Eccentric Positionality and the Mitwelt: Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology as a Framework for Humanising Mental Health Care

Abstract for INPP Conference 2026

Contemporary mental health services frequently harm those they aim to help – through objectification, coercive treatment, epistemic injustice, and the marginalisation of service user agency.

This talk argues that Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology offers both an explanation and a practical orientation for change. Central to Plessner's thought is *eccentric positionality*: the distinctively human condition of simultaneously being a body and *having* a body, always in a reflective, unstable relation to oneself, others, and the world. Thus, the structure of human existence itself provides fertile ground from which both ordinary developmental struggle and deeper psychological crisis grow.

Mental distress, from this perspective, is not deficit or disease but an intelligible response to the fragility of navigating the tension between subjective experience and objective self-perception within the *Mitwelt* – a shared social world – that has failed, reduced, or fixated a person at one pole of their existence. Since no person can be made to fit a general template, treating persons as diagnostic objects constitutes a philosophical error as much as an ethical one.

A framework for practice is proposed, that meets persons as irreducibly individual eccentric subjects, attends to the Mitwelt as source of harm and recovery, and advocates for co-produced, relationally attuned care.

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