up**

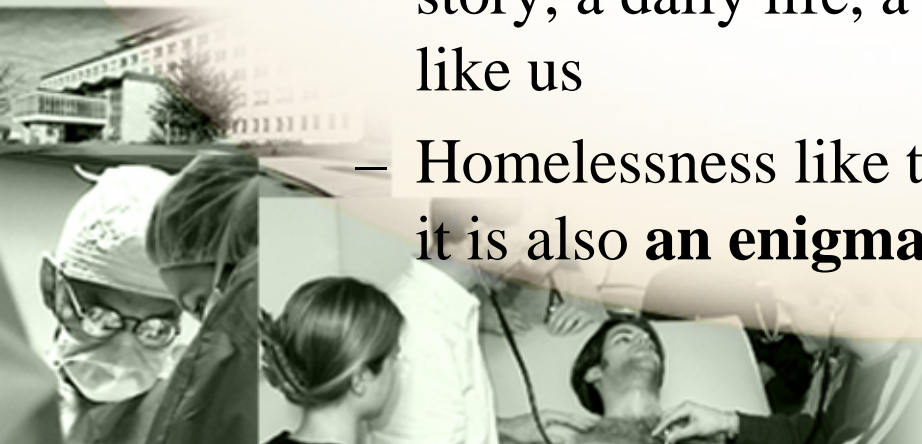


Be careful

- **Do not kill** meaning. To kill meaning is to kill a human being
- **Do not manipulate** meaning. Meaning appears by itself. Don't try too hard.
- **Do not instrumentalize** meaning. Meaning doesn't serve to explicate our action, but to explicitate our life
- **Do not lie** about meaning. Be careful about false meaning or ideology



- People we encounter are also ourselves
- We are sharing the same concern:
- Moving oneself through existence for the better
- People without home, are not only a social problem and a health problem,
- They are also a face (Levinas) who has a name, a story, a daily life, a complex soul and many dreams like us
- Homelessness like the others is not only a problem, it is also **an enigma**



- We have to remember that human beings has also a profound desire to be untied
 - To be homeless by choice: ex. Travelling, to be without responsibility, to be free of our time, etc.
 - So, it is not to be homeless that is a problem
 - It is the meaning we give to homelessness that makes a difference.



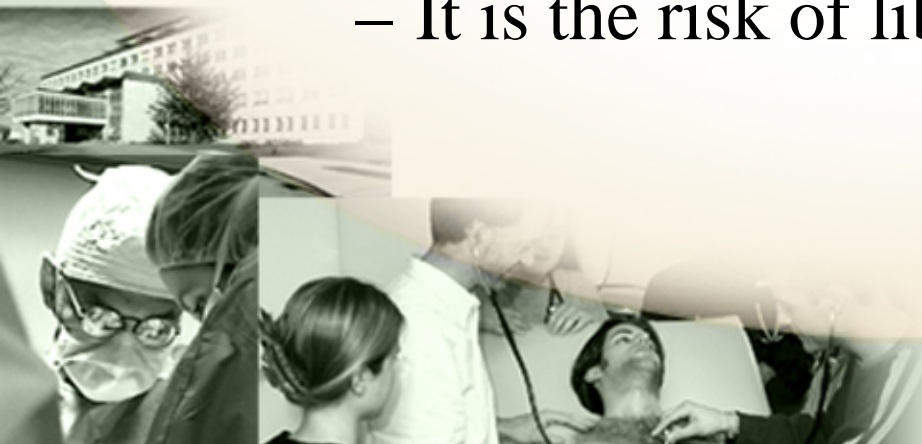
We can see it differently

- Because human being is an openness,
- A process of development
- Being homeless means only a rhythm slower in the process of development



The limits of dialogue

- Dialogue is not an easy thing
- There is tension, sometimes rupture
- Encounter another person is an **adventure**
- Like every adventure, it could finish badly
- There is a risk, but a beautiful risk
- It is the risk of liberty



Conclusion

- So the limit of commitment emerges from the interaction between the sufferer and the intervener.
- The minimal actions, **doing small things**, are the best ones and give limits to our commitment.
- We have to accept that **it could require a lot of time**

