The Phenomenology of Social Anxiety: On Bodily and Social Doubt

Social anxiety disorder is typically defined as a persistent fear of being judged or negatively evaluated by others. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), the "gold standard" treatment of social anxiety, identifies negative beliefs, avoidance, and physical symptoms (e.g., sweating) as its key features, addressing these via techniques such as exposure. Though an effective treatment, this framework risks overlooking a crucial aspect of social anxiety: its *phenomenology*. Drawing on existential feelings and concepts such as social and bodily doubt, I develop a phenomenological account which argues that social anxiety is not fully reducible to a set of beliefs, behaviours or symptoms.

Focusing on individuals with social anxiety and hyperhidrosis, I explore how extremely common social interactions, such as shaking hands, induce profound bodily and social doubt. Existential feelings such as estrangement from one's own body, as well as entrapment between both concealing bodily expressions from and performing for others, reveal a sense of being *out-of-sync* with the world in these cases that CBT models of social anxiety fail to capture.

By developing this phenomenological account, I highlight the existential dimensions of social anxiety, generating discussion around the refinement of current CBT practice, and considering alternative approaches, such as existential therapy.