

# **Emmanuel Levinas and the Practice of Psychology**

## **An Ethical Psychology for the Other**

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters in Arts  
(Counselling Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch



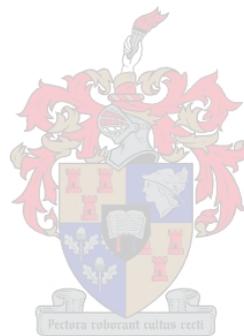
Supervisor: Dr. H.M. de Vos  
December 2005

**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

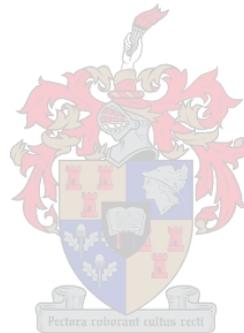
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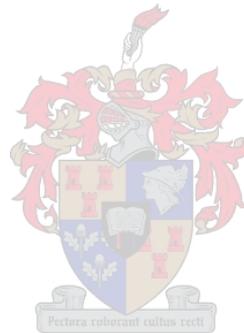
## ABSTRACT

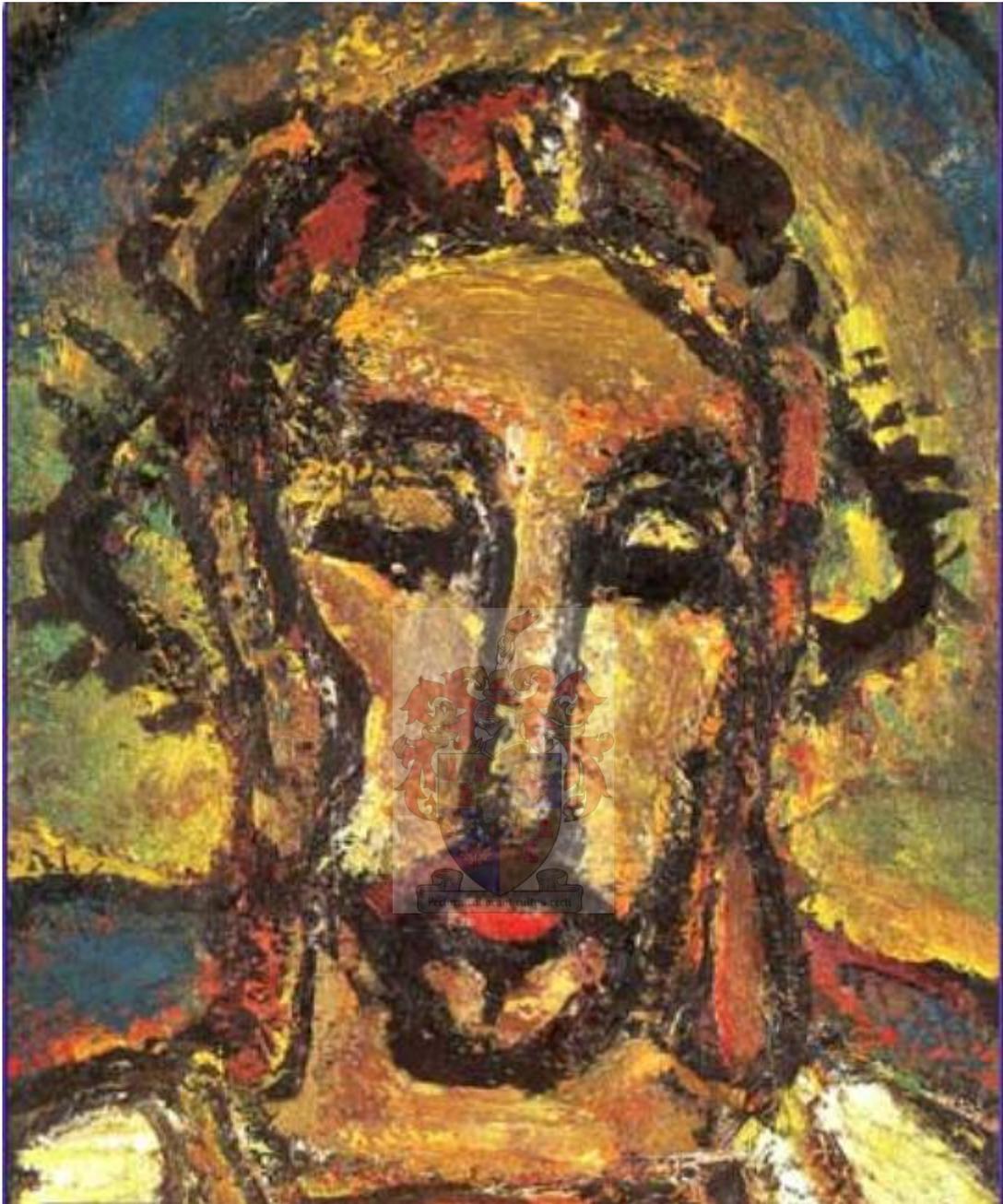
Psychology as a human science is rendered desperate by the human vacuum in its own contents. This paper argues that by adopting the methods and techniques of the natural sciences, psychology and psychotherapy not only transform the patient or client into an a-historical and a-social entity, but also propose an utopian view of reality and lose the inherent moral character of the psychotherapeutic endeavour. It seems as if the Post-Modern theoretical and psychotherapeutic alternatives do not offer a solution that solves the above mentioned problems. This paper aims to introduce the work of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, as a stimulus providing a different starting point in the search for solutions to the mentioned problems. Such an approach seeks to understand the radically ethical character of the therapeutic meeting by recognising the fundamental responsibility of the therapist, not to “totalise” (that is to reduce) otherness (the not me) into sameness (the for me) by assigning differences into pre-established characteristics, properties and categories. Only by recognising the otherness of the client in the “face-to-face meeting” and reacting to the call of the other can psychotherapy be ethical and render justice to historical and social situatedness of the other facing us in therapy. Some of the implications that the ethical challenge of Levinas holds for psychology will be explored. This includes the implications for the therapeutic meeting, psychological ethics, and the possibility of a “Levinasian psychology”.



## OPSOMMING

Sielkunde as 'n sosiale wetenskap het impotent geword as gevolg van die afwesigheid van die “menslike” in die vakgebied. Die sentrale argument van die werkstuk stel dit dat Sielkunde, deur die metodes en tegnieke van die natuurwetenskappe te gebruik, die pasiënt of kliënt nie net omvorm tot ‘n a-historiese en a-sosiale entiteit nie, maar ook ‘n utopiese blik van die realiteit bied en die inherente morele karakter van die terapeutiese ontmoeting verloor. Dit blyk dat die Post-moderne teoretiese en psigoterapeutiese alternatiewe nie die genoemde probleme oplos nie. Hierdie tesis poog om die werk van die Franse filosoof, Emmanuel Levinas, as stimulus aan te bied in die soeke na ‘n alternatiewe vertrekpunt om die genoemde probleme op te los. Deur middel van die filosofie van Levinas word gepoog om die radikaal etiese karakter van die terapeutiese ontmoeting te erken. Die fundamentele verantwoordelikheid van die terapeut om nie die andersheid (die nie-ek) te “totaliseer” (te reduseer) tot die selfde of eendershede (vir my/soos ek) nie, en dit nie te kategoriseer aan die hand van vooropgestelde eienskappe en kwaliteite nie. Alleen deur die andersheid van die persoon in die ontmoeting van aangesig tot aangesig te erken en te reageer op die oproep wat in die aangesig van die ander tot my spreek, kan sielkunde en psigoterapie eties wees en reg laat geskied aan die historiese en sosiale gesitueerdheid van die ander wat tot my spreek in terapie. Somige van die implikasies wat die etiese filosofie van Levinas vir Sielkunde het, sal ondersoek word. Dit sluit die implikasies vir die terapeutiese ontmoeting, sielkundige etiek, en die moontlikheid van ‘n “Levinasiaansesielkunde” in.





*ECCO HOMO – GEORGE ROUAULT 1953*

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Emmanuel Levinas challenges the hegemony of Western philosophy, theoretical reason and of those structures that are built upon them. In this Post-Modern era, we have become used to such attacks that deconstruct. Deconstructive readings have demolished hierarchies, resurrected buried assumptions in order to denounce them, and brought to the forth the inherent ontological presuppositions upon which our rhetoric is based.

The aim of this paper is to show the relevance of Levinas's thought for a rethinking (or for a first thematisation) of ethics in psychology. It is proposed that psychologists may find in Levinas neither technique or system, nor a new map of mind or behaviour, but a real purpose for psychology: above all a meaning for what psychology and psychotherapy are doing and a reason for their pursuit. Through the philosophy of Levinas psychology and psychotherapy are challenged to question their systems, language, theories and all their assumptions and acknowledge that what they say, hear and see resides outside their conceptualisations.

But why should psychology take notice of Emmanuel Levinas's work? The recent history of psychology shows that as a science psychology is rendered desperate by the human vacuum in its own content (Kvale, 1992; Williams & Gantt, 2002). The human vacuum in psychology has been attributed to the quest for universality. An abstract rationality and the idea of commensurability characterise modern psychology. According to Kvale (1992), these are some of the main themes which are indicative of the end of psychology as a modern science of man.

Williams and Gantt (2002) argue that if psychology is to rescue for itself anything more than a mere historical relevance, it must be willing to recognise that the philosophical grounds upon which it has sought to found itself as a natural science are in fact the very

grounds that have given rise to this problem of the “other”<sup>1</sup>, and that the Post-Modern alternatives that have been offered do not manage resolve this problem. A careful reading of the history of psychology reveals that most psychologies, at least the kind that influence popular culture, exclude the “problem of the other” and that it is ignored by most theoretical writings (Heaton, 1988).

What is meant by the “problem of the other?” The “problem of the other” can be introduced, although not directly in Levinas’s terms, by the encounter between the philosopher, Martin Heidegger and the psychotherapist, Medard Boss. The latter, a well-known Swiss psychotherapist, came to the conviction that science cannot access the “essence” of man because the foundations of natural science (objectivism, determinism, mechanism, and individualism) do not allow for it. As a result of this conviction, Boss turned to philosophy in search of a solution. His search led him to Martin Heidegger’s main work *Sein und Zeit* (1927). He hoped that philosophy could access the essence of man and that through Heidegger’s philosophy he could discover the basis for, and find new meaning, in his medical work. In 1959, Boss invited Heidegger to give his so called Burghölzli lectures, named after the famous psychiatric clinic in Zurich, and so began a collaboration that would stretch over 10 years until 1969. The main theme of the lectures was the relationship between body and soul - the psychosomatic (Heidegger, 1987).

In the lectures Heidegger gave in Zurich, he tried to oppose the idea that only by “objectifying” man psychotherapy can be practiced and be successful. If psychotherapy objectifies human beings it relates to humans in a technical way. Through this technical way of relating to humans, the essence of man is misunderstood, or even worse, it gets lost. For Heidegger, the central question in philosophy is “*How* something is” and not “*What* something is” (Heidegger, 1987). In adopting the methods and philosophical justifications of a positivist, natural science, psychology lost the “other.” Williams and Gantt (2002)

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<sup>1</sup> At this early stage a distinction should be made between “other” and “Other”. The “Other” is used when it refers to Levinas’s concept of the Other that will be illustrated in chapter 3. Any other use of the “other” refers to the individuals who represents the “not I” in a relationship.

show that one of the biggest consequences of “losing the other” is that psychology becomes ill equipped to account for human action in any manner that might preserve its essentially moral character. By reducing the rich and varied complexities of our human world to causal substrates, psychology cannot help but rob human existence of its inherently moral content.

Formulated differently, for the majority of thinkers in mainstream psychology, the question of “ought” should never be confused with the question of “what is,” and it is solely the question of “what is” in human behaviour to which the trained psychologist should attend (Williams & Gantt, 2002). The “ought” question – questions regarding morality and ethical obligation - to many in the field of psychology, belongs to the province of practical philosophy and theology rather than that of the serious behavioural scientists who, as a matter of policy, seek an objective account of actual human affairs.

Many psychological scholars, including Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Victor Frankl, Rolo May, and Irvin Yalom, have recognised the problem of objectifying man in psychotherapy and proposed alternative psychological therapeutic approaches. These alternatives to the traditional positivist approaches seek to overcome an excess of scientism and as a result reject mechanism and determinism and propose a view of human beings as fundamentally free meaning makers. In the broadest terms, the alternatives are grounded in the realisation that persons are not things, and should not be conceptualised or studied as such (Williams & Gantt, 2002).

These alternatives to the traditional approaches, which will be called here the “Post-Modern corrective,”<sup>2</sup> do not come without a cost. Critics of postmodernism argue that many, if not all, Post-Modern perspectives with its promotion of the self as a free meaning maker, inevitably end up in a moral and epistemological relativism (Bauman, 1993; Kvale, 1992). It is believed that they cannot offer a satisfying alternative to the philosophically

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<sup>2</sup> It is impossible in the context of this paper to deal comprehensively with all Modern and Post-Modern positions as well as the problem of what is Modernism and Post-Modernism. In this paper broad definitions of these two concepts are used following Williams and Gantt (2002). According to their “definition” the Post-Modern therapies are those rejecting the traditional positivistic approaches and include the “third force” psychologies, social constructionism, existentialism and deconstructionism.

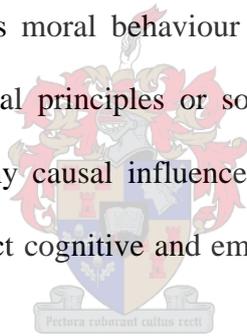
problematic inheritance of modernism because they offer merely the exchange of one type of alienation for another. The Post-Modern self, as the modern self, remains an a-historical and a-social self. The final analysis shows that the problem of the “other” remains and with that the problem of morality. This is a theme that will be discussed in chapter 2.

There would be no psychology if there were no “problem of the other.” It is proposed that psychology has never successfully understood the problem, much less addressed it (Heaton, 1988). The extant attempts to do so, constituting all the modernist and Post-Modern therapeutic approaches to psychology, have largely played themselves out (Williams & Gantt, 2002). Psychology needs to confront and address the problem of the “other” urgently if it wants to survive. More importantly, if psychology wants to improve the quality of human life, it will need to address the problem of the “other.”

Emmanuel Levinas, the French Jewish philosopher, offered a new understanding and a way to “problematise” the “other.” This will be illustrated in the third chapter. He takes us back to the “other” (or Other as Levinas writes it) as the beginning of any understanding of the human being (Taureck, 2002). Levinas criticises the “I, the Ego, the Self” or any concept that represents the individual person as object, and sees in the Other the key to unlock a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Through this, Levinas offers a powerful and fruitful alternative discourse for an ethical transformation and re-contextualisation of the relationship between the psychologist and those that he works with.

This is not, however, to suggest that it is believed that the work of Levinas marks yet another intellectual epoch, something like post-post-modernism, which would constitute the next chronological step in the evolution of ever-increasingly trendy philosophical thought. Rather, his work can be seen as an attempt to resuscitate a philosophical tradition that stretches back in the history of ideas to Plato’s question of the Good, or that which is beyond Being (Taureck, 2002).

It is proposed that Levinas's work is unique in the way it responds to the epistemological and moral difficulties of both the traditional "Modernist" and alternatives to the traditional "Post-Modernist" problem of the "other," as it will be discussed in the final chapter. It is in addressing this question that the main contribution of Levinas's work to psychology can be seen most clearly (Bauman, 1993; Harrington, 1994; Wild, 1969). If one takes the individual, the "same", the "I" as opposed to the "other" as the point of departure, then meaning and morality (the recognition of difference) remain simply judgements by or about individuals in as far as they adhere to, or not adhere to, ethical systems or cultural habits. However, precisely to the extent that the individual is an individual, and powerful enough to make such judgments, the individual becomes its own ground; the individual is alienated from his fellow man – the "other". In a view that takes individuals as fundamental, one's moral behaviour is judged by the extent to which it corresponds to either metaphysical principles or social consensus. In both cases, those judgements will be subject to any causal influences, processes, and limitations seen to operate and interfere with or affect cognitive and emotive functioning (Williams & Gantt, 2002).



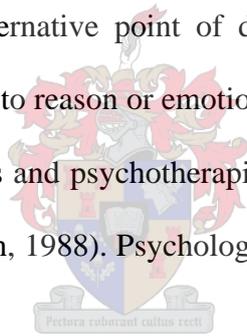
The radical alternative suggested by Levinas begins its analysis of human beings not with the "same" – individual consciousness of social construction – but with the "alterity" of the Other that grounds both identity and experience. Levinas suggests that our beings, our identities as individuals, are emergent in the concrete relation with the Other (Levinas, 1969). In other words, our life comes to have meaning and takes on character only in our relatedness to the other as we *first* respond to the Other.

Much of contemporary psychology, as occupying an ever more important part of contemporary culture, by assuming or invoking cognitive, and social complexity, aims to obscure and ignore difference. Through that meaning and morality are lost (Williams & Gantt, 2002).

Therefore, the paper aims to present some of the main themes of Levinas's work as a stimulus in searching for a genuine and ethical alternative to both traditional therapeutic approaches in psychology and their Post-Modern alternatives.

Finally, the alternative, which Levinas offers, claims to provide a new locus of meaning for psychology. The meaning of psychology can be found in the face of the Other – the face of the client that faces the therapist in therapy. This meaning is not a prescribed meaning; it does not exist “out there” and should be applied or brought into therapy. This meaning should be discovered, it comes to the psychologist or therapist in the face of the Other and in the response that the face of the Other demands from them.

At this early stage a word of caution is needed. This new meaning of psychology should not be confused with a new psychotherapeutic alternative or new personality theory. What is proposed here is an alternative point of departure for psychological thinking. Instead of first turning to the “T” - to reason or emotion (a therapeutic or scientific model or conceptualisation) – psychologists and psychotherapists are challenged by Levinas to turn to the one who faces them (Heaton, 1988). Psychology can be ethical only by staring at the face of the Other.

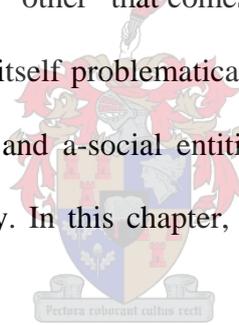


It is hoped that as a discipline, psychology will have the foresight and the courage to respond to the insights and challenges posed in the work of Levinas, that by making the psychotherapeutic meeting first of all an ethical meeting, psychology can be relevant and meaningful.

## CHAPTER 2 - PSYCHOLOGY'S ANOMALY: THE LOSS OF THE "OTHER"

Psychology wants to help people live healthy and happy lives amidst the various challenges and difficulties reality poses, be it through both treating pathologies and preventing them from developing. A wide array of subject fields exist within psychology itself, ranging from child psychology to geriatric psychology, covering every imaginable field which humans may encounter in life. Rooted in psychology is the deep desire to understand, help and care for people along the journey of life.

Unfortunately, it seems as if psychology has lost (or never had?) the ability to really understand, help and care for people as it would like to do. As a matter of fact, in its deep desire to understand, help and care it might be sustaining and cultivating the seeds of its estrangement from society and the "other" that comes in search for help. This estrangement and loss of the "other" manifests itself problematically in psychology in three ways: 1) it reduces persons into a-historical and a-social entities, 2) it proposes utopian models of reality, and 3) it has lost morality. In this chapter, these three themes will be developed further.



### 2.1 Psychology and the a-historical and a-social object / subject

The theory and practice of mainstream psychology has concentrated on the functioning of the individual (Bracken & Thomas, 2001). Most of the work done by psychologists has been to help individuals adapt to life – be it to their personal psychological existence, their biological drives, their jobs, their medical condition, their family life, and many other areas of life.

By focusing on the individual as an object or as a subject, and by placing the individual in the centre of reality, psychology autonomizes and isolates the individual from culture and history. The individual, the psychological man, developed into an isolated individual self with an abstract 'psyche' (Kvale, 1992). A psyche that monitors itself by

reflecting on his/her own thoughts, experiences, interpretations and feelings, in the search for direction and meaning in life (Bracken & Thomas, 1999). This leaves the psychological man without the “other” which co-inhabits the world with him/her. Kunz (1998) called this kind of psychology an “egology.”

How did psychology become a science that isolates persons socially and render them without a history? It is proposed, that as a *science* having its roots in the modernistic positivism, and as a science, which adopted the medical model to a large extent, psychology is doomed to consider man as an object and ultimately as an a-social and a-historical being (Bracken & Thomas, 1999). In addition, the alternative Post-Modern models proposed seem unable to escape the inherent nature of psychology to isolate the individual from his/ her social and historical contexts and as a result the “other” (Kvale, 1992).

The following discussion aims to demonstrate that inherent in both Modern and Post-Modern approaches in psychology the person (patient or client) gets lost because s/he is viewed in an a-social and a-historical light. Providing an exhaustive history of psychology is not possible nor is it the intention of the following discussion as it lies beyond the scope of this paper. It will however be sufficient to capture the main thrust of the argument in which it will be demonstrated that psychology renders patients and clients a-historical and a-social.

Psychology was not always a natural science. It can be said that the roots of psychology reaches back to the Greek civilisations more than 2000 years ago. For years, it was studied as part of philosophy, and it is only relatively recently, just a little more than a hundred years ago, that it came to be a scientific subject matter (Hergenhahn, 2001; Möller, 1993).

During the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was enormous progress in various scientific fields, amongst others physiology. The study of physiology

revealed new facts about the human brain and nervous system. The various discoveries not only placed new emphasis on man as a biological entity, but also tried to explain the relationship between psychic and bodily functions.

As a result of this progress in the natural sciences it does not come as a surprise that the desire developed to analyse the human experience scientifically. In 1879 Wilhelm Wund founded the first modern psychological laboratory at the University of Leipzig with the aim to study the human consciousness scientifically. Wund's objectives were: Firstly, to analyse the consciousness and distinguish the constituent parts thereof; secondly, to study the syntheses of these elements (the way in which these elements of the consciousness interact with each other to give content to the consciousness); and thirdly, to describe the laws according to which these combinations were created. The method according to which the consciousness was studied was introspection, a subjective analysis of personal experiences in which it was tried to reduce the interpretation and preconceptions of the observer as much as possible to render the analysis as objective as possible. Following this method of enquiry, Wund and his followers formed the Structuralism school (Galimberti, 1999; Hergenhahn, 2001; Möller, 1993).

For the Functionalists, however, the study of the consciousness was still too subjective. In reaction to Structuralism, scientists like William James and John Dewey were of the opinion that if psychology studied the functioning of the consciousness, that is the processes through which humans obtain, retain and organise knowledge of its surroundings and how this information is used in adapting to the environment (hence Functionalism) instead of studying the content of consciousness, psychology can be rendered more objective. This was done, not by abandoning introspection but through complementing it with more objective methods like control groups and laboratory experiments under controlled circumstances (Galimberti, 1999; Hergenhahn, 2001; Möller, 1993).

For some psychologists, not even the functionalists rendered psychology objective enough. In 1913, John Watson founded the behaviourism school. Watson considered Wunds concept of consciousness too subjective. According to him, psychology should be the study of behaviour. Behaviour is the reaction on an environmental stimulus that in turn can be connected to a muscle or gland activity. According to Watson, if psychology wants to be a modern true science, it must focus only on what can be observed, measured and manipulated scientifically. In this light, psychology focuses on the external stimuli and the reaction to it. What happens “inside” the human is too subjective and as a result can not be measured scientifically and can not be of value to psychology if it wants to be a true modern science (Galimberti, 1979, 1999; Hergenhahn, 2001; Möller, 1993).

Structuralism, functionalism and behaviourism in the end all had the same goal: To make of psychology a science based upon the same principles as other natural sciences and through that added to the empirical approach in the study of man (Galimberti, 1999; Möller, 1993). At the heart of this endeavour lies the ideal to be able to explain human behaviour according to rules or laws that govern human behaviour and are valid for all humans at all times. Through this, psychology was supposed to be able to predict future human behaviour. It should be noticed, that what is important here is the way in which human behaviour is similar or renders the same response. The uniqueness of personality and the individual experience are not the focus of the analysis. Through this the person of the psychological laboratory becomes an a-historical and a-social being.

During the same time as the above mentioned developments, the psychoanalytic school was founded by Sigmund Freud (Möller, 1993). This happened, however, in a different academic climate. Initially Freud, a physician, envisioned his approach as a therapeutic method for the treatment of psychic problems based on clinical observations of patients and not on experimental results. Freud was convinced that both normal and abnormal behaviour had an origin, and that the origin should be found in order to help the

patient. According to Freud the origin of behaviour is primarily of an unconscious nature and his method of inquiry was based on the psychoanalytic session he had with his patients in which previous experiences, feelings, and emotions were discussed. Freud made his own subjective interpretations and formulated theories that were not always “scientifically” proved (Möller, 1993, 1993b). More important, however, for our discussion is the fact that psychoanalysis and behaviourism shared a common goal in that both tried to explain human behaviour in terms of behavioural laws. In the case of psychoanalysis the behaviour did not result in reaction to an external stimulus but as a result of unconscious instincts.

It was largely, although not exclusively, through the pioneering work of psychiatrists such as Emil Kraepelin, Eugen Bleuler and Sigmund Freud that the medical model came to be accepted as fundamental to the theory and practice of psychotherapy (Gantt, 2000; Swartz, 1998). This model, although not the only model, is central in psychology (Ahmed & Pretorius-Heuchert, 2001; Swartz, 1998).

Kraepelin’s diagnostic structure maintained that there were several individually discernible psychiatric diseases, or illnesses, each distinct from each other. Depression, schizophrenia, and mania are different from each other just as flu, pneumonia, and cholera are different from each other. Just as there are diseases of the body there are diseases of the mind (Gantt, 2000).

A doctor (and psychologist) knows that someone is ill by using standard diagnostic methods. To make the ideal medical (psychological) diagnosis it should be possible to gather a specific set of signs and symptoms, which are unequivocal indicators of an underlying disease. These signs and symptoms, in an ideal world, are unique to a specific disease – other configurations of signs and symptoms will be indicative of another disease (compare the DSM-IV and ICD-10). In the medical model a diagnosis is made on the basis of the assumption that a set of signs and symptoms refer to an underlying pathology (Swartz, 1998). Correct treatment consists of treating the underlying pathology, which will

remove the signs and symptoms. The process and importance of perception, observation and data are the main characteristics of this model (Swartz, 1998).

How does the medical model, which is central in psychology, lose the “other”? The “other” is lost in this system because what is important in the medical or psychological encounter is the quantification of the signs and the symptoms that lead to a diagnosis and eventually to the formulation of a cure and not the relationship with the “other.” The relationship in this system is not a “free” relationship, that is - it becomes a relationship limited to the analysis of the signs and the symptoms, to everything that is measurable from a medical /psychological perspective and to the application of a therapy in a technical way. As a result the individual becomes an a-historical and a-contextual object to which the professional relate in a technical way. Seen as such the heart, lungs, immune system and brain are regarded as parts of the body; heart disease, lung cancer, AIDS and depression imply something different: A disease entity that exists separately from the body. The doctor or psychologist as the “expert” becomes the “owner” of the disease in that s/he has the responsibility and the privilege to name, predict and treat it. But what is treated is not the patient – it is the illness that is separate from the patient.

The medical model, that loses the “other” by limiting the patient-psychologist relationship to the diagnoses and treatment of the disease as described above, can also be observed in the cognitive psychotherapies. With the development of the cognitive therapies and models, the view that the mind played a minor role in influencing human action was challenged. This represented a fundamental shift in psychology away from the premise that behaviour is learned (behaviourism) or is rooted in the unconscious (psychoanalysis). Not only was the existence of the mind accepted, but also the central premise of rationality: the primacy of thought over sensation and the experiential world. In this rationalistic framework the individual’s inner mental processes come to have a central and dominant role in directing human action (Bracken & Thomas, 1999; Louw & Moller, 1993a).

Disorders and distress are defined, as in the medical model, in terms of disordered cognitive structures. This includes the thought content as well as the thought processes involved. Social and cultural factors are at best, secondary, and may or may not be taken into account (Bracken & Thomas, 2001; Swartz, 1998). In therapy, it is the disordered cognitive schemes (and not the patient) that needs to be identified and treated to correspond to more functional schemes. Once again what is important here is not the person who presents with the distorted schemes, but the distorted schemes that must be examined and treated.

It is, however, not only the psychological movements and approaches rooted in the medical model like the classical psychoanalytic, behavioural and cognitive approaches, which marginalises the “other” in search of providing treatment and help. The so called third force in psychology, and other post modern approaches, does not seem to escape from the problem of the “other”.

In reaction to the two main schools of psychological thought (psychoanalysis and behaviourism) that existed up until the 1930's the phenomenological, existential and humanistic psychology developed. These three movements are often grouped together and referred to as the phenomenological or the idiographic approach. According to Möller (1993) the distinctive characteristic of the idiographic approach is its focus on the individual and his/her relationship with him/herself. The approach focuses on the individual so that each person can come to a thorough understanding of the uniqueness of his/her experiences. Although the existential-phenomenological and the humanistic movements have much in common it remains two unique movements (De Vos, 1993) and as a result justifies separate consideration.

In Europe during the 1930's, man and his subjective experience of the world, his values, goals and free choice were re-accentuated by the existentialistic movement, in reaction to behaviourism's pre-objectifying of man, (Möller, 1993). Drawing upon the

writings of philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger among others, especially between the two world wars, existential psychotherapists emphasised man's acute individualistic authenticity (De Vos, 1993; Gantt, 2002). The individual existing in a unique way must continuously try to realise him/herself in a world that is deceitful. S/he who fails or turns away from the challenges of this world runs the risk of self-estrangement and the loss of the self (De Vos, 1993). From the existential perspective, human beings are condemned to freedom (as in the philosophy of Sartre), and must create for themselves, *ex nihilo*, the meaning of their own existential worlds. Individual consciousness is understood to be the source of all possible meanings, and lived-experience is the immediate product of the inescapable meaning-granting activities of that consciousness (Gantt, 2002). As the ultimate author of meaning of his/her own existence and, thus, that of existence itself, the individual must assume total responsibility for his/her existence and its meanings. In existential psychotherapy, the individual is the one who must live the authentic life (Binswanger in Gantt, 2002) this means the individual must accept all of his/her life-possibilities so as to "appropriate and assemble them to a free, authentic, own self no longer caught in the narrowed down mentality of an anonymous, inauthentic, 'every body'" (Boss in Gantt 2002). In other words, mental health and well being are to be found in the authentic "willing" of the determined and the decisive individual who purposefully accepts absolute responsibility for his or her own self-created existence.

Despite the focus that the existential-phenomenological approaches in psychology place on the "total" person or the person as a whole, they do not manage to resolve the problem of the "other," of grounding an authentic relationship. In the existential-phenomenological approaches so much emphasis is placed on the individual that it can become an isolated entity among other persons. The "other" is lost in a world where the "I" must affirm the willingness to live by taking responsibility for his/her *own* existence.

Such a reality becomes a place in which one person does not really relate to others as it relates first to the self. The final analysis renders the individual an a-social person.

As in the existential-phenomenological approach in the humanistic psychology, which developed during the counter culture movement of the 1950's and 1960's in the United States, the individual person is the centre of attention and the unique qualities of each person are accentuated in the choices, creativeness, ability to self-evaluate, self-realisation, and future orientatedness. The self-worth of each person is of the utmost importance for the humanistic movement and as a result they reject authority and competition as education principles and accentuate growth and self-actualisation instead (Möller, 1993). Kvale (1992) writes that the ideal self according to the humanistic movement is the person who frees him/herself from authority and tradition. Through this man's individuality becomes a goal in itself that could no longer be subordinated to purposes of greater dignity. In humanistic ethics, virtue became responsibility towards oneself, and vice irresponsibility towards oneself. The self-actualising person must be self-contained, true to his/her own nature, ruled by the laws of his/her own character rather than by the rules of one or the other authority other than him/herself. As in the existential-phenomenological approaches despite the focus the humanistic psychology place on the person and his potential and growth, they do not manage to resolve the problem of the "other." The person freed from tradition and authority, as in the existential-phenomenological approaches becomes an isolated entity among other persons. The "other" is lost in that the world becomes a place in which each person does not really relate to others. As a result of this the humanistic self, just as the subject of the psychological laboratory is an a-historical and a-social person (Kvale, 1992).

The Post-Modern therapies (here it refers to social constructionism and deconstructionism) want to provide psychology with therapies that are more faithful to the human experience by overcoming both scientism and idealism (Williams & Gantt, 2002).

Post-Modern therapies reject the mechanism and determinism found in psychology and propose an alternative view of human beings as fundamentally free meaning makers. The search for the necessary and absolute and the pursuit of certainty is rejected. According to Kvale (1992) the Post-Modern therapies seek to replace a conception of reality independent of the observer with notions of language as actually constituting the structures of a perspectival social reality.

Yet, the Post-Modernists seem unable to make their points without implying an individual subject. “Any writer denying the existence of the individual subject does it, of necessity, in the name of the author subject. So the subject paradoxically rears its head by the declaration of its death” (Løvlie, 1992. p. 122).

Løvlie (1992) illustrates this by turning to the “deconstructionist philosophy” and to the “post-structuralism” of Derrida, de Man, Lyotard and Foucault. He is of the opinion that neither of these writers dissolves the critical subject. According to Løvlie (1992) these writers are rather out to demolish ideological positions built on the idea of an epistemic subject being the centre of the world instead of being part of the text of the world. “They are doing away with the ‘philosophy of consciousness,’ without throwing out its baby, which is individuality” (Løvlie, 1992. p. 132).

In the end the Post-Modernists who want to speak of the importance of sociality fall short of an account of it because they still, in some sense, conceive of the problem of getting sociality “into” the individual being or getting an individual being out of sociality. In both cases the individual is the entity in contrast to whom others – the sociality – are defined. This leads inevitably to a relativism found in all Post-Modern approaches.

But how is this losing the “other”? Post-Modern perspectives, because they offer no firm ground for understanding and evaluating differences between people – the “I” and the “other” – effectively destroy these differences by levelling them into sameness (Williams & Gantt, 2002). Socially constructed differences (or senses of differences) are ephemeral

and insecure. For the “other” to be real, and the otherness (difference) fundamental, the “same” must, in some sense, be equally real and subject neither to social construction nor deconstruction. The question remains, then, how otherness and the same can both be understood in this way.

## **2.2 The psychotherapeutic utopia**

In obtaining therapy the clients come away with a good deal more than a simple cure for their psychological and emotional ills. Gantt (2002) and Heaton (1988) pose that at the core of any normative psychotherapy there is a set of socio-culturally motivated ideological assumptions – usually taken as factual givens – regarding the ultimate reality or “truth” of the world. During the often lengthy course of most psychotherapeutic treatments, clients are initiated into the language, customs, values, assumptions, and the practices of an entire order from within which they are then to make sense of themselves, their symptoms, and their world. This initiation equips the client, in effect, to live out the therapist’s theory through which the problem is explained and “healed”. This is not simply an academic or intellectual exercise, but an active moving into and shaping of the clients life in the light of the therapist-client dialectic.

The fact of the matter is that the patient receives much more than just a “cure” and a theory, but also receives the assumptions on which the theory is based (Pretorius-Heuchert & Ahmed, 2001). Psychotherapy is a cultural product and like all cultural products, it both reflects and reproduces its cultural context. Because the cultural context is in part composed of moral traditions embedded in political structures, psychotherapy is unavoidably a moral practice with political consequences (Gantt, 2002; Pretorius-Heuchert & Ahmed, 2001).

These core assumptions in psychotherapy reflect amongst others utopian truth claims, in that they not only make specific assertions about how the world really is, but also how it, in an ideal world, can or ought to be. The utopian ideals latent in the theory and

practice of psychotherapy revolve around some conceptions of the true character of human well-being and the ultimate aim or purpose of human existence (Gantt, 2002). Each psychotherapeutic theory begins its theoretical work with the presumption – usually unarticulated and inexplicit – of an ideal world of mental health and psychological wellness, where fully functioning individuals are able to lead happy, productive, and fulfilling lives. Unfortunately, however, all theories realise that such a world is far from typical. Therefore, detailed accounts are given for the absence of ideal functioning. The accounts describe the worldly conditions that are at the source of real-world anxiety and abnormality. This requires, in turn, the drafting of a set of specific proposals and prescriptions deemed necessary for the successful treatment of these abnormalities (Gantt, 2002).

This way of theorising presupposes a conception of mental health in which health becomes the vacuum, which is left when the so-called neurosis is cured (May in Gantt, 2002). Suggestions that conceptions of health are derived in this quasi-empirical, ad hoc, and negative way are unconvincing because they fail to pay sufficient attention to the fundamentally a-priori social and cultural situated-ness of both theorists and therapist (Gantt, 2002).

Another argument that might be levelled against the thesis, is that utopian thinking underlies prevailing understanding of human health and functioning invokes pragmatism. In other words, psychotherapy is merely a pragmatic enterprise, employing whatever tools and techniques that have proven to be useful in solving the various emotional and psychological problems of disturbed clients. This position is frequently advanced by those wishing to adopt a theoretical, as well as methodological eclecticism regarding the psychotherapeutic project. Psychotherapeutic practice is seen as little more than scientifically prudent adherence to a practical course of action which has proven to have some sustained therapeutic effect with clients.

In adopting a pragmatic stance toward the practice of psychotherapy, one has already presumed to know, or at the very least have access to, certain criteria of health and desirable functioning in the light of which therapeutic success can be judged (Gantt, 2002). Thus, within a pragmatic approach to psychotherapy, one detects an utopian ideal, rendered all the more problematic, and perhaps even more influential, owing to its ambiguous nature.

To illustrate some of the utopian presumptions and the way in which they influence psychotherapy, a look will be taken at three widely practiced normative psychotherapeutic traditions: Freudian psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioural, and Rogerian client-centred. It will be argued that in having unreflectively privileged a particular utopian model of mental health and human well-being, as well as a particular set of beliefs and behaviours, these approaches ultimately reduce human freedom. In terms of Emmanuel Levinas, as we will see later, this totalises the client. Through this totalisation the “other” and his/her uniqueness is reduced and eventually lost.

### **2.2.1 Freudian Psychoanalysis**

In Freudian psychoanalysis the psychological good life or utopia is realised when the patient is able to free fixated libidinal energy from the unconscious so as to restructure the ego to be in greater harmony with external reality (Möller, 1993b). The Freudian cure envisioned is one of “ego-freedom”, in which the ego performs its function and the instincts are attended to in a manner consistent with the demands of a rational world that does not conform to all our own wishes (Möller, 1993b). All of this can be accomplished through the offering of analytic interpretations, the analysis of dreams, free association, working through resistance and transference (and countertransference) via the expert use of various proven therapeutically techniques (Möller, 1993b). The Freudian utopia is thus a utopia in which, rather than giving ourselves over to our emotions, we are instructed in the insight of psychoanalysis so as to no longer require all of those harmful repressions that

bear down on us with such heavy psychic weight and render action irrational and neurotic. The promise of psychoanalysis is that we can be freed to investigate the potentialities of an existence in which our Oedipal conflicts are not so horrifyingly debilitating, our superego not so rigid and condemnatory, our ego not so strained in trying to satisfy the competing demands of the instincts and the superego and the external reality (Möller, 1993b).

How does the patient become part of such an ideal? In the Freudian psychoanalysis the patient learns to conceive the world in terms of unresolved Oedipal complexes, unconscious drives, impulses, and repressions (Möller, 1993b). Therapy teaches one that neurosis originates in traumatic events of the past. In therapy the patient must learn to question and critique the “reality” of the past events from within the more rational, reflective reality offered by the psychoanalytic theory and the psychoanalyst. In therapy the patient learns, with the refinement of analytic interpretation, that thoughts and feelings are best understood in terms of repetition compulsion originating in childhood, rather than as valid and meaningful responses to immediate lived experiences (Gantt, 2002). Over the course of the psychoanalytic endeavour the patient learns that any doubt or questioning of the analytical interpretation represents an instance of resistance which interrupts the progress of the analytic work (Möller, 1993b). Thus, from within the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition, cure and the attainment of the “good life” requires leaving the here-and-now world of meaning that are the patients’ lived experience and enter in a truer, utopian world where understanding liberates one from symptoms and repressions.

### **2.2.2 Rational emotive therapy of Albert Ellis**

In terms of the Rational emotive approach to therapy the psychological utopia can be described in terms of rational, logical and scientific thinking that leads to moderate and fitting emotions and appropriate behaviour. The fully functioning person is a person who “uses the methods of science (scientific thinking and an empirical stance to knowledge) to obtain knowledge about the self, others and the world” (Louw & Moller, 1993b; Wallen,

DiGiuseppe & Dryden, 1992). If a person thinks rationally, logically and scientifically they are not likely to reach conclusions that lead to extremely disturbed feelings. The Rational emotive approach thus strives to identify the irrational thoughts and reasoning errors that cause the emotional problems of the client and aim to change or remove these irrational thoughts and reasoning errors. Ellis distinguishes between elegant and inelegant goals (Möller, 1984). Inelegant goals strive to remove symptoms. The client is helped to formulate more rational thoughts and act more rationally to raise the efficiency of his behaviour. Elegant solutions strive to make a comprehensive change to the basic assumptions on which the client has founded his/her life, especially the absolutistic and irrational thoughts regarding him/herself, other people, and the world. Through this the client is liberated from: 1) demands that reflect unrealistic and absolute expectations of events or individuals, 2) awfulizing where the client exaggerate the negative consequences of a situation, 3) low frustration tolerance that stems from demands for ease and comfort, and 4) global evaluation of human worth of either the self or others in which it is implied that human beings can be rated (Wallen, DiGiuseppe & Dryden, 1992). This liberation allows the client to live a life in which s/he 1) takes responsibility for his/her own life and the problems that arise, 2) is tolerant, 3) adaptable, 4) accepts uncertainty, 5) takes risks, 6) self-accepting, 7) thinks scientifically, 8) is involved with other, and 9) is able to promote self-interest by being true to him/herself without being selfish (Möller, 1984).

How does the patient become part of such an ideal? Ellis states it explicitly and clearly: the patient needs to buy the theory of Rational-emotive therapy otherwise therapy will not be successful (Wallen et al., 1992). This means that the client needs to understand and accept the **ABC**-model of Rational-emotive therapy. **A** stands for the activating event, which is usually our perception of something obnoxious or some unfortunate environmental occurrence. **C** stands for the emotional and behavioural consequences and **B** is the client's belief system which consists of two parts: rational (**B**) and irrational (**iB**)

beliefs. This theory states that cognition is the most important determinant of emotion. Irrational thinking often produces dysfunctional emotional states. Thus, undesirable emotions and behaviour (*C*) is not the result certain external events (*A*) but is for the major part the result of how a person thinks (*B*) about these events. The most effective way to reduce emotional distress (*C*) is to change the patients way of thinking (*iB*). This however is not easy since humans have a natural tendency to think irrationally and upset themselves and perpetuate their emotional distress by repropagandising themselves with their own irrational beliefs. Therefore changing their irrational beliefs is likely to require persistence and practice (Wallen et al., 1992). Once the client has learned and accepted the theory the client must understand how his/her own irrational thoughts leads to his/her own problems. This ability to identify the irrational thoughts is a skill that the client needs to develop that s/he can use long after therapy has stopped. In therapy the client also learns how to dispute (*D*) these irrational thoughts through various disputation strategies so that when successful, the client will experience a new effect (*E*), which is a more rational philosophy and a level of affect which is compatible with effective problem solving (Wallen et al., 1992). Thus, from the Rational-emotive therapeutic perspective, cure and the attainment of the “good life” requires the client to adopt a scientific way of thinking through which s/he can enter in a truer, utopian world where logic and rationality liberates one from emotional and behavioural disturbance.

### **2.2.3 Rogerian client-centred therapy**

From the perspective of the Rogerian client-centred therapy the psychological utopia can be described in terms of the “fully functioning person” (Rogers, 1961, p183-196). The fully functioning person is an individual whose self-concept has come into harmonic congruence with his or her own organismic valuing process via relationships which are genuine or congruent, offer unconditional positive regard and total acceptance, and feel and communicate a deep and emphatic understanding (Mearns & Thorne, 1999). In Client-

centred therapy the client is to be assisted by the therapist in an act of self-liberation from the onerous, self imposed burden of needing positive judgements from others and to satisfy inconsistent demands made by others (Mearns & Thorne, 1999). In this self-liberation, the client is freed to actualise his or her own unique potential. Psychologically well-adjusted people are, thus, open to experience without feeling threatened and as a result can be trusting in their own organismic selves. They are capable of listen to others, are highly aware of their feelings and that of others and have the ability to live in the present moment. They are also aware of their subjectivity as evaluators of their experiences, and are willing to be in a process of change (Mearns & Thorne, 1999).

Thus, in the Rogerian scheme the utopian vision is articulated in terms of renewed reliance upon one's own organismic self, the fully functioning person has his/her source of wisdom deep within and accessible – an internal locus of evaluation. Therapy is assisting the client to free him/herself from distorted symbolizations and arbitrary conditions of worth to reinstall the basic trustworthiness of human nature so that s/he can be free to accomplish the work of individual progress (Rogers, 1961).

How can the client become part of such a utopian ideal? From the perspective informed by Rogerian theory, the client must accept that “neurosis” is the result of having denied the experiencing of his/her own feelings in order to fulfil the expectations imposed by others. The client must learn (again) that “doing what feels right proves to be a competent and trustworthy guide to behaviour” (Rogers, 1961, p.189) and (re)develop an “increasing trust in the organismic” (Rogers, 1961, p.189). Through this the client becomes finely tuned to the emotional dimension of life. In client-centred therapy the client learns to defer to the organismic as the infallible guide to his/her own behaviour, and the ultimate source of meaning and motivational power. The client is encouraged to “permit his total organism to function freely in all its complexity in selecting, from the multitude of possibilities, that behaviour which in that moment of time will be the most generally and

genuinely satisfying” (Rogers, 1961, p.191). From within the client-centred modality it is not fitting, nor congruent with the fully functioning person to question the validity of truth of one’s own internal experience. This turn inwards to find those actions and beliefs that will produce health and happiness and assure the full functioning and development of the whole person, is a turn to a utopian ideal (Gantt, 2002).

### **2.3 Psychology, ethics, values, morals and meaning**

A critical examination of psychology reveals that psychological ethics, being grounded in deterministic processes, addresses issues of moral conduct, principles and precepts. Because contemporary psychological theories have tried to ground meaning and morality in cognitive processes or in private emotive experiences, they have not successfully accounted for meaning and morality in human action; as such meaning and morality are reduced into products of determining processes (William & Gantt, 2002).

Any analysis of the human being that takes the individual as an a-social and a-historical being will not only fail to resolve the problem of the “other”, but will also fail to retain meaning or morality in its analysis. This is true for both the Modernist and the Post-Modernist traditions in psychology, because both the Modernists and Post-Modernists thought have begun their analysis by neglecting the space wherein difference can occur (Utopia), and they have systematically overlooked the alterity (historical and social situatedness) in the face-to-face encounter with the other. All differences among human beings are important to create meaning and morality and to understand the “other”.

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, psychology, being situated for a large part in the natural sciences, has adopted their models and methods (Swartz, 1998). Psychology as a science which searches for the ultimate principle, which describes and predicts behaviour, has imported mechanism and determinism that inform accounts of the natural world. Mechanism and determinism, as part of the legacy of modernism, destroy difference (and thus meaning and morality), because they search for the ultimate principle or force of

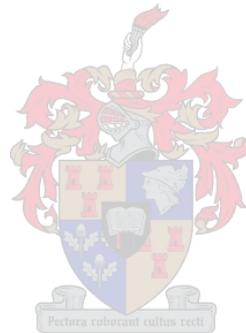
which particular events, including human behaviour, are simply necessitated variations. Thus, all differences among human events are, from the natural science point of view, in some sense incidental and superficial, because all human events are governed by the same principles or processes.

The mechanistic and deterministic explanatory structures also bring with them a destruction of agency – that is, they make it impossible to account for human action in agentive terms and through doing this they destroy difference that might have existed from the beginning. Without agency, morality becomes a subject that cannot be treated sensibly and satisfactorily (Williams, 1992, 1994).

But the mechanistic and deterministic explanatory structures in natural sciences and in psychology do not only destroy agency, but also lead to moral and epistemological relativism. According to these structures the morality and meaning of an act are determined by which ever mechanical and causal forces happen to be operating at a particular time, in a particular situation. Because in this “cause and effect scheme” the act necessarily follows from that which has caused it, the act cannot be otherwise than that which it is. But any act, that is determined in such a way, cannot be judged as moral or immoral because, first there is no possibility or difference within which the morality can inhere, and second, any judgement of morality will in it self be determined and therefore not a judgement at all, but a necessary and determined event. Finally, since all acts and events can only be sensibly evaluated relative to the extant conditions, inevitably results in epistemological relativism.

Third force and Post-Modern psychologists have rejected mechanism and determinism and proposed, as alternative, a view of human beings as fundamentally free meaning makers, as it has been shown in this chapter. Each of these two alternatives show a seemingly inescapable epistemological, as well as moral relativism, which is one of the direct consequences of the freedom that lies at the base of meaning making (Kvale, 1992). To avoid relativism, difference must be recognised. Because difference demands otherness,

difference cannot exist in any meaningful way for individuals only *as* individuals. Thus, for there to be genuine difference such that meaning may occur, there must be an *a priori* being-with that which is genuinely the “other”. Formulated differently: meaning and morality inhabit what might be referred to as the “region of difference,” because for difference to exist we need the otherness of an “other” (Levinas, 1969). Because both modern and Post-Modern perspectives effectively destroy these differences and level them into sameness, they empty psychology as a profession and life in general without morality.



## CHAPTER 3 - THE ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS

The following section gives a thematic descriptive overview of some of the most important and psychological relevant themes in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Instead of giving a description of the historical development of the philosophy of Levinas, selected themes of Levinas's work which are relevant for psychology will be discussed. Although a thematic presentation of the work of Levinas risks being fragmentary, it is believed that the work of Levinas is presented systematic enough throughout this chapter to form a whole. The advantage of a thematic approach is that it only presents the themes in the philosophy of Levinas that would be relevant for psychology.

As an introduction to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas aimed at psychologists, this chapter does not claim to be a comprehensive systematisation of his work. This chapter introduces themes in the philosophy of Levinas that will form the basis of a psychological critique and will hopefully suggest an alternative so that possible solutions to the problems mentioned in Chapter 2 can be explored and developed.

### 3.1 The radical humanism of Levinas

Any attempt to understand the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and its relevance for psychology would be futile if his understanding of humanism were not considered. Taureck (2002) states that everything that Levinas wrote since the publication of his first *magnum opus* (*Totality and Infinity*, 1961) is an attempt to ground his extreme humanism. The understanding of his humanism is not only important for an understanding of his philosophy, but it is also of vital importance if the contribution Levinas can make towards psychology wants to be explored. By stating that Levinas philosophy is a "philosophy of the Other" is not enough to describe his radical humanistic approach. By developing a

philosophy of the Other, Levinas is criticising the whole Greek humanistic tradition, which according to him, reduces the Other to the same.

It can be said that there exists at least two historical forms of humanism: on the one hand the Greek-Roman tradition and on the other hand the Jewish Humanistic tradition (Levinas, 1969). Levinas, rooted in the Jewish tradition, offers a criticism of the Greek tradition, which developed into two directions: the philosophical humanism of Idealism and the humanism of Existentialism on the one hand, and anti-humanism on the other. His goal is to radicalise both.

But what is meant with a Jewish humanism and how does Levinas understand Jewish humanism? What Levinas understands as Jewish humanism developed from the philosophy of his friend, Maurice Blanchot.

Blanchot (Taureck, 2002) writes that the truth of Judaism lies not in the fact that it reveals the only God, but that it opens *language* as the place where man places himself in relation to that which every relation excludes: the absolute distance, the absolute stranger. God speaks and man speaks to Him. To speak to someone means that the one who is addressed is accepted, that s/he is not imported into an information system of subjects or beings. It rather means to recognise the one who is addressed as (the) unknown and to accept him/her as a stranger, without needing him/her or to give up his/her otherness. In this sense the (spoken) language is the Promised Land, where the exile becomes the promised stay. The Jewish humanism is, from the perspective of the Greek humanism, astonishing in the sense that it supplies man with relationships: a supply that is so constant and primary that even there where God is present in name, it is still about man (people); it is still about what exists between one person and another.

What we recognise in the writing of Blanchot is that the Judaism has a special humanism recognising man's ability for language (speaking). The "as 'godly' addressed Otherness" is, in every act in which one person speaks to another person, present as the

ever-remaining otherness of the persons present. By speaking to the other we pay attention to the other and take account of him/her and the strange world s/he inhabits.

In the philosophy of Levinas he develops this Jewish humanism perspective into an extreme humanism in which he reworks and unites the paradoxes of the philosophical humanism and anti-humanism. Relying on Heidegger, Levinas shows that humanism and anti-humanism do not necessarily exclude each other. Anti-humanism is not necessarily something anti-humane, but at the most a criticism directed at humanism showing that humanism is not achieving what it set out to achieve: describing man.

Humanism wants to give man a privileged place in the world that would make man the goal of reality. According to anti-humanism, man as being, does not have a privileged position among the natural beings (Taureck, 2002). According to Levinas, what humanism needs, is the recognition of man as “stranger”. Man, according to Levinas, is restless and lives as a stranger in relationship with every place. As a stranger, man passes by – man is a nomad. In fact, he is already gone to the same extent, as he is adapted to his passing by. But in this passing by, he is calling from the streets, calling in the desert, calling while dying. His call is not a cry, nor is it a scream - it is a whispering scream (Levinas, 1989). Levinas does not hesitate to change the “non-being” of man into a possible “less than non-being”. Through this Levinas is continuing the modern anti-humanistic tradition by connecting it with a prominent Old Testament<sup>3</sup> theme: the desert experience.

Levinas, in developing his extreme humanism, concerns himself not only with the anti-humanism but with the humanism as well. Taureck (2002) argues that Levinas’s interpretation of the humanism of the existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre is crucial to the development of his extreme humanism.

Sartre spoke of the subject that is condemned to freedom. This statement rests on the following assumptions (Taureck 2002):

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<sup>3</sup> “... for ye are strangers and sojourners with me (Lev. 25:23)” and “I am a stranger in the earth (Ps. 119).” King James Version

- a) Every person is a free being.
- b) Freedom fulfils itself as responsibility; responsibility is individualised freedom.
- c) Responsibility replaces the concept of obligation. Obligation was, up until now, the estrangement through which man accepted objective values to hide his freedom.
- d) Responsibility does not only take place in the world. Man is also responsible for the world and for himself. But man is responsible for everything but his responsibility itself because man is not the basis for his being.

In reaction to Sartre Levinas asks two questions. Firstly: the humanism of Sartre took a step beyond the ethics and morality that existed up to that stage by replacing obligation with responsibility. Sartre, acknowledging the criticism of Levinas, later realised that he neglected to redefine the place of the concept “obligation.” This led Levinas to ask the question: how is it possible to ground responsibility in obligation, rather than to see obligation as a possibility within responsibility?

Levinas’s argumentation in response to the question can be summarised as follows (Taureck 2002):

- a) There exists an original obligation to responsibility.
- b) The responsibility claims obedience by man without the possibility to choose.
- c) In that obligation precedes the freedom of man, man is open for the otherness of other people before s/he can act as if s/he is a free subject.
- d) The obligation and the obedience have no correspondence to ontological categories, but to what Levinas calls “God.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Levinas is not theologising here. “God” is not referring to an individual existence, but is only a name, the idea of goodness, beyond all possible imaginable ontological images.

According to Levinas it seems only possible to ground responsibility in obligation through a crossing of the boundaries that Sartre would like to set for philosophy: consciousness and being.

The second question Levinas poses in reaction to the existential humanism of Sartre is whether it is possible and if so, what is the ground to think of responsibility as factuality. Formulated differently: on what grounds can we speak about being condemned to responsibility?

Once again Levinas crosses the boundaries that Sartre set for philosophy by going beyond the categories of consciousness and existence. He answers the question he posed by stating that we can speak about being condemned to responsibility on two grounds namely “passivity” and “the exclusion of the presence.”<sup>5</sup>

In the humanism of Sartre, man creates his future through an active reaching out. Does Levinas want to make man a passive being, unable to find the present? Levinas turns to the existential philosophy to answer the question.

For Levinas human activity should be understood differently. Human activity is not ego- but altro-centric. The other person is the origin of my activity, not my spontaneity (Taureck 2002). Thus the human activity does not take place – as in the philosophy of the Greek-Roman tradition – through activity. Activity is not the grounding for activity any more, not in the “presentness” (here and now – *hic et nunc*) of human thought or will of the ego, but beyond the present, beyond activity and even beyond a passivity, if passivity is understood as a mere lack of activity instead of a receptivity.

To summarise: Levinas radicalises the modern anti-humanism by crediting man with that which humanism likes to deny: man lives as stranger on this earth, a “there-being” (*Dasein*) in the desert, a residing that does not absolve the exile. Levinas also radicalises the humanism of Sartre. Sartre describes man as condemned to freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> Later in the chapter we will return to the subject of consciousness and passivity

Levinas goes beyond Sartre and takes this humanism one step further in saying that man is obliged to be responsible and human activity is nothing more than a receptive passivity. Both radicalisations have the same result in that man does not appear as an ego that centres the world in him anymore.

From this it is clear that for Levinas, responsibility is always connected with the Other. Interestingly when looking at the Hebrew word for responsibility (*achariout*) the Other (*acher*) can be seen in the root of responsibility. But the primary reason for Levinas's turn to the Other, the obligation to be for the Other can be found in the Jewish Messianic tradition. Levinas writes in *Difficult Freedom* (1990) that the Messiah is the Justified, the One that suffered, the One that took the suffering of the Other on himself. The fact that man does not shy away from the suffering of the other defines the self as the self. Every person is a Messiah and every person should act as if s/he were the Messiah.

Levinas uses Jewish semantics to formulate a moral imperative: every person should live as if s/he were the Messiah. Humanity should exist as a plurality of Messiahs, which grounds their response-ability towards the Other in an obligation. Later in the chapter it will be shown how the face of the Other summons each and every human being to responsibility, how humans 'discover' themselves when they react responsibly answering to the call the face of the Other poses.

### 3.2 Intentionality and the absolute otherness of the Other

The concept of intentionality is a concept with which and against which Levinas philosophised from the beginning. This concept forms a central theme in his thinking. If generalised, intentionality can be described as a psychic process that is directed at relating. If we desire, we desire a desired object, if we are thinking, our thinking is directed at thoughts, when we observe we observe something. Every psychic activity is directed at an object. Consciousness is always consciousness of something (Brentano, 1982). Intentionality originates from the Scholastic concept *intentio*. It was rediscovered and used by Brentano's descriptive psychology to differentiate between the physical and the psychic phenomena. According to Brentano, who deeply influenced Husserl's phenomenology, consciousness is always related to psychic phenomena.

Although this may sound trivial (consciousness as the consciousness of something), it was not always the case in the history of the philosophy of knowledge. Recent philosophies gave a lot more thought to a free-floating subject than to a world in which existence should still be proved.

Husserl, whose phenomenology influenced Levinas fundamentally, describes knowing as "co-constitution" between the world of things or objects and consciousness. The object and the subject cooperate in forming the meaning the subject has of the object.

This can be illustrated by the following example: For the Idealists when he directs his flashlight to his book lying on the table in a totally dark room, the flashlight beam (consciousness) would make the book come into existence. Husserl on the other hand is of the opinion that when someone directs the flashlight beam on the book s/he doesn't make it pop into existence. The flashlight discloses the book as the book and shows it to her/him, where s/he is the subject. Intentionality, like the light beam, is the way consciousness (that which knows) discloses the objects of consciousness (that which is known). Consciousness

as intentional is a form of the voluntary: it is a chosen inherent activity of the ego (Precht, 1991).

Levinas thinks the description of consciousness offered by Husserl is “*adequating*” (*adequatio*), equalising (making the one the same as the other) and emphasising the activity<sup>6</sup> of the consciousness of the ego, particularly knowing the other, too much.

Husserl (1992) distinguished two aspects in intentionality: the *noesis* and the *noema/noemata*. The *noesis* is the activity of the consciousness and includes thoughts, judgments, and perceptions. The *noema* on the other hand is that at which the *noesis* is directed. Thus, the *noema* is the content of the *noesis*. We can describe it as thoughts (*noesis*, the process/activity) and that what we think about (*noema*, the content of the thoughts). It is important to note that, according to Husserl the *noema*, the content of consciousness, is not an intra-psyche creation. The *noema* refers to the object that exists in reality (realer Gegenstand) but it does not mean that the *noema* must correspond to a real object (Husserl, 1992).

Levinas sees this *noesis-noema* relationship as equalising. Especially in *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas, 1969) intentionality is a central theme where the *noesis-noema* is described as the *adequatio* of the thoughts and the content of the thoughts. What Levinas wants to do is to go beyond the *noesis-noema* relationship to such an extent that a non-correspondence is shown. Levinas wants to make the non-correspondence the basis for intentionality. The argumentation of Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) can be summarised as follow:

- 1) Intentionality indicates the correlation between things, objects and the way they are presented in the consciousness of subjects. A colour as *noema* for example is only colour as something seen; to see includes the seeing of

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to notice the activity of the consciousness as described by Husserl. Levinas is of the opinion that Husserl has been influenced too much by the Idealism and places too much focus on the activity of the consciousness. As we shall see later Levinas proposes that the consciousness is radically passive.

colours (*noesis*). In the consciousness, that of which consciousness is conscious, is given.

- 2) Does intentionality concern all phenomena? The phenomenology of Husserl confirms this question in that it sees the *noesis-noema*-relationship as the “original” relationship.
- 3) It is arguable that the *noesis-noema* correlation concerns all phenomena. The other person is: a) the wholly other; b) he is met as a face; c) in the meeting language is spoken; d) through language the Other teaches and the truth transpires<sup>7</sup>.
- 4) The arguments a – d excludes the possibility that a subject is so open in him/her self, in his/her consciousness, that everything that exists is already given in the consciousness.

The question now arises: How does Levinas prove the otherness of the Other through the points mentioned under point 3 – the Other is met as a face, in this meeting language is spoken and through the language that is spoken the Other teaches and the truth transpires. Point 3a above states that the Other is the wholly Other. The Other is totally other than the “I” is. S/he is metaphysically different from the “I”. What does Levinas say?

### 3.2.1 The other as the “Other”

Practically Levinas is saying that the other is accepted as present through the “I” or “we” but, the fact that the Other is recognised as being present, does not mean that the Other has the same value than “I” or “we”. Levinas (1969) shows that the recognition of the Other as another human with the same rights as the “I” is a late Enlightenment product established through revolutionary emancipation. It assumes that the Other is an “I” - that s/he is an

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<sup>7</sup> The concepts a)-d) will be addressed individually to clarify how Levinas understands the noesis-noema correlation when it concerns humans and human relationships.

equal to the “me”. S/he is of the same type and has the same worth that the “I” have. In the late Enlightenment way of thinking the Other is recognised as an alter ego.

By describing man as the infinite Other then Levinas gives up the possibility for man to understand his/her fellow man through the “I”. Levinas (1969) calls this “totalising.” The Other is not another “I”, is not an alter ego and can therefore not be understood through an analogy to the “I”, nor is the other a phenomenon of my own consciousness, as Husserl sees it<sup>8</sup>.

With this view, Levinas destroys the self-understanding of man as he goes directly against the Socratic tradition, which sees the Other as another “I”. In this, there lies a dividing that concerns the co-existence of autonomous persons that is understood as similar in nature and with the same rights. Maurice Blanchot writes in response to Levinas’s description of the Other that the Other is not only falling outside of the horizon a person can imagine for him, the Other is himself without horizon.

It could be argued that people are not that different from each other – all are human. Humans with the same interests organise themselves in groups of people with the same social interests, this means that humans are living beings that are able to be a society or a community. Levinas would not disagree with that. What is important to notice is that Levinas is not concerned with the fact that all humans, in being part of the human race, are equal or different, nor does he disagree with the fact that people find amongst themselves similarities and organise themselves in social groups. What concerns Levinas is the Otherness of the other people in as far as the Other confronts me – the “I”. Formulated differently, Levinas describes a relationship between the first person “I” and the third person “the Other”.

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<sup>8</sup> The implications of this position of Husserl is “upsetting”. If ethics concerns itself with the relationship between people and how they behave towards each other, this approach of Husserl excludes the possibility to behave ethically as the other is just my representation and experience of the other and is not really the Other. In such a relationship the subject (I) meets another “I”. When the other is not met as the Other then we cant talk of ethics

Levinas does not only show the otherness of the Other through an analysis of the tradition of philosophy, he also describes it metaphysically. Levinas accomplishes this by “misunderstanding” metaphysics. In spite of using the language of ontology he does not fail in his attempt to argue contra the Socratic tradition and change the meaning of metaphysics.

According to Levinas the Greek tradition of philosophy understands metaphysics as ontology (Taureck, 2002). This means it understands metaphysics as the theory of being as totality of identical entities. Levinas wants to change this because he is of the opinion that ontology, as intentionality in Husserl, reduces the other to the same (is “totalising”). For Levinas the solution lies in the understanding of metaphysics, not as ontology but as ethics (1969). In other words, he changes the metaphysics into a theory of the Other in his/her difference and his/her relation with the “I” (me), as s/he meets the “I” (me).

How does Levinas understand ethics then? The traditional ethics, which developed from the metaphysics as ontology, assumes that the other person is an alter ego because s/he is the same as the “I” (me), and therefore has the same worth as the “I”. Such an ethic asks of the “I” the willingness to behave in such a way as the “I” would do in the third person. A person (“I”) should behave in such a way towards other persons (“I’s”) that from both sides it could be said that the relationship was just – we acted within the rules. According to Levinas this is a relationship between two “I’s”. The third person (s/he) was incorporated into the first person (I).

Levinas (1969) wants to incorporate both the first and the third person into each other. He who approaches me as the Other makes me a “moral subject”. The Other is the presentness of the third person – s/he cannot be incorporated or equated to the “I”. The face of the Other questions the own interests of the “I” and therefore opens the dimension of humaneness. The difference between the two forms of ethics can be recognised in the

descriptions of existential philosophy and extreme humanism as well as in the distinction between the Socratic and Messianic tradition.

### 3.2.2 The Face

Levinas calls the way the Other presents him/herself to someone and exceeds the ideas and preconceptions that someone might have of him/her “the face”. Levinas (1987) writes in his *Collected Philosophical Papers* the following:

The epiphany of the other involves a signifyingness of its own independence of this meaning received from the world. The other comes to us not only out of context, but also without mediation; he (sic) signifies himself. The cultural meaning ... is disturbed and jostled by another presence that is abstract (or more exactly absolute) and not integrated into the world. This presence consists in coming toward us; in making an entry...The epiphany of a face is a visitation. Whereas a phenomenon is already, in whatever respect, an image, a captive manifestation of its plastic and mute form, the epiphany of a face is alive. Its life consists in undoing the form in which every entity, when it enters into immanence, that is, when it is exposed as a theme, is already dissimulated. (pp. 95-96)

Levinas is saying that the face of the Other, showing itself in an epiphany, cannot be imported into the ego. The face of the other resists to be seen as an alter ego. It is beyond a final interpretation and categorisation. The Other is not just a mere object that can be subsumed under one of many categories held by a person and given a place in that person's world. That person may find that the Other inhabit a world that is basically other than his/hers and essentially different. “The face... goes beyond those plastic forms, which forever try to cover the face like a mask of their presence to perception. But always the face shows through these forms” (Levinas, 1989b, pp. 82-83).

The face expresses itself. The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradiction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of

an impersonal Neuter, but expression: the existent breaks through all the enveloping and generalities of Being to spread out in its “form” the totality of its “content,” finally abolishing the distinction between the form and the content. (Levinas, 1969, p. 51)

In this description the Other, who is present in flesh and is revealing him/herself in an epiphany, is keeping a distance and is even absent in his/her questioning glance. The Other is far from the “I” and other than the “I”, a stranger, and the “I” cannot be sure what his/her strangeness conceals. When this happens there can be truth.

The face of the other is a naked face – it cannot be covered with masks without reducing him/her what s/he is not. It is not clothed with specific cultural and typifying characteristics and therefore it cannot be categorised. What happens is a collision of two orders. No image can grasp the face and as such the face is a living, active surplus overflowing his/her form. This face gives meaning in his/her own way, not with signs and signals, but with *kath' auto*, from/by itself (Levinas, 1969). It signifies only with reference to itself and thereby escapes the referrals inherent in sign systems.

Levinas writes (1989):

Prior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expression, which cover and protect with an immediate adopted face, there is the nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defencelessness, vulnerability itself...From the beginning there is a face to face steadfast in its exposure to invisible death, to a mysterious forsakenness.... But in its expression, in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the

invisible death that must be faced by the Other ... were my business. (pp. 83)

The call of the Other opens a longing in the “I”, a longing that remains unfulfilled and remains a pure longing. This longing is the result of the face of the Other, that is infinitely and wholly other, and in such - as a living face which is overflowing with the meaning - it gives *kath’ auto* (from/by itself). In this the “I” meets a naked face (it is not covered by masks the “I” impose on it) that calls upon the “I” urgently and needy. The face of the other calls the “I” to responsibility before the “I” could choose or decide. The presence of the Other is a call to answer, not because it is a law or that you are forced to, but as responsibility (Pauw, 1999). Here the “I” experience the longing. Levinas says that consciousness loses its first place, the “I” loses its sovereign self-coincidence, its identification, in which consciousness returns triumphantly to itself to rest on itself (Levinas 1998). The longing of the “I” for the Other is not a longing that is incorporated in a bigger whole, it remains outside a universal order but addresses the “I” from the infinity, from the “otherwise than being”.

Levinas (1989) describes this responsibility as:

A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. Or more exactly, as if I had to answer for the other’s death even before being. (p.83)

In this paragraph the resonance of an extreme humanistic description of Levinas can be heard. In not shying away from the naked face of the Other and being open for their pain is a manifestation and realization of Messiah in the present. Before the face of the Other the “I” is emptied of his/her egoism. His/her thoughts are no longer thoughts that return to him/her but thoughts that are open and going out towards the Other.

In the face of the other man, the “I” is inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one. (Levinas 1969). This call to responsibility is not only a burden, but at the same time, a discovery of freedom. In this intersubjectivity that exists in the face-to-face meeting, the “I” is made a subject that confirms his/her uniqueness. It is only the “I” who can answer the call of the Other, no one else – the “I” is the chosen one. In his/her responsibility, s/he is free.

### 3.2.3 Language: The said and the saying

From the beginning Levinas was of the opinion that language and the ability to speak is associated with relationship between the “I” and the Other. The extreme humanistic position of Levinas is only possible because there is language (*la parole*) in-between the absolute differentiation between the “I” and the “Other”.

In discussing the extreme humanism of Levinas reference was made to Maurice Blanchot, who wrote that to speak always means speaking-to-a-person. To speak to someone means that the one who is addressed is accepted, that s/he is not imported into an information system of subjects or beings. It rather means to recognise the one who is addressed as (the) unknown and to accept him/her as a stranger, without needing him/her or to give up his/her otherness. In this sense the (spoken) language is the Promised Land, where the exile becomes the promised stay.

For Levinas language fulfils a connecting function between the users, between the infinitely transcendent and infinitely foreign. But because the subjects must remain separated in using the language, language appears paradoxically as the connection and the separation of subjects (Taureck 2002).

This implies that language also shows the absolute otherness of the Other. The relating, connecting and comprehension function of language exists as a sign of the otherness of the Other. In that, language remains nearness (intimacy) to or a move towards

(advance) the Other that is distant and shows the otherness of the Other. Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity* (1969):

The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which the epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us both, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by existence.

Speech proceeds from absolute difference. (p. 194)

Levinas does not stop here by showing the ethical dimension of the Other as it is shown in language, but he goes even further. The otherness of the Other is much more than a terminus that is placed into a relationship through language. Levinas continues by showing that the otherness of the Other is not only shown *in* language, but *as* language. He reasons as follow: The otherness of the Other does not show itself as in the ontological tradition through seeing, but through saying (to-oneself-say, *se dire* the verb in French is reflexive) and expressing (to express oneself). If the Other is only seen, s/he remains a *noema* within the intentionality of the observer and does not approach the observer from outside. The Other is not only seen, s/he confronts the observer as a physical body. The focal point of this physical confrontation is the face of the Other. The face that is confronted, is confronted as a seeing face. This seeing face, according to Levinas (1969), is a speaking face: the vision of the face is inseparable from its offering – that is language. “This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment of knowledge” (p, 198). In his/her face the Other expresses him/herself. In the face of the Other s/he expresses his/her otherness, an otherness that is infinite. “The face resists possession, resist my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp<sup>9</sup>” (Levinas, 1969, p. 197).

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<sup>9</sup> “The ‘resistance’ of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical” (*Totality and Infinity*, 1969).

Although the face of the Other resists to be grasped it is still exposed to the power thereof. The resistance in the face to be grasped can be negated – the Other can be imported into my schemes and categories – be made equal to me. Levinas calls this murder. According to Levinas murder is the exercise of power over that what escapes power. To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension completely.

In probably one of the most remarkable sections in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas (1969) writes “... in his (the Others) face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder.’” (p. 199). And in “*Is Ontology Fundamental?* (1998) he writes: “To be in relation with the other face to face is – to be unable to kill” (Levinas, 1998, p.10).

What Levinas accomplished with this is much more than he intended in *Totality and Infinity*. Through this Levinas went behind the spoken language. The face speaks by saying “You shall not kill!” Man speaks before he speaks. Levinas calls this *saying*.

The saying is contrasted with the *said*. When man speaks the language of the said, he is using the commonly understood notions of an individual establishing an identity in a society of others establishing their identity. The said is language that assumes that the listeners share the same understanding of the words the speaker uses and share the same values. The said is the language of the “I” that relates to objects in the world around it. The said is the language that adequates, compares, diagnoses, and judges.

In *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (1981) Levinas connects to the thought that man speaks before he speaks, which he developed in *Totality and Infinity*. He writes I am-for-the-Other, because I am meaning. Language is no longer the relationship between two termini. The “I” becomes meaning, the “I” speak before the “I” speak. My being-for-the-Other does not mean that the “I” as an autonomous “I” concerns him/herself with the Other, s/he turns to him, s/he offer him/herself to him. Neither does it imply the fulfilling of the commandment that man should love others as him/herself. It means that the “I”, the

whole self, become meaning to the relationship. The “I” does not lose him/herself by becoming meaning, to the contrary, s/he *is* only when s/he becomes meaning. Man is paradoxically, as mentioned before, only a stranger and Other not estranged. The “I”, in its speaking before it speaks, the “I” estrange him/her from him/herself, from his/her self-understanding as a nomad through becoming meaning for the Other. Instead of being a being as substance the “I” become a being as relationship.

There is thus for Levinas a third alternative to the Hamlet question “To be or not to be.” The third alternative is language in its original form – saying: the expression of the “I” inspired by the proximity (always commanding presence) and distance (always beyond comprehension, control, and consuming) of the Other that comes to the “I” as a pre-voluntary response to the Other’s naked face calling the “I” (the Others original saying) to responsibility. Man’s being there is not reducible to the being there concerned with itself (to be or not to be). Man’s thereness is the being there, being present and being answerable to the Other. In the Other’s face the “I” recognise that his/her *saying* “Here I am” is more original than any words s/he can utter. This is Levinas’s alternative to the Hamlet question.

Man’s saying “Here I am” is the expression to the Other, that s/he have undeniably witnessed the Others’ presence before him/her. The “I” cannot shrink the responsibility of the claim the face of the Other lays upon him/her. What is important is to notice that Levinas describes this witnessing of the revelation of the Other as a passive event. The “I” is more passive in this than receiving a blow on the head<sup>10</sup>. This revelation of the Other that the “I” receives passively is not directed at him/her as a general member of the public, or because of his/her position. This revelation is addressed at the “I” as the individual, who is assigned fundamental responsibility prior to any claim to be capable and moral. It is addressed at the “I” because the “I” is present! The thereness of the “I” is established by the face of the Other facing him/her, appealing to his/her responsibility. The identity of the “I”

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note the theme of “passivity” here, as we will return to this theme later in this chapter.

as the one who is being faced is, the-one-called-to-be-responsible. S/he cannot turn away from the Other. This means the “I” cannot turn away from him/herself as the one called. Regardless what the “I” decides to do, s/he is there and must respond, “Here I am.”

### 3.2.4 Being taught and the transpiring of the truth

For Levinas the otherness of the Other is also proved through two concepts that he calls “being taught” and the “truth”. True to Levinas’s philosophy he uses both these concepts relationally. This implies that the meaning he gives to these concepts is not always following the traditional western philosophical tradition.

In *Totality and Infinity* (1969) Levinas explains what he means with these two concepts. After he describes the Other as the totally Other who is present in flesh and is revealing him/herself to the “I” in an epiphany, but at the same time is keeping a distance and is even absent in his/her questioning glance. The “I” realises that the one confronting him/her is far from the “I” and that which is other than the selfness of the “I”. The Other presents him/herself as a stranger and the “I” cannot be sure what his/her strangeness conceals. When this happens there can be truth.

Levinas (1969) writes:

The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in this “form” the totality of its “content,” finally abolishing the distinction between form and content. This is not achieved by some sort of modification of the knowledge that thematizes, but precisely by thematization turning into conversation. The condition for theoretical truth and error is the word of the Other, his expression, which every lie already presupposes. But the first content of the

expression is the expression itself. To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have an idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching (enseignement). Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. (pp.51)<sup>11</sup>

Thus for Levinas the truth transpires when the Other shows him/herself from him/herself out (*kath' auto*) and is allowed to express him/herself without being reduced and made equal to the self which faces the Other or being categorised by the self.

...the being telling itself to us independently of every position we should have taken in its regard, *expressing itself*. Here, contrary to the conditions for the visibility of objects, the being is not placed in the light of other but presents itself in the manifestation that should only announce it... *The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation*: a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form. (Levinas, 1969, pp.65)<sup>12</sup>

That is why Levinas considers the traditional concept of truth a problematic concept:

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<sup>11</sup> Original italics.

<sup>12</sup> Original italics

Truth presupposes a being autonomous in separation; the quest for a truth is precisely a relation that does not rest on the privation of need. To seek and obtain truth is to be in a relation not because one is defined by something other than oneself, but because in a certain sense one lacks nothing. (Levinas, 1969, p. 61)

For Levinas the truth that transpires in the *relation* does not come about because we want to undo the movement apart and establish a relationship by moving in a reverse direction. Levinas (1969) says the truth transpires when there is a movement from the “I” “...going toward the other in Desire.” (p. 61). The concept of desire will be discussed in the following section.

Levinas states that the Other expressing him/herself, the coinciding of the expressed with the one who expresses is teaching. The Other – the revealer – reveals that what is totally other to us and in that is showing us something new. S/he teaches from him/herself by showing what only s/he can show. The new that is revealed to the “I”, be it in the face or through the spoken word, is not the awakening of something in the “I”, that is to say, it was present in the “I” and now the “I” is reminded of it or recognise it again. No, it comes from the infinitely Other and is a revelation of something totally new and foreign to the “I”. In the relationship where the truth transpires through desire the Other teaches me about his/her world and his/her otherness.

### 3.3 Need and desire

The distinction between need and desire as articulated by Levinas helps us to go about with the otherness of the Other. Levinas starts his book *Totality and Infinity* (1969) with a paragraph which he entitles *Desire for the invisible*, in which he makes the distinction between “need” and “desire” clear. Levinas argues that true life is absent, but that humans are in the world and therefore are going from the familiar to whatever is hidden from their view. This can happen in one of two ways: Man can enter this land, which was hidden from his/her view and can satisfy him/herself with whatever is lacking in his/her life. The otherness (alterity) is thereby absorbed into his/her own identity as thinker and processor. Levinas calls this “need”. Need is thus the consciousness of what has been lost and what is absent, a need is therefore essentially a nostalgia, a longing for the return. This however would not respect what the veritably (truth) of the Other is. Even with other persons man’s needs urge him/her to comprehend (reduce others to his/her cognitive grasp of things), control (make others fit his/her particular behavioural project), and consume (find in others a goodness, not for their sake, but for what s/he can sustain him/herself and affectively enjoy) (Kunz, 1998).

There is thus a clear correlation between “need” and “totalising”. Levinas is of the opinion that because we live in a totalising tradition, it is not possible to distinguish between “need” and “desire.” Levinas calls this “imperialism” and an “allergy for the other.”

Levinas sees Odysseus as the symbol of western philosophy, of this “imperialism” and “allergy.” Odysseus leaves his land of birth and goes on a journey that leaves him travelling for more than twenty years. He leaves, however, with the intention to return to Ithaca. This longing to return accompanies him throughout his journey until he returned.

In history there is another figure that symbolises an alternative movement namely Abraham. He leaves his land of birth in command of God and sets off for an unknown land.

This is a movement of transcendence that goes out from the self without returning: A heteronomic experience.

The desire is something totally different. Desire tends towards the absolutely other. Levinas (1969) writes:

...desire does not long for the return (to the self), for it is desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves. (pp.33)

Desire has another intention; it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. Desire does not fulfil but deepens. It goes out to the Other not for the sake of the self, but solely for the sake of the Other. The face of the Other opens and teaches us about a world totally other than ours. Desire is an openness, curiosity and respect for this world that is other, an openness, curiosity and respect that cannot be satisfied, but can only be deepened.

To remain in a movement towards the Other, to desire, requires a radical generosity, it does not ask for the thankfulness of the Other; this would suppose a movement back to the self. But this generosity is not a loss because in this movement a relationship is created. It is however not a profit because this relationship is created outside the sphere of expectation and needs. Such a relationship cannot exist if a result is expected impatiently, only in patience which does not expect anything can such a relationship exist and can be called a relationship in which desire exists. Levinas writes in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1987) this orientation:

... [Desire] is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering the Promised Land. ... To renounce being the contemporary of triumph of one's work is to

envisage the triumph in a time without me, ... in liberation from my time. (pp.92)

Levinas calls this a “being-for-beyond-my-death” (contrary to Heidegger’s *Sein zum Tode*) and a crossing over to the “time of the Other.” Patience is to be at the mercy of the future, a future that always belongs to the Other.

For Levinas this movement is not only an ethical movement, it is ethics itself. Only in such an ethic can meaning be rediscovered.

### **3.4 The passivity of ethical responsibility**

Earlier in the chapter it has been shown that Levinas goes beyond the humanism of Sartre. Levinas (1969) describes the reception of the epiphany of the face of the Other, the imperative “thou shalt not kill!” as a passivity – but it is a passivity beneath all passivity. What makes this passivity a radical passivity, is the passive reception of the epiphany of the other that is addressed at the “I”, not chosen by the “I”. Man is called to serve (be a messiah), to respond to the needs of the other with “Here I am!”

It has also been shown that Levinas differs from Husserl in that he is of the opinion that the description of consciousness offered by Husserl places too much emphasis on the activity of the conscious ego, particularly in knowing the other. Levinas disagrees with Husserl’s implication that intentional (active) consciousness is the only relationship, the self has with that which is other than the self, especially other human beings.

Phenomenologists see the consciousness always as an intentional consciousness. Having an ethical obligation disclosed is a form of active knowing (I am co-operating in the disclosure) rather than being passively commanded by the Other, as it is for Levinas. For Levinas man’s duty is revealed to him/her. In the face of the Other, in an epiphany, man’s responsibility is revealed to him/her.

For Levinas this passivity of the conscious is not like Freud's superego in which the forming of conscience is the automatic internalisation or introjection of the parents, or the cultures, values, demands, and prohibitions. Levinas's notion of the passivity of consciousness is founded on the conviction that there exists a constitutive pre-original openness towards the Other (Levinas, 1981). To be human means per definition to be open for the Other. This is experienced when the face of the Other calls man's (the "I") natural egoism into question. The Other challenges any effort of to comprehend (stereotype categorise), any effort to control (use the person as a means for personal gain), and any effort to consume (enjoy the Other as a thing). The Other tells the "I", simply by his/her presence, that these are violations of his/her radical Otherness. The source of the challenge to the effort to comprehend the Other is not the intentional constituting consciousness of the "I", the mental activity of the "I" deciding to question his/her own tendencies. The "I" (man) cannot police him/herself. The source of man's conscience is the Other's goodness challenging me. Man does not construct his/her conscience – it happens to him/her! Man does not so much actively form his/her conscience on his/her own, as it is passively formed. Man's conscious(ness) is passively formed by the independent goodness of the Other teaching (instructing) the "I" about his/her goodness, and commanding the "I" to be responsible. It is assigned to man simply by being a neighbour to his/her neighbour, being a being that is vulnerable and sensitive to being called, by being human.

In his/her freedom, man may choose to accept the individual responsibility assigned to him/her. Man is commanded to be responsible precisely because s/he is not caused to be responsible. Man's consciousness is neither the superego deposited in him/her by his/her parents causing him/her to do certain actions, not the noble psychological structure of good intentions on which s/he too often falsely pride him/herself. Conscience is passively received. The psyche is still the psyche, the free agent, but this freedom is commanded independent of its self-initiated, and self-directed freedom. It is commanded by the Other!

It is commanded by the enjoyment and the suffering of the Other. Only through this commandment that comes to man, s/he can be free, s/he can be who s/he is, s/he can be him/herself. “The psyche in the soul is the Other in me” (Levinas, 1981, p. 69)

Levinas indicates that the origin of the non-intentional consciousness can be founded in the non-intentional affectivity of sensible enjoyment. Enjoyment is passive. Enjoyment is more fundamental than intending, representing, reasoning, freedom, theory and practice, or any psychological state: enjoyment is the ultimate consciousness of all the contents that fill man’s life – it embraces them (Levinas, 1969). What Levinas is saying is that humans are not taught, does not acquire knowledge, through first being in some neutral active state, but rather through joy or pain, as object of enjoyment or not. Life is love of life, a relation with contents that are not man’s being but more dear than man’s being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun (Levinas, 1969). Man’s being itself is passively exceeded and overflowed by what is experienced through his/her senses. Enjoyment breaches any totality (understanding, categorisation) that tries to embrace it - reason or other forms of representation, psychological or sociological categories, any notion of necessity or utility of finality. Enjoyment is undeserved, it is not the result of my good work, the enjoyment of reward is an independent gift. Enjoyment is gratuitous. Man is passive to enjoyment. “To enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure – this is the human” (Levinas, 1969, p. 133).

However, the very possibility of passive enjoyment points to the human vulnerability of being denied satisfaction: suffering. Suffering is certainly passive. It is gratuitous. Suffering is unexpected and undeserved, certainly not chosen by man’s intentional consciousness. Humans are vulnerable, exposed to otherness, otherness that can hurt as well as give enjoyment. When humans suffer for nothing, they recognise that the passivity of the sensible cannot be turned into activity.

The enjoyment and suffering, this passive exposedness to the Other, is the basis of our consciousness. Although enjoyment allows for the ego to be complacent in itself, to be free of interpersonal tensions, to experience the privacy of the ego, at least for a while, the experiences of enjoyment and suffering provide the conditions for the self-for-the-Other. The self must go beyond the immediacy of enjoyment in order to sustain itself in its 'happy dependence' of enjoyment, it is open and dependent on the world it enjoys, including other people. Consciousness, the calling to responsibility for the needs of the Other, is founded on the passive experience of the Other, sensibility, not some rational category on constituting consciousness. In empathy, the "I" does not go through some syllogistic reasoning such as: When I need things, I suffer. Since he (the Other) is just like me, another me, he needs things. Since he is just like me, another me, he must be suffering. I should share my things.

The immediacy and passivity of the sensible is the immediacy and passivity of enjoyment and suffering, and is the immediacy and passivity of feeling the suffering of the Other, and the desire to give. While the Other is not another "me", the Other is closer to the "me" than the "I" am to the "me", the Other is in "me". The Other's proximity (the Other in the self) calls the "I" (me) to empathy, calls the "I" (me) to give his/her material self, calls the "I" (me) to be a messiah. Giving, according to Levinas, is not a gift of the heart (reason), but of the bread of one's mouth (Levinas, 1981).

To summarise: The origin of ethical consciousness, according to Levinas, is in the passivity of sensibility rather than in the activity of reason, as Kant would like to have it. It is important to note that this passivity is not the equivalent of mechanical passivity, where an effect is the passive result of the cause. Affective passivity is more passive than mechanical passivity because it is the passivity of meaning. Meaning is received; a non-intentional, gratuitous meaning that can delight or hurt the "I". Through this the "I" receive the call to responsibility from and for the Other. The call to enjoy the otherness of

the joy of the Other – to enjoy the Other as the Other in his/her joy, or to respond to the suffering of the Other, the suffering that cannot be comprehended by the “I”. The “I” receives the call to responsibility from and for the Other. This radical passivity to the radical otherness of the Other is the origin of consciousness. Enjoyment and suffering is given a basic role in the constitution of the self. The implication of such an understanding of passivity is that the “self” is held hostage by the Other without having the choice for or against it – a theme that will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.5 The infinity of ethical responsibility**

Levinas is fond of quoting Dostoyewsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* “We are all responsible for all and for all men and before all, and I more than all the others.” (Levinas, 1981, p. 146). Levinas (1981) explains what he means by quoting this extraordinary sentence by saying that this is not owing to such or such as guilt which is really mine, or to offences that I would have committed; but because I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility. The “I” always has one responsibility more than all the others.

The more man does to fulfil his/her responsibilities the more there is for which s/he is responsible. The Other does not only call for an apology from him/her, but also immediately disqualifies the apology. The meaning of these radical thoughts becomes concrete when they are interpreted in the light of Levinas’s philosophy of the Other.

The face of the Other, that questions the interests of the “I”, “opens humanity”. However, the “I” is not only questioned by the presence of the imminent Other, the one that is facing him/her at the moment, but also by the call of help of the infinite Other of which the one present is a symbol. Levinas (1981) writes that the face, in its nakedness as a face, presents to the “I” the destitution of the poor and the stranger and appeals to his/her powers and abilities, appeals to him/her. The “I” is accused by the Other that looks at him/her

through the eyes of the whole humanity, and with that unlocks the destitution of the whole humanity. Then the “I” stands guilty before the world.

The subject, the “I”, is not only the hostage of the one who confronts him/her face to face, but through the Other s/he is also the hostage of the whole of humanity. It is impossible to draw the line where the responsibility of the “I” ends and the rights of the Other begins. Man’s responsibility stretches across all conceivable borders.

What is important to note is the fact that what the infinity of responsibility denotes is not its actual immensity, but a responsibility increasing in the measure that it is assumed; duties becomes greater in the measure that they are accomplished. The better the “I” accomplish his/her duties the fewer rights s/he has; the more the “I” is just the more guilty s/he is (Levinas, 1969).

It is not possible for the subject, the “I”, to fulfil his infinite responsibility, to be responsible for all and for all men before all at all times. The “I” is responsible for the Other, who confronts him/her but also for the third; the whole of humanity that confronts him/her in the eyes of the Other. If the “I” answers to the call of the Other that confronts him, s/he cannot answer fully to the third because the “I” is occupied by the Other. Therefore, the “I” cannot avoid making comparisons and assessments of the responsibility that comes to him/her not only from the Other that confronts him/her but also from the third. In this, the infinity of responsibility comes and is realised for which the “I” is held responsible. The “I”, the guilty one, the one that always has not done enough, compares and assesses the incomparable, the inaccessible, the totally Other. The “I” is using force against the Other.

The subject, the “I”, that carries the burden of these inescapable accusations against him/her is however assisted by the third. The third, the Other that comes from beyond the Other that is facing him/her, asks for a comparison, an assessment, and a objectifying of that, that actually cannot be objectified. The involvement with the third – justice -

necessitates this unwanted force. Justice asks that the ethical challenges be objectified and that comparisons and assessments are made, that ethics be compromised. Justice also requires the acknowledgement of the fact that the needs of the subject, the “I”, are also incomparable in the face of the Other. Levinas (1981) writes “Thanks to God I am another for the others” and “...thanks to God as that, as a subject incomparable with the other, I am approached as an other by the others, that is ‘for myself.’ ” (pp. 158-159) The “I”, who owes an infinite amount of responsibility to the Other and society, receives the grace of also being an Other and is herewith once again received back into the community.

In summary: the challenges that justice poses demand the compromising of ethics. The movement of ethics – responsibility, the saying, and the hostage – belongs to a pre-reflective niveau. Justice, the claim of the third, requires a comparison and assessment. It requires a cognitive and objective approach. The third gives birth to the conscious(ness) and thought. Justice requires that attention be given to the themes of the “said” because the “speaking” gets caught up in the said and is written down in law books. The speaking and responsibility requires the said and justice. But where the subject is not questioned any more through the face of the Other that confronts him/her, justice is not possible. Justice cannot statically be determined. Justice must be open to the disruption, the Other can bring with him/her and be willing to adapt as is required by the disruption. The involvement with the third, justice, starts with the relation of the self with the Other and always returns to the relationship, the face to face relationship.

## CHAPTER 4 - LEVINAS AND AN ALTERNATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL PARADIGM: PSYCHOLOGY FOR THE OTHER?

### 4.1 Levinas and psychology

In his many writings Levinas has discussed and commented on psychology, psychoanalysis, and Freud more particularly. Although these comments do not, either singly or as a whole, make up the locus of the potential contribution to a rethinking of psychology and psychotherapy Levinas can make, it may be interesting to take a look at the scattered comments referring to psychology, psychoanalysis and Freud.

It is an imperative for any systemised work concerning itself with Levinas, psychology and psychotherapy to take notice of these comments directed at Psychology.

Levinas expresses dissatisfaction with the psychological account of reality. According to Levinas psychology, as other natural sciences, does not get to the root of things. In his philosophical view this is because psychology, as a natural science, pursues the logic of its particular and distinctive subject matter – the psyche. As a natural science, psychology cannot give an account of the whole and as such it is totalising (Levinas, 1973).

In his critics to Freud in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) Levinas accuses Freud that he begun his theory of psychoanalysis with libidinal desire and pleasure, without having delved into their deeper and proper ontological significance, which is the significance for being – the ethical. Once again Levinas is of the opinion that psychology is not deep enough and gives a non-Freudian account of Eros and its relation to ethical subjectivity in the fourth section of *Totality and Infinity* (p. 254).

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1981) Levinas accuses psychology and psychoanalysis, along with a whole range of other subject fields (including sociology and political economy), of being too suspicious, for reductively detecting hidden symptoms,

superstructures and meanings where straightforward meanings are intended. Here psychology is accused of falsely being too deep.

However, it must be said that none of these comments crosses the threshold of originality to merit exceptional notice (Cohen, 2002). More important than Levinas's comments on psychology, are his account of the "other"; his radical ethical presentation of the psyche; his understanding of ethics and the implication for the face-to-face meeting in therapy. The following chapter will attempt to explore some of the implications Levinas's philosophy has for the psychological meeting.

## **4.2 A new psychological paradigm**

Levinas's thought not only has much to offer psychology in terms of insight and modes of thinking, but it also challenges the basic assumptions of psychology. Levinas's questioning is not primarily ontological, that is, not primarily concerned with the nature of being of the self. To the contrary, he contests the primacy of ontological questioning as is found in all philosophical and psychological theories. For Levinas ethics is "first philosophy". This fundamental position affects his entire account of subjectivity, as has been shown in the previous chapter.

But before we look at the implications of Levinas's philosophy for psychology a word of caution is needed. On the question how should we be responsible, Levinas only gives a few pointers but not a worked out answer. Amongst others Levinas's work is to a great degree a commentary on the need to pause as we encapsulate, judge and systematise (Terreblanceh, 2001). His work does not provide a blueprint of how the "good" should be realised. Two reasons can be given as to why Levinas does not provide us with a blueprint or program showing how the good should be realised (Terreblance, 2001).

The first reason, why Levinas does not provide a concrete plan for realising the "good" probably lies in his understanding of ethics. Levinas is of the opinion that ethics is a "Samaritanian" cause (Terreblance, 2001). Ethics should be understood as universal as it

affects every human being. By doing that Levinas proves to be sensitive towards the context. He knows that if he provides concrete and specific suggestions he may be trapped in a specific historical era. Levinas realises that each context requires different ethical responses. He therefore leaves it open which makes his ethical philosophy relevant for diverse contexts.

The second reason for Levinas' unwillingness to specify the way in which the good should be concretised, lies in the anti-programmatic approach of his philosophy. Levinas forms, with other ideologically critical philosophers of the twentieth century (like Frans Rosenzweig and Hanna Arendt), a group that refuses to provide a blueprint to show the way in realising the good. Levinas knows very well that great danger hides in the pragmatism of the social good. Levinas is at one with the Russian writer Vassily Grossman who is of the opinion, that by concretising the "good" in social structures you kill the spontaneous "good" that exists between people (Terreblance, 2001).

On the basis of this philosophical-ethical view Levinas praises patient and public discourse in which time is spent examining tests, persons, and events in which one invests oneself in studying meaning without rushing to judgment. Levinas's work, while valuing systematised thought for what he understood as its moral function, is anti-systematic; for Levinas, system and systematising must be judged from outside the system and the systematisation, from the infinite and other directed outside known as ethical codes. Levinas's critique can therefore not be systematised into another system. It would be contra Levinas to develop a Levinasian personality theory or therapeutic approach. It is true that Levinas does have a lot to offer psychology, but this may not become the basis for a systematic psychology.

It is doubted that psychology will find in Levinas what Binswanger and Boss found in Heidegger, a foundation for a systematic analysis of human experience. Rather, Levinas challenges our theories to be more clearly circumscribed by the context of their

presuppositions. Through Levinas's traditional clinical approaches must be given added nuances by rediscovering notions which have already been offered by others, but which now may be grounded within a philosophy, which is based in an appreciation for the human, whose sociality is based in responsible and uncaptureable subjectivity (Harrington, 1994).

### **4.3 Levinas's reinterpretation of the Psyche: A new historical and social "humanism"**

Levinas's understanding of the psyche is best outlined in the third chapter of his work *Otherwise than Being of Beyond Essence* (1981). When Levinas speaks of the psyche elsewhere in his numerous writings he does so in the direction he has articulated in this chapter (Cohen, 2002).

Levinas's first reference to the psyche in *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (1981) is very rich and can serve as a guide in presenting Levinas's understanding of the psyche.

The interpretation of sensible signification in terms of consciousness of..., however little intellectualist one means it, does not account for the sensible. It does indeed mark a progress over sensualist atomism, for it avoids the mechanization of the sensible through the 'abyss of meaning' of transcendence that separates the lived experience from the 'intentional object.' Indeed in the transcendence of intentionality diachrony is reflected, that is, the psyche itself, in which the inspiration of the same the other is articulated as a responsibility for another, in proximity. Sensibility is in this way situated back in the human exception. But one has to go back from this reflection to the diachrony itself, which is the-one-for-the-other in proximity. It is then not a particular

signification. The-one-for-another has the form of sensibility or vulnerability, pure passivity or susceptibility, passive to the point of becoming an inspiration, that is, alterity in the same, the trope of the body animated by the soul, psyche in the form of a hand that gives even the bread taken from its own mouth. Here the psyche is the maternal body (p. 67).

Levinas's description of the psyche begins with linking it to sensibility. This sensibility of which Levinas speaks goes beyond or exceeds Husserl's notion of intentionality<sup>13</sup>. For Levinas the psyche is a breach and not a bastion of self-consciousness. Levinas's deepest account of this breach has to do with its time: 'diachrony,' the self pierced by time's transcendent dimensions, the irrecoverable past and the unforeseeable future, which for Levinas comes to the self as a function of the time of the other.

According to Levinas the psyche is ruptured by diachronous time, is affected by the moral alterity of the Other. Such alterity retains its alterity in as far as it is received by a self inordinately responsible for the Other. Here diachrony (time), psyche and morality all arise together. The Other, as the moral Other, can have this effect on the self precisely because it affects the self from beyond or from across the identifying abilities of the self's reason and will, reaching the self in its very sensibility – in its sensibility as a passivity. This breach in self-consciousness, the inspiration of the self in its passivity, due to its sensibility to the other, leads Levinas to name the psyche as responsible for the Other, the morally affected body.

Levinas uses a very powerful metaphor to describe the-one-for-the-other: "the maternal body" – literally the other within oneself. The Other is encountered as if s/he were literally in my body; the Other's pain, my pain; the Others suffering, my suffering. The psyche is conceived through this introjection. But this introjection is unique - it is a moral

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<sup>13</sup> In chapter 3 Husserl's notion of intentionality was discussed as well as Levinas's criticism of the *noesis-noema* and his attempt to go beyond that.

introjection. This introjection goes beneath reflection and beneath thematising consciousness, beneath the intentionality of Husserl. Seen as such the genuine concreteness of the psyche can be found in the responsiveness to the moral demand, the moral imperative that ruptures the psyche. For Levinas the psyche is more aware, more alert, more vigilant, and more conscious than the self-consciousness.

Seen as such it can be said that the self is not its own but the Others. The Other that has already passed before being constituted in the memory of the self, and the Other that is yet to come from the unforeseeable future disturbs the self, takes the self hostage. Yet in spite of the fact that the self is a hostage in the face of the Other's radical alterity, disturbed and overwhelmed, the self is neither annihilated nor alienated. Rather, it finds itself, "torn up from the rest" (Levinas, 1981, p. 68) because the self is taken up in the greater demand: responsibility for the other. For Levinas the non-identity of the self has higher priority, is more important, is better than the complacency of identity. Levinas (1981) expresses it through the following:



The psyche involved in intentionality does not lie in consciousness of..., its power to thematize, or in the 'truth of Being,' which is discovered in it through different significations of the said. The psyche is the form of a peculiar dephasing, a loosening up or unclamping of identity: the same prevented with coinciding with itself, at odds, torn up from the rest, between sleep and insomnia, panting, shivering. It is not an abdication of the same, now alienated and slave to the other, but an abnegation of oneself fully responsible for the other. This identity is brought out by responsibility and is at the service of the other. In the form of responsibility the psyche in the soul is the other in me, a malady of identity, both accused and

*self*, the same for the other, the same by the other. Qui pro quo, it is a substitution, extraordinary. (Pp. 68-69)

Levinas writes that the psyche is a “malady of identity”. For Levinas the psyche is a malady because it is a shattering of the identity prior to identity. It is a non-identity insofar as it rises to a higher cause than identity, namely that of being for the other before oneself.

Levinas (1981) comments on the above citation: “The soul is the other in me. The psyche, the-one-for-the-other, can be a possession and a psychosis; the soul is already a seed of folly” (p. 191). According to Levinas the psyche can also become “ill,” is liable to collapse and psychosis because it is a vulnerability and an extreme proximity. The healthy soul, the healthy psyche is not an armed self-enclosed fortress but an openness to the Other, and hence also the possibility of malady, illness, debilitating vulnerability and mental breakdown. One can be mentally ill because one can be morally responsible, the eye-to-eye meeting makes demands. The road from mental illness to mental health is not to create a fortress ego from a shattered ego, as many psychotherapies do, but to regain one’s responsibilities to and for the other, to respond the demands that are made by the Other. This represents a breaking point with all psychological and therapeutic techniques up until now (Kunz, 1998; Kvale, 1992; Williams & Gantt, 2002). Levinas indicates the way for a different understanding and conceptualisation of the psyche and the possibility to create meaning.

Moral maturity – the psyche – is not a given. The road of morality is a rocky one with temptations on both sides. On the one hand the Other can be refused through a hardness of heart, ignorance, immorality, decadence and evil. On the other hand there is the danger of collapse, of excess, of psychosis and folly. For Levinas (1981) the road to morality lies in “the identity of a body exposed to the other” (p. 69), “the possibility to give” (p. 69), and the capacity to suffer for the suffering of others.

For Levinas, the psyche - in as far as it shatters identity, it is the Other in the "I" (me), it responds to the face of the Other, it animates the body - is the starting point of meaning. What is meaningful originates in man being responsible to and for the Other, originates in the disordering of man's being by the Other. What is meaningful does not refer back to the man's being even though it can be referred back to man's being or to the being of which s/he is part (world, *Geist*, essence, idea). The disorganised self, the whole self addressed by the Other, the self as relationship, becomes meaning in as far as the self offers itself to the Other. But the self does not offer itself to the Other as a autonomous being who turns to the Other in concern, one is offered to the Other in as far as one becomes meaning in the relationship, is-for-the-other – the self kept awake not by itself but by the Other, the self is chosen before it can choose. The face of the Other, which speaks before it speaks, which demands man's attention, which demands always more than the "I" bargain for, takes him/her hostage and inspires him/her, makes him/her him/herself in as far as s/he is for the Other, inspires him/her to say "here I am" [Hebrew: *hineni*] referring to an availability to serve, a responsiveness to the call of the Other. This is the origin of meaning.

Levinas sees the psyche as the animation of the body. The sensible psyche, according to Levinas, supposes a body. Through man's body s/he presents him/herself and is sensible. The distinction between the body (the body as object) and the lived body (being human) lies for Levinas in the psyche. Levinas claims that moral intersubjectivity, the-one-for-the-other, is the animation of the body. The psyche is making the human body more than merely an animal vitality. What Levinas is referring to can be illustrated by the witnessing of a body "living" solely by means of a life support system and the person one knew before becoming dependent on life support. As bodies, humans can suffer and die and as a result others, in their hunger, illness, suffering and dying appeals to my humanity. The manifestation of the Other through his/her body grounds the new humanism of Levinas. This new bodily humanism differentiates from psychological humanism-

existentialism as well as from Post-Modern theories in psychology, whose limitations have already been shown in the second chapter. The body of the Other, to which the “I” have been made sensible through the face, calls the “I” to a different responsibility, a responsibility that above every thing else responds to the concrete social-historical situation of the Other, and not of the “self” or interpreted through theories and models. Through being sensible the “I” is moved to respond, made responsible to answer to the call of the Other. It is only as a vulnerable being and through being vulnerable that the “I” can respond to vulnerable beings. It is only as a vulnerable being and through being vulnerable that there is meaning in being responsible – people living in famine you feed and the ill you cure (Keij, 1992).

Contemporary psychology based on modernistic-scientific theories encounters in Levinas’s conception of the psyche a critique. For Levinas the human psyche – Ego, Self, Subjectivity, Soul, I, - is not a scientific object, but a moral event of sensibility deeper than rationality, it comes before theories and methods. Singularity - the “I” - is a function of moral responsibility, the irreplaceability of the moral agent. Moral selfhood is at once singular, historical and social precisely because all of these terms, must be understood originally in moral rather than epistemological terms.

Levinas does not define the self cognitively. Hence he does not define the self at all. He does not consider the self to be a specification of a genus, an instance of generality, or a part of a whole. The self is the first person singular “I”. Care should however be taken not to confuse the “I” with individuality as most psychological approaches do. Every person is unique, but uniqueness does not constitute selfhood.

What does it mean positively and concretely for the human self not to be, or not to be originally an object seen from the outside, being historically an socially situated? Levinas’s interpretation is firmly grounded in the intersubjectivity. This does not mean, as one might think, that selfhood will be presented as the intersection or node of interactions

or transactions within a social network. Rather, more deeply and more significant, it means that selfhood emerges as the bearer of obligations and responsibilities for the Other. Thus according to Levinas, and this is the crucial point, the human self is constituted by, constituted in, constituted as the inescapable necessity of moral obligation and responsibilities. The self, one might say is pressed into service, service to others. The self does not volunteer for this service; it is called to the service, enlisted to serve, passively receives the task to perform this service. Beneath the for-itself of reason and beneath the for-itself of the wilfulness, the self is for-the-other because the self, as we have seen in chapter 3, is passively open to the other that faces him/her.

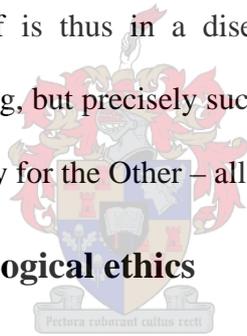
Concretely this means that the self is not an entity with moral qualities, a substance with moral attributes. To say that the self is for-the-other does not mean that first there is the “self” and then this self becomes for-the-other, but in as far as it is for-the-other it is itself. The original way of being human is being moral – being for the other. To formulate it differently the Hamlet question is not, to be or not to be, but to be or not to be good (Levinas, 1987). The self, lived in the first person singular, “I”, “me”, “myself”, can only be described as a singularity when this singularity is derived from its election to be responsible for the Other. According to Levinas, and psychology should take note of this point, moral sensibility cuts deeper than the instincts of animal sensibility, the wilfulness of human desire, and the reflection of human reason. One is stunned by the Other – before wilfulness and desire. The impact of the Other is however not a brute force, it is an ethical force: the responsibility to respond, the obligation that the “I” now have to and for the Other.

Responsibility for the Other thus cuts deeper than the self’s egoism. One is chosen before choosing. Here lies the Levinas’s great insight and achievement: The absolute primacy of the ethical. Here we receive the key to unlock and reconfigure psychology as ethical. Levinas has shown us the core of what it should mean to be human, the

distinctively human, the psyche, is from the start to be conceived – and not merely conceived but lived - within the imperative of morality and justice that we meet in the face of the other, rather than in terms of the motivation, drives, interaction of instincts, rational and non rational thoughts, drives to actualisation, creativity or productivity.

Through this Levinas grounds thought in ethics and not ethics in thought. This requires a reversal of traditional thought and reasoning. That is to say that the selfhood is for-the-other more essentially than essence, substance, will, reason, transcendental ego and all the other formulae of self-sameness – whether individual or participatory – psychology has proposed for the self. According to Levinas the self stands in a relation that transcends these formulae, namely the Other. Here selfhood is selfhood not through synthesis of self-identification, whether the world or mine's, but rather as a non-identity, being put into question, by the Other. The self is thus in a disequilibria, not that it loses itself, is annihilated or becomes a non-being, but precisely such that it finds itself wholly given over to the Other in moral responsibility for the Other – all the way, unto death.

#### **4.4 Levinas and psychological ethics**



Ethics is Levinas's response to totality. If ethics is "first philosophy" then therapy is an ethical event. It is important to notice that, in terms of Levinas's understanding of ethics, the therapeutic meeting is not just ethical because ethical principles govern the relationship and the ongoing process; but that the therapeutic meeting is structured in accordance with and adheres to the guiding ethical principles and standards of the various professional boards' ethical codes of professional conduct. Nor is the therapeutic meeting ethical because the therapist uses an ethical theory in figuring out what good and just behaviour is or in solving difficult ethical problems that might arise in therapy.

#### 4.4.1 Levinas' prerequisites for a psychological ethics

Levinas does not give a detailed description of how to concretize the “good” (Terreblanche, 2001) even less does he attempt to formulate a systematic psychological ethic. His relevance for psychology and a psychological ethics is rooted in the fact that he describes the prerequisites for rendering the psychological meeting an ethical meeting.

As has been shown, Levinas contrasts two historical figures to illustrate the prerequisites for ethics. The first figure is Odysseus and the second Abraham, which represents a movement of transcendence that goes from the self without a return. This movement is for Levinas the answer to the current ethical crisis. He poses this orientation that goes out freely (without any premeditated aim or presumption) from the self towards the Other as the first of four transcendental prerequisites for ethics. He calls this a “work” (*oeuvre*): “A work conceived radically is a movement from the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same” (Levinas, 1993, 91).

To remain in such a movement towards the Other requires, and this represents the second prerequisite, a radical generosity. This is a free movement outward that goes out from the self into the unknown land without the intention to return. Thus it does not expect gratitude from the Other – that would presuppose a return to the self. In this free movement toward the Other that does not expect any return to the self, a relationship is created. It is a relationship that is not based in expectancies and desires. This relationship represents for Levinas the third prerequisite for an *oeuvre*. With this relationship also comes a fourth prerequisite. This free movement that does not expect a return and through which a relationship is created would be denied if it is not accompanied by patience. This *oeuvre* requires patience that does not expect an outcome. “A work is possible only in patience, which pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering the Promised Land. ... To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work is to envisage this triumph in a time without

me, ... in a liberation from my time.” (Levinas, 1993, p. 92) Patience is to be at the mercy of the future, a future that always belongs to the Other. This movement is not for Levinas only an ethical movement, it is ethics. Only through this movement can we regain meaning that can serve as orientation in this world.

What are the implications of this for psychotherapy and psychology? Ethics, in Levinas’ terms does not enter after, or in the midst, but before the therapeutic encounter. It is the relationship that is ethical. The therapeutic meeting is ethical because the client, as the Other, lays a claim on the therapist. It is not his/her good will, nor is it his/her reason, nor the psychotherapeutic method that commands him/her to be ethical or responsible in the therapeutic meeting; it is the goodness that the therapist sees in the face of the Other that commands him/her. The face of the Other reveals him/herself as to the therapist as vulnerable and worthiness. In the face-to-face meeting the face of the Other is revealing him/her as the one who is speaking before s/he speaks, is making the unspoken demand – do not kill... do not do violence ... serve my real needs! These meanings in the face of the Other, these ethical commands are conditions of reason, rather than the result thereof or the result of some prescribed moral order.

The argument is not what is the moral thing to do: The therapist has received the call and know what is expected of him/her. S/he must now reason about how, where and when s/he can respond.

Ethics is thus primarily perceptual. It is not based on the reasoning about abstract principles, it is perceived in the face of the Other. Lingis, in his introduction to *Otherwise than being* writes: “Responsibility is a fact ...[It] is an imperative order. But the locus where this imperative is articulated is the other who faces me – the face of the Other.” (1981, p. xiii). It is thus clear that the perception of the dignity of Others comes before any of the therapist’s sophisticated judgments about who deserves and who does not deserve, before his/her calculations and comparisons of people, before the prescribed rules and

regulations. The extension supports the rational conclusion that humans have worth simply by being human. The face of the Other speaks by its very presence as good and is always beyond a full understanding.

It has been mentioned that ethics, as described by Levinas is not reducible to a set of moral principles competing with each other nor to various ethical theories and models. The first and only principle of the Levinas' ethical philosophy is the Other. The dignity of the Other that The "I" perceive in the face-to-face meeting is not an abstract principle: the face of the Other directly reveals the Other to the "I" as vulnerable and as Goodness. This material revelation is the origin of ethics. The face is perceived, or better, is revealed to the real perception of the self. From the face of the Other the self receives its own freedom, the call to use its own freedom in the light of the good of the Other.

The scandal of modern society is not that it cannot prove that human freedom is invested in human individual, but that humans allow themselves to be persuaded by psychologies, sociologies, economic and political theories and even theologies, which describe freedom as freedom that is self-made, that comes from within, that is self directed and is in the interest of the self (Kuntz 2002). Man is called to obey Others from beyond his/her nature; it is an ethical command. Psychology cannot simply be the study of the nature of human experience and behaviour. It must be an ethical science – the face of the client/patient calls psychology to that. It also needs to be an ethical science founded on an ethics that recognises the goodness of the Other and holds that the self is responsible to honour and serve that goodness.

#### **4.4.2 Levinas and ethical psychotherapy: Suffering for the other**

The question of the Other is central to psychotherapy in both theory and practice. Unfortunately, however, it is a question that has too often been neglected in the theoretical writings of the discipline, as psychology tends to be preoccupied with issues of effective technique, normative treatment, and differential diagnosis. Questions regarding the

otherness of the Other, and the fundamentally ethical and moral responsibilities engendered in the face-to-face meeting with the Other, have been subordinated to questions of method, science and technique (Heaton, 1988). The result of such a psychotherapeutic system is that the individual and the system correlate with each other. The system defines cure and the cure occurs because of the correct application of the method of cure generated by the system (Gantt, 2002). Ultimately what happens is that wherever psychology looks, it is only able to find itself.

Levinas has gone further than any other major theorist in his search to find a more fruitful re-conceptualisation of the interpersonal relationship, in the face-to-face meeting. Although his work is first aimed at philosophy, a great deal of his work has direct implications for the therapeutic meeting because it engaged a consistent and systematic questioning of the status of the Other and its relation to the “I”, the ego, or the same (Gantt, 2002). The work of Levinas poses a challenge to the therapies, which seek to totalise, that means: circumscribing difference (the “not me”) into the same (the “for me”) by assigning human qualities and possibilities to categories, systems and principles (Levinas, 1969).

As Levinas has pointed out (1969) and as has been described in chapter 3, the otherness of the Other can never be completely comprehended or subsumed within a theoretical system, no matter how elaborate or sophisticated. The Other will always be more; will always overflow the arbitrary boundaries of whatever conceptual categories we might design or use. This implies that neither psychological theory of personality and psychotherapeutic approach nor any therapist operating in such a system and who is trained in such a system, is able to give a true interpretation of psychic events. The therapeutic relationship, in which the utterances of the client, the Other, are assimilated into the system of the therapist is an act of *totalisation*, in Levinas’s terms, a reduction of the otherness of the Other into a simple component part of that which is self-same. In such a system the questions of the therapist, which is “prescribed” by the modality does not allow the client

to be truly 'Other than'. Instead it forces the client to become a more homogenous element in a totalising therapeutic system.

By approaching the Other via the restrictive categorical terms of a particular therapeutic system, one ultimately closes down the possibility for truly meaningful, intimate interpersonal dialogue (Gantt, 2002)

Levinas maintains that it is only in the radical plurality of the absolute and irreducible difference that a genuine sociality can come in to being: a sociality that begins with the ethical command that: Thou shalt not kill! This is not an abstract ethical principle, it is rather the eminent concrete moment of the ordinary, everyday fact of the other person facing the "I", soliciting aid and pleading for relief, calling the "I" out of the hollow void of his/her egocentrism (Levinas, 1969). Levinas can help psychology understand that what is truly meaningful is that which occurs in the infinite gap separating and joining the "I" and the Other in proximity; in the "I", who is ethically subject to the suffering of an Other in pain. This ethical subjection or perhaps more appropriately, ethical identity as described in this chapter, is revealed in the face-to-face meeting with the Other.

The real work of psychotherapy, when conceptualised from within this perspective, takes place as the therapist responds to the ethical obligation to suffer-with an-other in the here-and-now immediacy of his or her suffering – through the inescapable and inevitable challenges and problems of daily living (Gantt, 2002; Gantt, 2000). When the therapist responds to the call of the other in the face-to-face meeting, when the revelation of the Other is opened in the therapist through the desire for the Other – not a physical or psychological desire, but a desire for the absolute unknowable Other, an ethical and therapeutic meeting can take place. The struggles and the suffering<sup>14</sup> of the Other calls the therapist in the face-to-face meeting to open him/herself up for the struggles and the

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<sup>14</sup> Here the example of struggles and suffering is used because it is assumed that a person turns to a psychotherapist when s/he experiences some type of problem. This should however not be limited to negative experiences such as struggles and suffering, the therapist should also be open in the same way to positive experiences such as enjoyment, happiness, excitement, etc.

suffering and to be taught about the struggles and the suffering of the Other. This leads to the emergence of a radical difference between *suffering in the Other*, which for the therapist is called through the face-to-face meeting, and *suffering in me*, the therapists own adventure of suffering whose uselessness can take on the only meaning it can possibly have, that is, in becoming suffering for the suffering of someone else (Gantt, 2000).

The point here is that it is in and through suffering for the useless suffering of another that existence can derive genuine meaningfulness (Gantt, 2002).

Understood in this way, suffering-with in suffering-for the suffering of an-other, the necessary context for a therapeutic relationship exists (Gantt, 2000). For it is in suffering-with, dwelling-with the Other that the “I” is called out of his/her own ego and self-centredness and cease to live as if s/he is just going through the motions of every day life, turned away from his/her fellow man, and instead is turned to his/her neighbour and is able to respond to the face which touches his/her heart and asks him/her to tell (realise) the truth (Gantt 2002).

Through this a non-totalising context is provided, in which the therapist can responsively attend to the Other as the Other. Suffering-with provides a space in which the ethical nature of the face-to-face meeting can be realised. This implies that the therapeutic situation is no longer understood and interpreted in terms of a dialectical or authoritarian totality: the one who will heal the other who is in need of healing. Suffering-with is a moment in which the therapist is open to the being of the other person, the person’s radical otherness that reveals a mysterious world – a world that cannot be reduced and understood in terms of preconceived categories or totalising systems that propose utopian visions of reality and therapies for reaching this utopian reality.

The call of the client is a call that summons to sociality not to utopia; a call to take on the task of suffering-with and suffering-for the suffering of the other person, our client (Gantt, 2000).

To summarise: the ethical call to responsibility is the basis on which any discussion of therapeutic practice and technique must begin. The call to suffer-with is ethically prior to any formal articulation of any particular form of therapeutic school, intervention, strategy or method. This also implies that psychotherapy is not just about healing in the negative sense – curing a deficit or solving a problem – but more fundamentally, it is a move in the direction of a caring community, a community that confirms the Otherness, a messianic community. From this perspective the aim of the face-to-face meeting is not in the first place cure – the removal of signs and symptoms - this might well occur in therapy, but is secondary to the ethical call we receive passively in the face-to-face meeting in which we suffer-with the Other as we open ourselves to the otherness and the complexities of the Other.

As has been mentioned in the opening pages of this chapter, it would be misleading to think that suffering-with is simply one or more empathic technique among others that might bring about positive results in therapy by creating some egalitarian framework of shared power and disclosure where each takes the responsibility for her/himself in the relationship. Suffering-with is in its very essence opposed to the mechanised world of therapeutic techniques and technical manipulations.

This should not be interpreted as saying that technique is not important or irrelevant and does not have any place in psychotherapy. Such an assumption would prove to be not only impractical but also absurd. What is meant here is that suffering-with another in the moment of the experiencing of pain and anguish is ethically prior and morally superior to any method or technique (Gantt, 2000). Only if psychotherapy comes to admit this ethical priority, to take on itself the requirements of ethical obligation, will it become truly therapeutic in the full sense of the word.

#### 4.5 Open questions: The philosophy of Levinas.

An introduction of Levinas' thinking to Psychology would not be complete if it does not pause and look at possible objections in the use of Levinas' philosophy in psychology in general, and psychotherapy and psychological ethics more in particular.

Levinas is a new voice in psychology, only recently psychological scholars have begun to use Levinas' philosophy in an attempt to render the psychotherapeutic meeting a more ethical meeting and give new meaning to the practice of psychology (Williams & Gantt, 2002). From within the field of psychology the dialogue with Levinas is limited to the possible contribution his philosophy can make to the psychological encounter and a critical distance of his contribution to psychology is not yet developed.

During his long philosophical career, Levinas had various philosophical dialogue partners which complemented and criticised his philosophy, opening new questions to be addressed. In relation to the themes that have been developed in this paper, a look will be taken at some of the thinkers that share communalities but also show differences with Levinas' philosophy, of which psychology should take notice. The criticism brought in here against Levinas is limited in this discussion to the relationship between the "I" and the "Other" as this is a central theme in this paper and the criticism is so varied and complex that there is a risk of over generalising.

As has been shown, Levinas' philosophy poses ethics as fundamental. This important aspect was neither ignored nor undervalued in contemporary philosophy. Three main philosophical responses to Levinas' philosophy will be considered: two from the French contemporary philosophical tradition and one from the German hermeneutical tradition. Some aspects of Paul Ricœur's, Jacques Derrida's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical considerations in relation to Levinas' philosophy will be pointed out in order to affirm the contribution Levinas' philosophy made to the present discussion of the Other but also to identify some shortcomings in his philosophy.

### 4.5.1 Paul Ricœur

Ricœur states clearly that Levinas' philosophy represents to him a fundamental challenge. This is clearly reflected in the title of Ricœur's work *Oneself as another* (Ricœur, 1992). As the title shows Ricœur wants to describe the "self" in such a way that the self already "takes in" the other, by it self. But not, as Husserl thought, by showing an "Alter Ego" departing from the "Ego". Ricœur looks for, and finds, a new possibility in Levinas' ethical philosophy to solve the problem Husserl's phenomenology poses. According to Ricœur's solution the relationship between an "Ego" and "the other" becomes the responsibility of the self. In the solution Ricœur proposes, his criticism towards Levinas can be seen as well. In Levinas' philosophy the Other is exclusively thought of in terms of the absolute otherness, which becomes transcendent. The other remains the absolute Other as has been shown in Chapter 3. Ricœur rethinks this transcendence by giving the responsibility of the "discovery" of the Other to the self (Taureck, 2002).

As it can be seen, the problem of the Other in Levinas is shifted from the side of the Other, as in Levinas, to the side of the self, in Ricœur. Not a subject, nor an object, but the self can and should recognize the Other by thinking it's own structure. Ricœur fills Levinas' transcendence of the Other by observing that the self has got the structure of "being imposed" (*être-enjoint*) by the Other (Taureck 2002). Ricœur's concept of "being imposed" opens the social dimension where the self and the Other can live together in a just way.

Ricœur's ethical solution shows that the otherness as defined in Levinas' philosophy is ambiguous in as far as the "being imposed" comes from an other (another person, God, or who ever), that remains undetermined. Ricœur manages to define this ambiguity.

### 4.5.2 Jacques Derrida

One of the first philosophers occupying himself with Levinas' philosophy was Jacques Derrida. Both being Jewish and both being adopted as French citizens using French as language in which they philosophised, render it not surprising that Derrida found in Levinas' philosophy a dialogue partner. Apart from their differences both philosophers had great respect for each other as they learned from each other and used the criticism offered to continue developing their thinking (Taureck, 2002).

The philosophy of Derrida can be called the "Philosophy of Difference" (Kimmerle, 2004). But calling his philosophy a philosophy of difference is not without problems. Thinking "the difference" means not to understand and describe the other and the otherwise in terms of the same and the similar, but to try to think the difference itself. To think in terms of concepts, as the metaphysical tradition did, means to generalize, to focus on that which is common. The unique, the not identical, the different falls through this thinking pattern. Philosophers such as Heidegger and Levinas criticised the metaphysical tradition because of its inability to recognise "the difference". On the one hand Heidegger tries to "get out" of the metaphysical tradition, which forgets the ontological difference, by turning back to the origins of the Greek philosophy in order to give a "new beginning" to the Western way of thinking in which "the difference" is accounted for (Heidegger, 1950). On the other hand Levinas tries to found a new "first philosophy" through ethics. According to Levinas the only way to think about the Other in such a way that "the difference" is given its just position is through ethics as "first philosophy" evading the traditional philosophical and moral concepts (Levinas, 1969).

Derrida sees in Heidegger's ontology and in Levinas' ethical philosophy two symmetrical errors. He is convinced that it has no sense trying to demolish the metaphysical tradition by renouncing the use of metaphysical concepts (Derrida, 1978). In terms of philosophy of history, Derrida is of the opinion that trying to get out of the

philosophical tradition does not represent a solution in the rethinking of the difference. Derrida's philosophical attempt is led by thinking "the difference" itself, that means, examining the texts that belong to the philosophical tradition and indicating that which is suppressed, the unsaid in these texts, deconstructing them, in order to reveal the structure of rationality (Ferraris, 2004). Derrida's point of departure is the rethinking the "science of writing" (*grammatologie*). According to him, the sign does not refer to the presence of something static, it does not represent an object. The sign is a *trace* that refers to something else in a network of references (Kimmerle 2004). That's way Derrida writes: There is nothing outside the text! (Derrida, 1992).

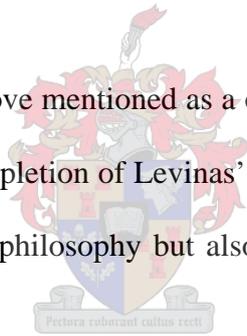
Derrida's most detailed encounter with Levinas' philosophy can be found in the essay "*Violence and metaphysics*" (first published in 1964), which was later published in *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978). Even though these two philosophers grew much closer later in their careers, the criticism that Derrida formulates here against Levinas was not invalidated. In this essay Derrida analyses Levinas' work *Totality and Infinity*. Derrida recognizes the main difference between Heidegger and Levinas in Levinas' refutation to use the verb "to be" to approach the Other. Levinas' new categories to express the Other must, as shown before, come from the Other, and not from the capacity of the "I" to judge.

In the first part of the essay Derrida focuses on the relationship between seeing (the *face* in Levinas' thinking) and listening. In his criticism to Levinas' philosophy, Derrida shows how the relation with the Other, as an irreducible, as an infinite Other, represents a separation between thinking and language. This separation is an error according to Derrida, as it implies a transcendence (Derrida 1978), a being beyond the capacity of the "I" to grasp the Other. Through this transcendence the Other seems also to escape every possible determination, as it can't be defined in any context. But, according to Derrida, Levinas errs as he must have presupposed "being" in describing the Other as the infinite Other, because

every determination, also ethical determinations, presupposes the thinking of the verb “to be”.

The second part of the essay discusses the relationship between “violence” and metaphysics turning to Heidegger’s ontology and to the eschatology. Derrida manages to show the difference between Levinas and Heidegger’s attempts to rid themselves of the metaphysical tradition by analysing Levinas’ phenomenological description of the Other (Ferraris, 2004). According to Derrida, Levinas misunderstood Husserl’s concept of “constitution” (Konstitution). Husserl did not oppose “constitution” to “encounter/meeting” (Begegnung) as Levinas interpreted it. Husserl intended that only when someone shows him/herself as a phenomenon he also can *be* another “I” (Alter Ego), and as such the otherness of the other will be attributed and also upheld (Taureck, 2002, see also Chapter 3.2).

Derrida did not see the above mentioned as an objection against Levinas’ philosophy but just as a supplement to or completion of Levinas’ thinking. This shows the depth of the thinking of Levinas and the task philosophy but also psychology has in reflecting on his ethical challenges.



### 4.5.3 Hans-Georg Gadamer

Although Gadamer does not formally occupy himself with Levinas’ philosophy it has been shown, that there are various points in these two distinct philosophies where they encounter each other (Warren, 2004). However, despite various similarities such as the fact that both Gadamer and Levinas develop philosophies departing from the phenomenological school, they remain distant as well. Gadamer doubts a pure ethical approach to renew philosophy as attempted by Levinas. Levinas in turn, is critical of philosophical hermeneutics because he finds appropriation between the “I” and the Other in its method of understanding.

According to Gadamer (Gadamer, 1986) the purpose of philosophical hermeneutics is to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever

that experience is to be found, and inquire into its legitimacy. Hence the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside of science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.

By showing that truth can be found within the humanities, Gadamer combats the notion that the only real truth is the “objective” truth that is discovered through scientific methodology. By showing that the experiences of philosophy, art, history reveal experiential truths that cannot be discovered through scientific methods, Gadamer establishes the primacy of hermeneutics over scientific method in human understanding.

Scientific knowledge has not just sought to become the predominant method of understanding in its own disciplines, but has also claimed the primacy of its knowledge in the humanities. Scientific method has been applied to philosophy, history, art and psychology for the purposes of discovering the scientific truths within these fields. Gadamer argues that we need to go beyond the narrowed scope of scientific knowledge in the arts and humanities in order to describe human understanding and experience. This fosters an argument for psychology to be understood through the knowledge of the humanities and not only the sciences.

One of the main concepts in the philosophy of Gadamer is the “fusion of horizons”. In the case of reading a text, there are two horizons that come into contact: the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the author. Through hermeneutic conversation, these horizons can become fused through the discovery of a common understanding. It is in the fusion of horizons that understanding has taken place. The goal of the hermeneutical conversation is, in fact, to come to an understanding. This understanding can only occur if both parties find a common language, that is a “common horizon” (Gadamer, 1986). The constantly changing horizons of interpretations create a circle of understanding that is constantly revised by fore-conceptions which are always in flux. This so called hermeneutic circle is

not really a circle as someone will never come back around the circle to a previously held understanding, but is rather a spiral of interpretations that continues outward to infinity.

Emmanuel Levinas is critical of the hermeneutical understanding, finding that it does not adequately allow for ethical relationships. He wants to create space for the Other to speak and make sure that the Other is not silenced through appropriation into a larger system, or totality. Levinas is of the opinion that hermeneutical understanding creates just that because in this circular movement, the whole and the parts determine one another. Hermeneutical understanding is based upon the ever growing set of prejudices of the subject, and nothing new can be understood except in relation to those prejudices.

The problem that Levinas has with hermeneutical understanding is that separation from the circle is not possible, and this creates a totality by which the Other cannot be known as completely Other, but only known in relationship to subjective prejudices. Hermeneutical understanding creates an “open notion of totality” in that it allows the approach of the Other but then appropriates the Other to the same. This does not allow the Other to speak on his or her own terms. Levinas finds that hermeneutics does not allow the Other to fully be able to speak with his or her own unique voice because hermeneutical understanding constructs an understanding of the Other through commonalities projected on to the Other through one’s prejudices. Understanding the Other is always a thematising of the Other based upon an appropriation. This is dangerous according to Levinas because the Other is understood as part of the “I” and not as separate and irreducibly unique.

To summarize: According to Gadamer’s hermeneutics the “I” and the Other, as Levinas thinks it, remains to far a part, to such an extent that there is no possibility for a mutual understanding and a relationship any more. If there is no relationship, can there be any ethics?

## 4.6 Conclusion

The alternatives discussed in this chapter is in the first place a call to the therapist rather than the client. As it has been said more than once in this chapter, what psychology and psychotherapy can learn from the work of Levinas should not be regarded as a new theoretical formulation concerning the nature of the clients and patients that comes in search for help. Neither does it represent a new methodology of technical innovation in effective care and treatment. Rather, it is a call for the psychotherapist to admit his/her infinite ethical responsibility to the client as the absolute Other – a responsibility that attends first to the needs of the Other. Only when psychotherapy admits the ethical priority will it perhaps become genuinely therapeutic.

The various systems, movements and theories in psychology and psychotherapy will continue to make sense or will be replaced by other systems that make more sense – according to Levinas it should be like that. Levinas is not condemning system-making. What he is saying – applied to psychology – is that psychology and psychotherapy must allow people to evade being pigeonholed or defined by conceptual frameworks – no system and no theory will capture the personhood of the person that we are facing in therapy. The truly human escapes the *said* (Harrington, 2002).

If Levinas is a new voice in philosophy he is an even newer voice in psychology. Only in the last five years has psychology started to take notice of Emmanuel Levinas's contribution. Psychology is only starting to take up the challenge Levinas poses – to think of ethics as “first philosophy” – and the possible implication thereof. Psychology has only started to explore the possible implications of this change in perspective in this paper. A lot of work still needs to be done in order to make Levinas's work accessible to psychology and to explore the real depth thereof.

Psychology is in the privileged position that it is appointed to and it is expected of psychology to concern us with the face-to-face meeting. In and through this psychologists

and psychotherapists have the privilege to experience the ultimate freedom, the freedom to passively give themselves for the Other and be truly human as they receive the Other in the face-to-face meeting.



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## **ADDENDUM: EMMANUEL LEVIANS: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

The following biography aims to delineate the major influences on the work of Emmanuel Levinas. The major influences on Levinas's life and work will be presented chronologically and a context will be provided within which Levinas can be understood without giving an in-depth description of these influences. It is hoped that it would become clear in the following section how Levinas have been influenced by different people and events throughout his life. Seeing Levinas in his historical context will hopefully make Levinas and his philosophy easier to understand.

Emmanuel Levinas was born into a Jewish family on the 12 January 1906 in Kaunas, Lithuania. His earliest memories include the news of the death of probably one of the greatest Russian romantic writers Leo Tolstoy, and the tri-centennial celebrations of the house of Romanov (1613-1918), the most well known Russian ruling family, which came to a fall after the Russian revolution five years later in 1917/18 and changed the course of Russia that was unaltered for centuries. All of the previously mentioned, the First World War (1913-18), which uprooted the family, and his father's bookshop left a deep impression on the young Levinas. A particular confluence of the old and the new was therefore much in evidence and part of his life.

In Lithuania, Judaism had developed to a high spiritual level during the eighteenth century and had produced arguably the last Talmudist of genius, the Goan of Vilna. Although religion stood in the centre of family life, Levinas's parents belonged to a generation that saw their future in the Russian language and culture. The implication thereof was that Levinas was not only brought up in the Jewish tradition and did not only read and study the Hebrew Bible, but also the great Russian writers like Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyewsky and Tolstoy. It was the preoccupation he developed with these writers that led him in 1923, at the age of 17, to move to Strasbourg (the closest French city to

Lithuania) in order to study philosophy under teachers such as Charles Blondel and Maurice Paradines.

Charles Blondel's thoughts against modernism and positivism had wide influence in France at the beginning of the last century. Blondel was of the opinion that in the name of Christianity modernism and positivism cannot be allowed. After the church had reprimanded him he focused his work solely on philosophy. A central theme in Blondel's philosophy, a theme that would reappear in Levinas's work, was the conviction that the human "will" preceded the reason (Unknown, 1993a).

During Levinas's studies in Strasbourg the writings of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) were making a strong impact on students in France. Bergson's writings influenced a whole array of philosophical themes, which included epistemology, pragmatism, phenomenology and literature. It was, however, Bergson's theory of duration that left an enduring impact on Levinas and influenced his work to a large extent (Hand, 1989). Bergson reacted against "spacious time" of physics and positivistic experimental psychology, which used this model to describe the conscious. He proposes a solution that describes conscious status directly through introspection. That means that he proposes a qualitative instead of a quantitative approach. The lived or experienced time of the consciousness is "duration" and it can't be measured through a positivistic approach (Unknown, 1993b).

During his studies he became friends with Maurice Blanchot, a French writer, who introduced him to the works of Marcel Proust. This was the start of more than a lifelong friendship. During the Second World War Blanchot saved Levinas's wife from the National-socialists. Their philosophies would influence each other as they criticised and complemented each other's works throughout their careers. Blanchot would later be the middleman between the philosophy of Levinas and the philosophical-literary world in France. Levinas did not hesitate to summarise the "non-being / nothingness" (Nicht-

Wesen) of man, a theme Blanchot developed as a possible “less than nothing” (Taureck, 1997).

In 1928-29 Levinas attended a series of lectures given 70 km south of Strasbourg, on the German side of the Rhine, in Freiburg (Br.) held by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Husserl lectured on phenomenological psychology and the constitution of intersubjectivity. It was during this time that Levinas started to work on his dissertation on Husserl’s theory of intuition, which was published in 1930 (Taureck, 1997). In Freiburg, Levinas did not only get to know Husserl but also Martin Heidegger whose academic reputation was already beginning to surpass that of Husserl in many of Germany’s most elite intellectual circles. Here he discovered Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, which was published shortly before in 1927 and attended the famous 1929 encounter between Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer at Davos in Switzerland, which marked for Levinas ‘the end of a certain humanism’ (Hand, 1989).

In 1930 Levinas received French citizenship, married Rachel Levy, a childhood friend from his days in Kovno, and started working in the administrative section of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. In this year Levinas’s dissertation was published with the title: *The theory of intuition in Husserl’s phenomenology*. This book is still in publication today and enjoys wide-ranging respect for the depth of its analysis and its continued significance to contemporary phenomenology (Williams and Gantt, 2002). After the publication of his dissertation on Husserl’s theory of intuition Levinas started to work with Gabrielle Pfeiffer on the translation of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* into French in 1931. In this work Husserl redefines phenomenology as an egology, a position Heidegger would later reject through the notion of transcendental constitution (Hand, 1989).

In 1932 Levinas met Jean-Paul Sartre, arguably one of the most famous French existentialist writers at a philosophical congress organised by Gabriel Marcel (Taureck, 1997). This was the start of a personal friendship. They respected each other both as

persons and as philosophers. As would be shown in this chapter, Levinas would radicalise the committed humanism of Sartre. Where Sartre is of the opinion that man is condemned to freedom, and in this freedom he can choose to be responsible, Levinas would argue that man is obliged to be responsible. Man's obligation to responsibility is not something that he can choose in his freedom.

In 1939 Levinas was called up for military service where he served as an interpreter of Russian and German at the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1940 he was captured near Rennes by the German 'Nationalsozialisten' and was a prisoner of war in a camp for Jewish French soldiers near Hanover, Germany. Although his wife and daughter, Simonne, managed to escape detection during the Second World War, Levinas's whole family, who were living in Lithuania, were among the 6 million Jews that were killed in concentration camps (Taureck, 1997). Levinas decided that he would never return to Germany.

During the war, in between periods of forced labour, Levinas read Hegel, Proust and Rousseau. During this time he started working on his book '*Existence and Existents*' in which he describes anonymous existence, and the state of insomnia, sleep, horror, vertigo, appetite, fatigue, and indolence (Hand, 1989). This book was published shortly after the war in 1946.

A year after the war ended in 1946, Levinas was appointed as the director of the Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale. In the following years Levinas gave a series of lectures at the Collège Philosophique, which would later develop into his book '*Time and the Other*'.

Since 1957 he had contributed to the annual Talmud Colloquium of French Jewish Intellectuals (Hand, 1989). Jewish religion would always be present in the philosophy of Levinas. The importance of this influence on his work cannot be underestimated. This would become clearer in the next section and can be clearly seen in Levinas's development of an extreme humanism. His description of man as a Messiah should be noted.

After publishing his doctoral thesis in 1961, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas was appointed as professor in philosophy in Poitiers. This was followed by a move to the university of Paris-Nanterre in 1967 and in 1971 to the Sorbonne where he taught until he retired in 1976. His second major work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* was published in 1974 while teaching at the Sorbonne in Paris. After his retirement in 1976 he published numerous other articles and books. Emmanuel Levinas died on the 25 December 1995 in Paris at the age of 89 years.

