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FINDING VOICE:
AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McNulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Ryan Mest

May 2011

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Ryan Mest

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FINDING VOICE:

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

By

Ryan Mest

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ABSTRACT

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AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

By

Ryan Mest

May 2009

Dissertation supervised by Professor Eva Simms

Finding Voice faces the challenge of introducing therapists to philosophy and philosophers to psychotherapy in the same breath. Balancing philosophical rigor with an accessible writing style, I introduce psychotherapeutic practice by interpreting carefully selected philosophical texts as scholarship on psychotherapy. Throughout the work, I offer clinical vignettes, examples, and stories to illustrate the ideas as well as enrich the reading experience.

Part One introduces psychotherapy as an ethical treatment for moral pain. I dare to present the Kierkegaard of *Fear and Trembling* (1846/2006) as a good therapist for Abraham. I turn to the Derrida of “Whom to Give to (Knowing not to Know)” (1995) as a supervisor for the case. With the help of these philosophers, I define the desire of the therapist, the nature of a client’s pain, and the way in which the therapeutic relationship is

uniquely structured to address this pain through finding voice. The ideas of sacrifice, the suspension of the ethical, the call of the Other, and the suffering of a double secrecy are crucial here.

Part Two introduces the basic conceptual tools needed for psychotherapeutic practice by describing existence and transcendence in the therapeutic relationship. First, I turn to van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology in *A Different Existence* (1972) to conceptualize what needs to be addressed in therapy. By finding a voice for the client's immediate experience and listening to the poetry of her perception, the therapist gains insight into the depth and breadth of the client's painful way of existing. Second, following a clever and surprising route, I introduce Levinas' early work *Existence and Existents* (1978/2001) and *Time and the Other* (1987) as inspiration for a transcendental approach to therapeutic intervention. I offer principles for conceptualizing how the therapist can find a voice of alterity that disrupts the client's painful way of existing and inspires change. The Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention unexpectedly yet certainly complements the phenomenological approach to psychopathology.

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Introduction

Chapter 1: Echoes of Epicurus

An imaginary, ancient scene. Two philosophers stand amidst the greenery of a great, walled garden far enough outside Athens to offer an escape from the urban expanse. In the midst of their philosophical conversation, men and women of various classes - the students residing here, at Epicurus' school - work, converse, reflect, and play. It is an enclosed, simple community open to all, expecting each to give what they can, and it is a community of friends who have sworn an oath to a few basic principles of living as well as thinking. Democritus, a well-known philosopher with a fierce, formal, and abstract intellect, has just come from a very different school within the city called the Lycaenum. There, he spoke with Aristotle and his wealthy, powerful, male pupils of high status who soon would run the city. He witnessed Aristotle teaching his students that their emotions were intimately tied to their beliefs as well as their judgments.

Democritus, however, had other interests. He wished to converse not about feelings and judgment but about atoms, the void, elements, and other theories of physics for which he is well known.

Going from place to place, Democritus himself does not reside in any one location for too long. He does not settle. He travels where his mind compels him to go, forever dissatisfied and wanting more knowledge, more rigor, more truth. Thus he visits one school within the city and then this school outside the urban expanse.

As he approached the home of Epicurus and his friendly community of students, Democritus saw the wall barring the famous garden from view. For those who never join the school, the wall serves as an invitation to all sorts of debaucherous fantasies. In the

absence of any genuine witness to what transpires within, their minds fill in the gaps with filthy imaginings inconsistent with the reality of the garden that is luscious in its greenery, but decidedly simple in its food, drink, and dress.

At present, Democritus and Epicurus are discussing their theories of physics. Specifically, they consider the atomic origin of all things, a subject about which they mostly agree, at least on the surface. They imagine the birth of the world in the same way. Atoms - the smallest, indivisible entities that all things are made of - first fell in straight, perfectly parallel lines. Somehow, they agree, the world as they know it was born of the chaotic colliding of these atoms into each other, forming varied bodies of matter that became nature, the environment around us, and even ourselves. The subject of the philosophers' thoughts is the question: how did this motion of the atoms come to be? If the atoms fell so perfectly in straight lines harmoniously through the void, what caused the collisions, chaos, and birth pangs of the universe?

Epicurus, calm and reflective, asserts that one of the atoms swerved. Democritus, talking down to Epicurus in a tone on the verge of mockery, retorts, "Well how do we explain this renegade atom's swerve? What cause can explain such a divergence in the system?"

Epicurus, sensing an irritation bubbling in his visitor, responds in a cool yet assertive voice, "It swerved, on its own accord."

Democritus flares up, disgusted that such a well known philosopher would be satisfied with such an explanation. "Surely, Epicurus, you may venture a more sophisticated explanation than that. We must explain, systemically, why the atoms come

to collide. If, indeed, one swerves, as you say, we must follow with an understanding of what caused such a swerve to occur!”

Epicurus, who wishes his visitor’s disrupted and disrupting spirit would calm, warmly says, “That’s the point, it swerves itself.”

“Why?” asks Democritus hotly but also not wanting to disrespect his host too directly.

“Because,” says Epicurus.

“Because?” states Democritus, now confused as well as irritated.

Epicurus replies confidently with calm eyes, “Indeed.” Facing him, Democritus faces the limits of reason, an intolerable position for such a thinker. “Bah!” he gasps, waving his hand as if to fan away some foul smell as he turns away to leave. Epicurus would invite Democritus to his school if he thought such an invitation would be appreciated, but he knows this is not the case and would be taken as insult. He bids Democritus farewell and returns to the garden, tending to the days affairs. The two philosophers go their separate ways, one as at home with his thought as he is at home in his garden, the other as unsettled in his thinking as he is in life.

In his dissertation for the doctoral degree in philosophy roughly two thousand years later, a young, not yet renowned philosopher recalls the legendary ends of both ancient philosophers whom history has not forgotten (Marx, 1841/1975).¹ Of Democritus he writes:

...he traveled to Egypt in order to learn geometry, and to the Chaldeans in Persia, and he reached the Red Sea. Some maintain that he also met the gymnosophists in India and set foot in Ethiopia. On the one hand it is the *lust*

for knowledge that leaves him no rest; but it is at the same time *dissatisfaction with true, i.e. philosophical, knowledge* that drives him far abroad. The knowledge which he considers true is without content, the knowledge that gives him content is without truth. It could be a fable, but a true fable, that anecdote of the ancients, since it gives a picture of the contradictory elements in his being. Democritus is supposed to have blinded himself so that the *sensuous light of the eye* would not darken the *sharpness of intellect*. This is the same man who, according to Cicero, wandered through half the world. But he did not find what he was looking for. (pp. 40-41)

In sharp contrast, he writes of Epicurus:

But while *Democritus* seeks to learn from *Egyptian priests, Persian Chaldeans, and Indian gymnosophists*, *Epicurus* prides himself on *not* having had a *teacher*, on being *self-taught*. There are some people, he says according to Seneca, who struggle for truth without any assistance. Among these people he has himself traced out his path. And it is they, the self-taught, whom he praises most. The others, according to him, are second-rate minds. While Democritus is driven into all parts of the world, Epicurus leaves his garden in Athens scarcely two or three times and travels to Ionia, not to engage in studies, but to visit friends. Finally, while Democritus, despairing of acquiring knowledge, blinds himself, Epicurus, feeling the hour of death approaching, takes a warm bath, calls for pure wine and recommends to his friends that they be faithful to philosophy. (pp. 41-42)

An Epicurean – and decidedly not Democritean – spirit sparks the fire that fuels the present work.

* * *

Although we commonly conceive of psychotherapy as a scholarly practice fathered by Freud, the art of healing through speaking is as old as Western knowledge itself. At the dawn of Western scholarship, beginning with the Greeks, philosophers founded the fine art of argument as therapeutic practice. Classicist Martha Nussbaum (1994) reports:

The Hellenistic philosophical schools in Greece and Rome - Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics – all conceived of philosophy as a way of addressing the most painful problems of human life. They saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering. They practiced philosophy not as a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery. They focused their attention, in consequence, on issues of daily and urgent human significance – the fear of death, love and sexuality, anger and aggression – issues that are sometimes avoided as embarrassingly messy and personal by the more detached varieties of philosophy. They confronted these issues as they arose in ordinary human lives, with a keen attention to the vicissitudes of those lives, and to what would be necessary and sufficient to make them better. (pp. 3-4)

In his renowned and luscious garden, Epicurus lived alongside his pupils, who he also called friends, and cultivated insight into living a good life (Diogenes Laertius, 1947; Nussbaum, 1994). Unlike his contemporaries, he welcomed all people - including women and slaves - to join his school despite the injury this great hospitality inflicted on his public reputation. Many came to Epicurus seeking relief from psychological distress. Together and in solitude, they studied philosophy as a healing art. Epicurus wrote a letter outlining morality to his pupil Menoecus. The opening lines express the purpose and place of philosophy:

Let no one when young delay to study philosophy, nor when he is old grow weary of his study. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of his soul. And the man who says that the age for philosophy has either not yet come or has gone by is like the man who says that the age for happiness is not yet come to him, or has passed away. Wherefore both when young and old a man must study philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessings through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come. We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when it is absent we do all to win it. (Epicurus, 1947, p. 123)

First and foremost for Epicurus, morality and emotional well-being define the purpose of philosophy. In short, the study of philosophy meant something like psychotherapeutic practice.

The study of philosophy means something like psychotherapeutic practice to me as well. The object of this work is for me to find a voice with which to inscribe

psychotherapy into philosophy. In my past writings, I have certainly attempted this. But like many philosophers and psychotherapy theorists, my rhetorical style has been theoretical to the point of being obtuse and abstract to the point of arrogance, with only glimpses – lengthy glances at best – of something a general reader might consume without getting full or disgusted after just a few bites. Like myself – and with greater skill – many scholars write of philosophy and psychotherapy at once today. I experience the many of them suffering from the same illness. They do not offer a dish digestible by the general reader. In my opinion, we, writers within a specific genre of scholarship, need to do a better job of enticing and inviting the general reader. To inscribe psychotherapy into philosophy, one must both write as well as be read. The great challenge of finding my voice is not speaking, but speaking so as to be heard loud and clear.

Epicurus' hospitality included more than inviting students without any discrimination. He wrote profusely, but most of his works that are known to have existed have never been found. What remains of his work, however, testifies to his having found his voice in such a way that the educated student and the lay servant alike could hear him. His most known work, the "Principal Doctrines," collected clear, brief points that could easily be memorized and learned by the illiterate (Epicurus, 1947; Nussbaum, 1994). The first four points had the name 'tetrapharmakon,' meaning 'fourfold drug,' and they were well known as both philosophical principles and a psychological treatment. In his letters, too, he wrote for the general public. Consider his letter to his well-read student Pythocles, to whom Epicurus writes:

You ask me to send you a brief argument about the phenomena of the sky in a short sketch, that you may easily recall it to mind. ... I now intend to accomplish your request, feeling that these arguments will be of value to many other persons as well, and especially to those who have but recently tasted the genuine inquiry into nature, and also to those who are involved too deeply in the business of some regular occupation. (Epicurus, 1947, p. 85, my omission)

Today, Pythocles and Epicurus might strike us as preparing to discuss some ancient meteorology. However, the skies of old were not the skies we experience today. They were the scripture read by those who prophesized the works of the gods and the coming of wrath. To fear the skies due to the astrological meaning attributed to them was quite common. Epicurus considered it a distressing psychological condition in need of treatment. Witness how the opening to his letter to Pythocles continues:

First of all then we must not suppose that any other object is to be gained from the knowledge of the phenomena of the sky, whether they are dealt with in connexion with other doctrines or independently, than peace of mind and a sure confidence, just as in all other branches of study. (p. 85)

Teaching philosophy meant healing psyches. And not just the psyches of the educated, wealthy men whom Aristotle taught, at times with therapeutic intention (Nussbaum, 1994). Epicurus philosophized for all.

When addressing the general reader, Epicurus kept the well-read student in mind as well. Consider the opening of his letter to Herodotus:

Here, Herodotus, is my treatise on the chief points concerning the nature of the general principles, abridged so that my account would be easy to grasp with

accuracy. I think that, even if one were unable to proceed to all the detailed particulars of the system, he would from this obtain an unrivalled strength compared with other men. ... For such is their character that even those who are at present engaged in working out the details to a considerable degree, or even completely, will be able to carry out the greater part of their investigations into the nature of the whole by conducting their analysis in reference to such a survey as this. (Epicurus, 1947, pp. 81-83, my omission)

Similarly, I here aim to find a voice to describe general philosophical principles of psychotherapy that may be easily understood by the introductory reader as well as appreciated by the well-read one.

Quite different from Epicurus, I aim to introduce philosophical texts here in such a way that they may be read, through my eyes and in turn yours, reader, as psychotherapy scholarship as well. Said differently, I interpret the philosophical texts, which themselves are not explicitly about psychotherapy, such that they inspire insights into psychotherapy. I carefully chose which texts to introduce and interpret, for many philosophical texts may be read – and indeed, have already been read – as psychotherapy scholarship.

Psychologist Eugene Gendlin (1978), for instance, reads Heidegger's philosophical tome *Being and Time* (1962) as a text on psychotherapy. But this tome, as I will discuss later, could not make the cut by my selection criteria because neither English translation is accessible enough to the general reader and perhaps none could be, given the complexity of the original. I chose the texts I introduce here for their philosophical renown, their relevance to psychotherapy, and just as importantly their accessibility. Being philosophical texts, they become more accessible through my commentary on them, but

even without my commentary they are more readable than most philosophical works. I have taken care to read multiple translations when they exist so as to choose what, in my opinion, is the most readable translation. The length of the texts factored into my selections as well. For a philosophy text to be readable, I think it must also be brief enough to not wear the reader out. Philosophy challenges the reader intellectually and in my experience few ever achieve the benefit of completing an entire text unless it is short.

The length of the texts and selection of authors has another purpose as well. Being an academic wishing to reach the general reader, I am thinking especially of students. I carefully chose the principal texts so that one could reasonably study all of them – along with the present work as the primary guide - over the course of a semester. At the end of such a course, the student will have become acquainted in an introductory way with philosophers whom they will certainly encounter again should they pursue more reading in philosophically inspired psychotherapy research. This is especially true with Kierkegaard and phenomenological psychology. In the case of Derrida and Levinas, their work appears more and more within the genre and the student will find herself already familiar with them as their influence continues to spread as it undoubtedly will.

In finding my voice, I could not, as many scholars do, focus on just one philosopher's work. Rather, I present philosophical texts by authors that inspire in me an understanding of psychotherapeutic practice. I am an independent, pluralist thinker. I am decidedly not a disciple of any one theorist. I have witnessed such minded scholars in debates with each other, as if integrating philosophers' ideas was impossible. This is particularly the case with psychologists inspired by Heidegger and those inspired by Levinas. Debates spring up as if one must choose absolutely between the two

philosophers. I myself have been guilty of this at times. In an attempt to heal this divide, I take up Heidegger and Levinas in a clever way that even draws on their differences towards this integrative end.

I have faced my greatest challenge though also reaped the most aesthetic pleasure from developing an accessible writing style. I have carefully chosen my words so as to be understood and at times even pleasantly so. The concepts developed in the following chapters include stories which illustrate them concretely. The details of the stories often serve as metaphors for the concepts as well. For instance, in illustrating the concept of double secrecy in a therapeutic encounter, I describe the secretive qualities of the location where it took place. The illustrations and example stories also moderate the pace of the work, sparing the reader from getting stuck reading a few dense, abstract theoretical lines again and again in search of clarity.

In addition to the general reader, my intended audience is twofold: philosophers interested in psychotherapy and psychotherapists interested in philosophy. In finding my voice as a philosopher and psychotherapist in the same breath, I hope to inspire dialogue between philosophers and psychotherapists by providing a language relevant to and accessible to both.

Part One introduces psychotherapy as an ethical treatment for moral pain. I dare to present the Kierkegaard of *Fear and Trembling* (1846/2006) as a good therapist for Abraham. I turn to the Derrida of “Whom to Give to (Knowing not to Know)” (1995) as a supervisor for the case. With the help of these philosophers, I define the desire of the therapist, the nature of a client’s pain, and the way in which the therapeutic relationship is uniquely structured to address this pain through finding voice. The ideas of sacrifice, the

suspension of the ethical, the call of the Other, and the suffering of a double secrecy are crucial here.

Part Two introduces the basic conceptual tools needed for psychotherapeutic practice by describing existence and transcendence in the therapeutic relationship. First, I turn to van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology in *A Different Existence* (1972) to conceptualize what needs to be addressed in therapy. By finding a voice for the client's immediate experience and listening to the poetry of her perception, the therapist gains insight into the depth and breadth of the client's painful way of existing. Second, following a clever and surprising route, I introduce Levinas' early work *Existence and Existents* (1978/2001) and *Time and the Other* (1987) as inspiration for a transcendental approach to therapeutic intervention. I offer principles for conceptualizing how the therapist can find a voice of alterity that disrupts the client's painful way of existing and inspires change. The Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention unexpectedly yet certainly complements the phenomenological approach to psychopathology.

Some fundamental aspects of Epicurus' philosophy, which I will introduce here, foreshadow the forthcoming insights I offer later with reference to other thinkers. A theme in his philosophy is setting limits on reason. He does so in order to grasp the full breadth of what he's studying, not limiting himself to what reason has to offer. He also finds reason gone awry as the source of psychological pain.² While Democritus would follow reason to the ends of the earth, Epicurus reins reason in, harnessing its power for the sake of psychological well-being. Like other great, ethical philosophers, Epicurus is a philosopher at odds with philosophy, specifically philosophies that take reasoning farther

than it ought to go. I am thinking of Kierkegaard, who in *Fear and Trembling* heals the wounds of Hegel's all-consuming reasoning by introducing paradoxes of morality and faith that even Hegel's reason cannot overpower (see Part One). I am also thinking of the early Levinas, who similarly heals the wounds left by Heidegger's all encompassing analysis of existence by introducing a relationship to that which is beyond existence's grasp (see Part Two). The affinity between these philosophers will become clear in the subsequent chapters of this writing as I engage their work to understand psychotherapy.

The chapter on phenomenological psychology in Part Two will resoundingly echo Epicurus' philosophical method, which I will now introduce. The intention inspiring the method is not only the cultivation of sound knowledge but also the health of the soul. Towards this end, he was a prudent thinker who advocated for scholarly pluralism. The aim of his philosophical approach was not to argue for one, objective truth to rule them all. For instance, while many theories explained phenomena such as the occurrences in the sky, Epicurus did not incite debate by accepting one theory and rejecting others that described the phenomena just as well. Rather, he aimed for the attainment of peace of mind through harmonizing one's understanding with one's perception. He was not concerned with finding the single right explanation when many different ones would equally suffice. He taught his students to "not try to force an impossible explanation" but "to live free from trouble" and "without disturbance" (Epicurus, 1947, p. 87). He simply instructed them to "follow the lead of phenomena" (p. 87).

By "follow the lead of phenomena," Epicurus means explicitly listen to what your perceptions are telling you. Don't try to force something to have one rational meaning, especially if it is in contrast to what you immediately experience or perceive. In his essay

"The Life of Epicurus," the historian Diogenes Laertius (1947) writes of the Epicurean method:

Logic they reject as misleading. For they say it is sufficient for physicists to be guided by what things say of themselves. Thus in *The Canon* Epicurus says that the tests of truth are the sensations and concepts and the feelings; the Epicureans add to these the intuitive apprehensions of the mind. (p. 31)

Similarly, Epicurus writes in his letter to Herodotus:

we must keep all our investigations in accord with our sensations, and in particular with the immediate apprehensions whether of the mind or of any one of the instruments of judgment, and likewise in accord with feelings existing in us (pp. 39-41)

The method values above all one's immediate experience. Trust what you see, what you think, and what you feel in relation to your object of study. Do not let any one aspect of a thing, such as a belief about it, disregard what you experience immediately before you. Consider the full breadth of your experience. Reason, feelings, and physical sensation all contribute without one being dominant over the rest.

Like a therapist, Epicurus also finds meaning in perceptions that are clearly irrational. When one is studying something imperceptible, mysterious, or elusive to reason's grasp – in short, something that might lead a person to consult a therapist - he asserts that following one's sensations includes "the visions of the insane and those in dreams" (p. 33). He finds meaning in such imaginary visions associated with an object of study. Epicurus' philosophical method requires you to find a voice for your immediate experience of a phenomenon without restricting yourself to the expression of what is

objectively true about it. We will delve more deeply into the therapeutic value of finding voice for one's experience later.

The chapter engaging Levinas' work in Part Two will echo Epicurus' thinking regarding death and the future in a particular way. Epicurus views death and the future as beyond reason's grasp. Regarding death, Epicurus philosophizes so as to dispel fear and cultivate good living as much as he seeks to articulate the truth. He writes:

Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is the deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living. (p.125)

To reason fearfully about what we will experience in death is reason reaching beyond its limits to the detriment of the Epicurean's soul. Rather, Epicurus' reasoning points towards death as something beyond our knowledge, and therefore as a limit to our experience. Like an existential therapist, Epicurus finds a voice that brings his students face to face with death, encountering that which they fear, and in philosophically working through this fear makes life more pleasant.

He similarly treats difficulties stemming from relationships to the future by setting limits on what we can possess with our reasoning. To foresee the future with certainty is akin to forcing an impossible explanation, with similar psychological consequences. He writes:

We must then bear in mind that the future is neither ours, nor yet wholly not ours, so that we may not altogether expect it as sure to come, nor abandon hope of it, as if it will certainly not come. (p. 127)

Investing one's reason in a firm belief about the future is a misguided use of reason unsettling to the one who thinks it. Like a therapist, Epicurus finds a voice through which his students encounter the inherent mysteriousness of the future. For a person who reasons that one vision of the future is imminent, facing the ambiguity of the future relieves the pain forcing one future to come when it might not. For a person who knows nothing of the future, facing the inherent mystery of the future may inspire hope and a sense of possibility. Later, we will explore in more depth how the therapist can effect change by finding a voice through which the client encounters the future.

Before concluding this introduction and proceeding to Part One, I must confess a final, neurotic way in which the theme finding voice guides this project. When I found myself distracted from writing, processing my thoughts, or needing a break, I was finding my voice musically. I have played guitar for a long time but it was not until specifically NOT writing the present work that I learned to sing. Even when getting away from finding voice, I was finding my voice anyway. Everywhere you go, there you are.

Part One: Finding Voice and the Psychotherapy Situation

Chapter 2: Kierkegaard the Therapist

*Warming Up*¹

When the duty of killing his son fell on the prophet Abraham's shoulders, he found himself in a terrible moral position. Here was a responsibility that he could never want but was nonetheless his whether he liked it or not. What's worse, God did not tell Abraham why he must sacrifice his son. He was responsible for something as horrible as it was mysterious. He did not know the secret meaning of his duty. No explanation was offered to him. He could not explain himself to anyone because he did not have an explanation for himself either. His moral decision was not controlled by knowledge. It was as if the decision had already been made for him although it was he who made it and he who was responsible. I can only imagine his inner torment during the three day ride to Mount Mariah. I can only imagine how Abraham must have felt as he walked up the mountain, holding a knife in his hand as he approached the stone altar with his son beside him - the lamb for the sacrifice. Surely, Abraham was committed to God's will and would not disobey. A knight of faith, he would not deter from his strange and mysterious duty. But just as surely, Abraham felt horror, shame, and emotional pain that made him tremble deep in his bones. He knew what he was to be in the eyes of the world and even in his own eyes: a murderer of the worst kind. He wished that God had not asked this of him. He did not want to be what he knew he would become.

And if this were not enough of a burden, he could not share his pain or knowledge of his task with anyone. He could not even speak of it to a stranger let alone his family, for anyone would surely say what he already knew, "Abraham, you are mad. You cannot

murder your own son!" He is kept in absolute secret. Neither does he know why God has asked this of him nor does he have anyone to talk to about his terrible task. Although the prophet did not and would not refuse his divine responsibility, one can easily imagine that he could have benefited from the comfort of confession and confidential conversation. His burden might have been eased if he had someone to share his secret suffering with. He would not be saved from the responsibility that was his alone, but he might have been saved from the pain of living with no one to witness his secret struggles. Loneliness and alienation are themselves a heavy burden to bear. We can imagine the impossible situation of a therapist going back in time to help Abraham shoulder his terrible burden by giving him a home when he had none. In the therapists' office, Abraham could have found a sanctuary for his voice which would surely have spoken of unspeakable pains and the mysterious direction his life was taking. Therapy could have eased the silence he suffered.

To be sure, if Abraham were appointed to his task today and turned to a therapist for support, he would be disappointed and feel betrayed. Ethical codes demand that the psychologist protect the potential victims of their killer clients (APA, 2002). The therapist could not keep Abraham's secrets and could not support him in his prophetic task. In fact, the therapist would be obligated to do everything in his or her power to stop him and protect his son. Nonetheless, Abraham's story exemplifies in the extreme the kind of moral situation that therapy often addresses in cases that don't involve murder. To be responsible often means to be alone, to be in secret, and to suffer silence in good faith. Perhaps this is a reason that Abraham's story holds an important place in the

Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religions: it teaches a moral lesson about the meaning of responsibility.²

Abraham's responsibility is a prophetic responsibility. He does not know what is in store for him. He can only follow the signs of God's will and respond in good faith. He awaits God's mysterious commands and promises to respond no matter what God wishes. This is the moral of the story: responsibility is a sign of faith rather than knowledge. The word 'responsibility,' itself, carries this lesson. To be 'responsible' is to be the one who must 'respond'. The 'response' is already contained in the 'respons'-ibility. Although we are not prophets as Abraham was, we are all prophetic insofar as we are responsible: promising to respond when the time comes whether we like it or not. The burden of responsibility is the wonder of faith. We know not what will be asked of us, only that we must answer, following the signs that lead us forward without knowing for certain where we are going.

When we must move forward, change our lives, and learn to live in a new kind of world in new ways, we must have faith in ourselves. Abraham's story rings true in times when our faith is tested. Especially in trying times of transition, we do not know where life is taking us, why things had to turn out this way, or who but me bears these burdens. We find ourselves sacrificing the world as we know it and the relationships we value. We find ourselves feeling homeless where previously we had felt at home. At a time when we may not even feel at home in our own skin, we can find a home in the therapy room. When we suffer silent responsibilities, feeling desperate to express and address secret pains that we may not understand, a therapist can offer us the voice we are wanting. One can share the burden of secrets and even the burden of secrets which are

secret even to the one who bears them. When we bear responsibility in double secrecy, the therapist will follow us as we follow the signs, offering a voice in the face of mystery, isolation, and the pain of silence and secrecy.

The Therapist's Desire

There's something peculiar about the desire to be a therapist. While therapists do bear witness to healing, along the way they feel so much pain. Like a moth drawn to the flame, a therapist seeks out profound pain and dives right into it, wanting to get burned, to feel the pain. It's the relationship between the therapist and the client that effects the healing. The therapist's desire leads towards difficult, hurtful, and confusing narratives many times a day, week after week, month after month, year after year. The end of this journey is ideally the healing of wounds, which means the end of therapy is often when things don't hurt so bad anymore. Once the pain has subsided or become manageable, the therapeutic relationship ends. While one might want to think that it's the positive outcome that attracts the therapist, the everyday work of the therapy loudly calls attention to the therapist's desire to be close to pain. Looking at the story of a therapy in which the goals are successfully achieved, it's easy to tell it in highly functional terms with a childish simplicity. The client wanted to change, went to the therapist, and through the therapy effected change. It sounds deceptively simple and nicely packaged like a sales pitch. Someone wanted to change, consumed therapeutic services, and enjoyed a favorable outcome. Its very neatness reeks of foul thinking. Where in this description is the human element of the therapeutic process? The therapist and client appear in this description as machines performing functions, which is a sorry, so long distance from

appreciation for a simple fact: the relationship between client and therapist is one based in the client's pain. The offensively mechanical, functional description does not resonate with my experience of therapy or therapeutic relationships and I expect for most therapists or clients it would not either.

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's attraction to Abraham, on the other hand, resonates strongly with the therapist's desire. In the opening sections of the book *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard (1843/2006) tells the story of a man captivated by the story of Abraham's trial. It's like hearing about somebody's friend who has these problems they just happen to know so much about. Reading the story at the beginning of a book which is an extended reflection on Abraham's sacrifice, one cannot be duped into thinking the man spoken of is anyone other than the author. He writes:

There was once a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story about how God tested Abraham and how he withstood the test, kept the faith, and received a son a second time contrary to expectation. When the man became older, he read the same story with even greater admiration, for life had separated what had been united in the child's pious simplicity. Indeed, the older he became, the more often his thoughts turned to that story; his enthusiasm became stronger and stronger, and yet he could understand the story less and less. Finally, he forgot everything else because of it; his soul had only one wish, to see Abraham, one longing, to have been witness to that event. His desire was not to see the beautiful regions of the Far East, not the earthly splendor of the Promised Land, not that god-fearing married couple whose old age God had blessed, not the venerable figure of the aged patriarch, not the vigorous youth of Isaac bestowed by God ... His longing

was to accompany them on the three day journey when Abraham rode with sorrow before him and Isaac by his side. His wish was to be present at the hour when Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw Mount Moriah in the distance, the hour he left the asses behind and went up the mountain alone with Isaac, for what engrossed him was not the artistic weave of the imagination but the shudder of the thought. (pp. 7-8, my omission)

Like a moth summoned to the flame, he flies towards Abraham's pain. He wants for nothing but to suffer with Abraham on his journey to do what he could least want: to sacrifice his son. How could one want to bear witness to such a perplexing, anxiety provoking and extremely painful situation? Abraham must make an impossible choice between his child and the will of God, and Kierkegaard wants to be there when it happens? He chases the shudder of the thought, an experience so profound that thought refuses to accept it. He even loses interest in the positive outcome of the whole endeavor. As an adult, it no longer interests him that God held back Abraham's hand, though that is certainly a preferable ending. No, he wants to join with Abraham's world and be part of that terrifying journey of sacrifice. He wants to bear witness to and reflect on the pain and the paradox. Clearly, Kierkegaard's desire makes him susceptible to a profession in the therapeutic arts!

Reading *Fear and Trembling* only further confirms this observation. He reiterates in a new way the point he made about the child's view of Abraham's story as a beautiful trial. Such a telling sees only the outcome and forgets the struggle as it was lived. Abraham is tried and succeeds, becoming the heroic knight of God and winning

his son. Kierkegaard cannot stomach such a telling for himself just as we can imagine Abraham would find it disgustingly dehumanizing. Kierkegaard writes:

People construe the story of Abraham in another way. They praise God's grace for giving Isaac back to him again; the whole affair was only a trial. A trial - this word can mean much and little, and yet the whole affair is over as soon as it is said. ... One forgets that Abraham only rode upon an ass, which goes slowly along the way, that he had a three-day journey, that he needed some time to chop the firewood, bind Isaac, and draw the knife. (pp. 44-45, my omission)

And he continues:

If I were to speak about him, I would first depict the pain of the trial. To that end I would, like a leech, suck all the anxiety and distress and torment out of a father's suffering in order to be able to describe what Abraham suffered while still believing through it all. I would recall that the journey lasted three days and a good part of the fourth; indeed, these three and a half days must be infinitely longer than the couple of thousand years that separate me from Abraham. (p. 45)

You read it correctly. Kierkegaard wants to recall an infinite period of suffering in the desert, riding a slow ass beside a man bearing his son so that he may kill him because God asked. Kierkegaard wants to empathize with him! To feel the pain of a journey that feels like an eternity! Such a desire requires great patience and emotional endurance. And nothing makes his desire seem more like a therapist's than his want to be like a leech for Abraham's pain. Consider that in Kierkegaard's time, a leech was not just a freaky, blood-sucking insect. A leech was used as a therapeutic treatment to remove poisonous blood from the body. The leech serves as a metaphor for empathic relating. He implies a

want to feel Abraham's pain in a healing manner. Explicitly, he wants to suck all the anxiety and distress and torment out of the father's suffering so that he may describe it. It sounds very much like a therapists' research. He wants to wade up to his waste in anxiety, paradox, and moral torment so that he can learn something. We'd be wrong not to hear his lessons that resonate with the experience of therapists despite the fact that he is branded a philosopher. To appreciate his philosophical work for its psychotherapeutic insights, let us begin by considering his work on Abraham in its social and historical context.

Silence, Sacrifice, and the Suspension of the Ethical

Soren Kierkegaard published his reflections on Abraham's sacrifice in the now classic philosophical text *Fear and Trembling*. It was 1843 in Denmark and the book was not only about Abraham, it was a radical and profound criticism of the prevailing moral philosophy of the day. At that time and in that place, the church and state formed a seemingly indivisible unity. To be a Danish citizen usually included and required being a member of the Danish State Church. Furthermore, religious doctrine endorsed the powers of the state and vice versa. As is often the case, the ethical perspective of the time reflected the political status quo, which at this time also meant the religious status quo. The moral philosophy of the day justified itself with reference to duty towards God. Men of the state were simultaneously men of God.

What was the moral philosophy of the time? In midnineteenth century Denmark, Hegel's universal ethics reigned supreme. According to Hegel's philosophy, the highest court of appeal in judging human affairs is 'the universal.' This term refers to the

common laws of men expressed by the state, the church, and one's community. From this perspective, the more one submits to the law and common customs – even if it causes one great harm – the more ethical one proves oneself to be. Forsaking one's private existence and individuality is the highest ethical expression. Kierkegaard summarizes Hegel's ethics in the following way:

The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is in turn the disclosed. Defined immediately as a sensuous and psychological being, the single individual is the concealed. His ethical task, then, is to extricate himself from his concealment and to become disclosed in the universal. Whenever he wants to remain in concealment he commits an offense and is in a state of temptation, from which he can only emerge by disclosing himself. (p. 71)

In other words and in a nutshell, to be ethical meant hiding nothing and submitting oneself to the demands and judgments of the social norms, customs, and laws of the day, no matter what the cost.

How did Kierkegaard respond to and criticize moral philosophy? In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard thinks through the story of Abraham in a number of ways, introducing undeniable paradoxes that make Hegelian ethics tremble as if an earthquake of thought threatens to crumble the foundation on which it rests. Kierkegaard argues that while ethics demands a commitment to the universal, there is nonetheless a higher court of appeal, namely one's individual relationship with God and faith, which he terms 'the absolute.' From his perspective, the private individual can value universal ethics and want to reveal oneself through the universal, but nonetheless be in an absolute moral position that forbids this revelation. One could maintain a love and belief in universal

ethics while nonetheless withdrawing from it because of a higher duty to God. Such is the story of Abraham's sacrifice in which he keeps silent despite the ethical demand that all be revealed and submitted to the common law. Such was also the force of Kierkegaard's thinking, for if one admitted that the story of the father of faith was invalid - that the story whose moral was the foundation of faith itself was not relevant - then the foundation of ethical philosophy would lose its basis. What a paradox for the day! The philosopher writes:

The Hegelian philosophy assumes no justified concealment, no justified incommensurability. It is therefore consistent in demanding disclosure, but it is befuddled in wanting to regard Abraham as the father of faith and in speaking about faith. (p. 71)

Following this logic, the ethics of the universal loses its divine support if it can not account for Abraham's faith. On the other hand, if one admits that Abraham's private duty to God supersedes his obligation to the universal ethic of disclosure, then the universal still loses its omnipotence. In either event, the morality of the day comes into question. Furthermore, a parallel relationship, namely the union of church and state exemplified in the morality of the time, also comes into question. Kierkegaard's argument in *Fear and Trembling* posed a radical and revolutionary paradox.

A man of ethics as well as faith, Abraham believed in the universal. He was committed to the laws of men. Most importantly, "the ethical had no higher expression than family life for Abraham" (p. 99). He loved his family and felt a great obligation towards them. Abraham embodied the ethical persona. A lawful man and devoted father, he would never want to murder his son. Yet from an ethical perspective, which

Abraham himself embraced, murder is exactly what God has asked of him. For no one would believe Abraham if he revealed that God demanded his son as a sacrifice. Indeed, such a thing could not be revealed for it would be called madness. Abraham knew this as well. He knew that the universal understanding of his act, the ethical meaning of it which he must have known and felt, was that he intended to murder his son.

We can reasonably imagine that this would be the last thing he could ever want. Not only because Abraham was a devoted father, but also because he had to work harder than most to become a father. God tested him, put him to a trial of many decades, and only by surviving and passing the test would God grant Abraham a son. Like a good therapist, Kierkegaard passionately summons empathy for Abraham with reference to not just fatherhood, but Abraham's particularly trying experience of it:

Let me speak humanly about it, purely humanly! He takes seventy years to get a son of his old age. What others get quickly enough and enjoy for a long time takes him seventy years to get. And why? Because he is being tried and tested.

Is that not madness! (p. 67)

When God ordered Abraham to kill his son, God ordered Abraham to sacrifice that which was perhaps dearest to him in the world. His duty to God was terrible and horrifying.

Kierkegaard explains that it must have been this way, for such is the nature of sacrifice:

He must love Isaac with all his heart; inasmuch as God demands Isaac, Abraham must love him, if possible, even more dearly, and only then can he *sacrifice* him, for it is indeed this love for Isaac which by its paradoxical opposition to his love for God makes his act a sacrifice. (p. 65)

And the author continues, “Only at the moment when his act is in absolute contradiction to his feeling, only then does he sacrifice Isaac” (p. 65). In order for a sacrifice to be a sacrifice, it must be the sacrifice of what one loves. One cannot sacrifice what one does not care for. Sacrificing what one hates is in no way a sacrifice, but to sacrifice what one loves more than anything is the ultimate sacrifice, which is exactly what God asked for.

Kierkegaard articulates and understands Abraham’s pain so well! And if the pain of his sacrifice were not enough – indeed, this pain is so great it’s hard to imagine it worse! – Kierkegaard observes how Abraham’s inability to speak or be understood by anyone increases his burden. Kierkegaard has the insight, desire, and emotional endurance to dive deeper into Abraham’s anxiety and torment. He emphasizes that Abraham cannot talk to anyone about his absolute duty. He must remain silent about it. He can speak of the good of the family and ethics. He may speak truthfully, profoundly, and at length about his love for his son. But Abraham can say nothing about sacrificing him and the pain this duty causes him. He cannot speak, which intensifies his pain and anguish. Kierkegaard writes:

Abraham keeps silent – but he *cannot* speak. Therein lies the distress and anxiety. For if I can make myself intelligible when I speak, I do not speak even though I go on talking incessantly day and night. This is Abraham’s situation. He can say everything, but one thing he cannot say, and yet if he cannot say it, that is, say it in such a way that another person understands it, he does not speak. The relief in speaking is that it translates me into the universal. (p. 100)

To find one’s voice and make oneself heard is a revealing, ethical, and relieving act.

Therapists know that repression is one of the most common causes of psychological pain

and the revelation of the repressed brings relief. But if Abraham did speak, he would be stopped from fulfilling his divine duty. His son might flee from him. His wife might hold him back. His fellow men might detain him, calling him a madman and criminal. No one would understand him, for no one bore witness to God demanding this from Abraham. There is no evidence or proof. The duty was appointed to him alone. Even if he did speak, he would be unintelligible and completely misunderstood. Kierkegaard understands this as well as a therapist might. Like a therapist, he offers an understanding of Abraham that would relieve the pain of his repression if only Kierkegaard could travel back in time and fulfill his desire to accompany Abraham on his terrible journey. But he cannot go back in time and Abraham did not have a therapist, though we can imagine Kierkegaard would have been a good fit.

While we can understand how he remains silent in order to fulfill his duty, Abraham's silence also has two philosophical ramifications. First, his decision not to speak was a moral decision not made in self interest. Like the gift of death he made for God (or genuinely attempted to make, since God at the very moment of decision held back the knife over Abraham's son), the pain of his silence was also a gift for the divine. His silence was not simply pain, it was a moral pain. To suffer silence is an ethical act of faith. It was a moral decision he made constantly every day of his burden. Every day he faced the pain of what he must do and summoned the faith required to fulfill his duty despite himself. He desired the consolation of revealing himself to family and friends, yet it was something he nonetheless had to refuse.

Second, by not speaking, Abraham betrayed universal ethics. Although Kierkegaard's readers may not have been subjected to a divine duty like Abraham, they

nonetheless may have trembled in fear before its philosophical implications: in deciding to sacrifice his son, Abraham also sacrificed ethics. For Abraham was an ethical man, he obligated himself to the family and the common law of men, and it was exactly this ethical commitment that he sacrificed as well in the act of sacrificing his son. In order to be ethical before God, he acted in the most unethical way, sacrificing the very morality that he and Kierkegaard's readers so valued. But in the same gesture, he affirmed a higher, absolute ethics of faith on which universal ethics rests. In every instant of his silence, at every moment when he did not reveal himself to anyone, he sacrificed the ethics of man on the altar of an ethics of faith. If he did not do so, however, universal ethics would still be lost. As in the biblical story of the tower built on sand, the sand beneath the tower would wash away and the structure would similarly fall to ruin in the sea. Since universal ethics depended on faith in God for justification, if Abraham lost his faith then universal ethics would be lost as well. The paradox that Abraham's sacrifice poses is that one's absolute, ethical duty to God can justify a "suspension of the ethical" (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006, Problem I, pp. 46-59).

Again I am struck by how good of a therapist Kierkegaard might have been for Abraham. The philosopher articulates the prophet's predicament so well and with such appreciation, empathy, and compassion. Kierkegaard's conceptualization of Abraham's problem as a moral problem testifies to Kierkegaard's capacity to withhold judgment and meet Abraham exactly where he's at. On the one hand, Kierkegaard affirms the universal ethical position which judges Abraham to be a murderer. Kierkegaard can give words for this judgment that Abraham feels passed on him, by others as much as himself. On the other hand, Kierkegaard affirms the duty Abraham has towards God and honors the

silence Abraham must keep despite the pain it causes him. Kierkegaard offers words and justification for Abraham's terrible position in which ethics must be suspended. Indeed, Kierkegaard himself has found his way into Abraham's silence by suspending the ethical. Kierkegaard connects with Abraham so well because the philosopher himself has suspended the ethical. His attitude towards Abraham is insightful and empathic because it is first and foremost nonjudgmental. In his philosophical exploration of Abraham's sacrifice, Kierkegaard creates a space – albeit a written one – where Abraham's silence can be broken. The philosopher – and we readers too for that matter – finds himself dwelling with Abraham's pain and paradoxical problems in a space where it is safe to reveal oneself without being judged. Unlike another observer who might judge Abraham as mad and detain him, Kierkegaard would ride by his side, would not judge him, and would thereby provide Abraham the opportunity to find his voice and relieve his pain, at least in part, by revealing himself in full to another who can hold and feel the contradictions that define the prophet.

If Kierkegaard were to fulfill his desire to go back in time and accompany Abraham on his journey, the philosopher would find himself included in and bound to the prophet's silence. Kierkegaard would not enact judgment of Abraham according to social norms and laws in general, though he would be aware of them. Like a therapist, he would suspend judgment when listening to Abraham, his would-be client. Also like a therapist, he would find himself bound to confidentiality. Just as he understands that Abraham must remain silent despite himself, so too would Kierkegaard be obligated to silence. He would have to convey this to Abraham to earn his trust. Otherwise, Abraham could never reveal himself to Kierkegaard, who in turn would then be unable to bear

witness to Abraham's journey and empathize with his pain. Abraham would be alone and silent. In order for him to speak, Kierkegaard would be bound to the very silence that Abraham would finally break in therapeutic conversation.

As I imagine the two together on the long route to Mount Moriah, I see them trekking through the desert and finding sanctuary together in a shared tent. This image I've conjured in my mind's eye serves as a metaphor for understanding what can happen therapeutically between the two. The word 'tent' comes from the Latin verb 'tendo,' meaning 'to stretch.' A tent is that which has been stretched over oneself to provide shelter. Similarly, sitting in the tent together in conversation, Abraham's silence might also stretch to include Kierkegaard like a tent, providing privacy and separation from the world beyond its shelter. There, he could find his voice even though everywhere else this is exactly what he should not do. He could find relief from the *tension* (another *tendo* word) of silence without yet submitting himself to the judgment of social norms. By no longer being alone with his silent pains, Abraham would not be stretched so thin, could find some relief. He might also find a sanctuary for moral reflection. With the philosopher, Abraham might survey the voice that in the outside world is silent and decide what he *intends* (another *tendo* word) to reveal. How far does he want his voice to stretch into the community? What is best kept silent? And at what cost? What *intensity* (another *tendo* word) of silence can he bear? Should his voice remain hidden in the tent of the therapy room, or should the tent be broken down, stretched out like a canvas, and used to launch the voice into the world like a child being propelled into the air? How will the world of others judge him should he speak? Clearly, Kierkegaard is ready for a conversation with Abraham about morals and silence. As we've seen, Kierkegaard has

the words for describing the situation, excellent insight into the moral dimension of the struggle, and the desire to support Abraham in his decision. Abraham could finally express his pain that he must work so hard to mask. He could finally confess his terrible burden and suffer openly with another. He could finally find his voice. The confidentiality of their conversation and Kierkegaard's suspension of judgment offer a short circuit in the ethics of the universal that allow these moral questions to be asked and the silence to be broken. The philosopher offers the prophet the opportunity to find relief through speech without entering into the universal. The imperative to reveal himself would be both satisfied and not satisfied. The universal ethic would be suspended, though he could reveal himself nonetheless.

I would like to summarize Kierkegaard's philosophical, therapeutic insights with reference to finding voice, but first I feel compelled to note that in suspending the ethical Kierkegaard offers what another person also does in the Muslim version of Abraham's sacrifice. In this telling, it is not Isaac who God demands as the lamb for the sacrifice, but an older, mature son: Ishmael. The age signifies a critical difference. Unlike Isaac, Ishmael is old enough and wise enough to know his place in the journey he takes with his father. The older son knows that he is to be sacrificed and that God has asked this of his father. Ishmael does not run and does not waver. He does not want to die, and yet despite himself and in faith he follows his father and plays his part. He believes in Abraham and does not judge him. Abraham can speak to Ishmael. He bears witness and supports him, nourishing Abraham's faith and joining him in his pain, offering him the opportunity to find his voice as Kierkegaard does though in even more profound a way, for Ishmael is not a caring stranger but a faithful son ready for his role as the sacrificed.

That he can suspend the ethical and meet his father with compassion and wisdom despite the fact that doing so will forfeit his own life makes Ishmael's capacity for non-judgment, compassionate listening, and faith perhaps the most striking of all. In Kierkegaard's, Christian version of the story, Abraham has no one, which makes the pain of his situation more desperate and the therapist's desire to help him more passionate. Even with Ishmael as a support, one might still feel compelled to go back in time and offer Abraham support and some relief, though Abraham's situation would be less desperate with a son sharing his burden. Indeed, a therapist might want to be there for Ishmael as well as Abraham since both are put to such terrible trials that they cannot speak of to others!

With reference to finding voice, I will now summarize Kierkegaard's philosophical insights that demonstrate how good of a therapist he might have been. Kierkegaard desires to feel Abraham's pain with him, to bear witness to his struggle, and to see him as he is in the process of his struggle in as human a way as possible. Having thought through the meaning of sacrifice, the philosopher may offer Abraham words for what he's experiencing day by day whether he likes it or not. Kierkegaard understands the experience of sacrifice, that is, how to articulate the idea of sacrifice while at the same time feeling it empathically, joining Abraham in the act of understanding. If Abraham were unable to describe his situation, Kierkegaard could help him find the words necessary to express himself. Such an expression Kierkegaard also believes would be relieving. He bears the basic assumption of therapists, that finding one's voice brings relief. Similarly, a therapist might take up Kierkegaard's understanding of sacrifice and use it to help any client in a position of sacrifice find their voice. The philosopher's insights may have been born from his analysis of Abraham's situation, but they are

insights into the nature of sacrifice in general, applicable to more than just Abraham's situation. Allow me, reader, to illustrate the use of such an understanding of sacrifice with reference to one of many experiences in which these insights have served me...

The Counseling Center can't be missed. A grand, brick, brand new building, it faces the parking lot outside the gym and student center with the words "Counseling Center" in bold, metal letters above the door. The staff carry mixed feelings about the visibility of their new home. On the one hand, the great presence of the building, which looks nothing like a hospital or ER, welcomes students to enter and exit as they would any other university building. People casually come and go through the front door all day long. With so visible a building and so many coming and going, it's only natural that counseling seem less and less foreign to the masses. On the other hand, those who never enter the building and never venture into a therapist's office may concoct bizarre fantasies about the students seen entering and exiting through the front door as well as what goes on within the center, itself. Those watching may judge and those who attend therapy may feel judged. The stigma about therapy may be decreasing and certainly the visibility and volume of people utilizing counseling services contributes to destigmatization. However, the stigma isn't nonexistent yet either. It's a mixed bag.

On this particular day, a student sits waiting for his first appointment with me. We've been going back and forth over email for a month now, trying again and again to find a common meeting time despite his consistent sabotaging. Although I've stated repeatedly that we're open from roughly nine to five, he consistently replies to my emails saying something along the lines of, "I can't make those times you have available, I can

only come at 6pm or 8pm.” When we do find a time for the first appointment, he cancels last minute or doesn’t show. In fact, he may only be here today because in my most recent email I informed him that I’m quite busy and this, my fourth attempt to give him an appointment that he supposedly wants, will be my last attempt. In part, it’s not altogether his choice to be here. His ambivalence fits his situation. He’s been referred by an authority figure who expects him to come to counseling. In fact, that’s the reason I’m giving him this last chance. If the student has the desire to engage in counseling beyond the need to fulfill some obligation, then this can work out for the best. If he doesn’t, then no order in the world could make therapy useful for him. We’ll find out what’s what soon enough. I appreciate his predicament before even meeting him. Although I don’t know why, he’s coming to counseling initially because he’s been told to. Not the best start to a therapy, but not an impossible start either.

Greeting the student in the lobby under the bright fluorescent lights, I shake his hand, introduce myself, and invite him to follow me back to my office. The walls turn from green to blue as we head towards my door. Walking into my office, the aesthetic mood shifts. Plants grow by the windows, sunlight dances along the windowsill and walls, lamps set a mellow mood, and the dark wood of the frames and art make things feel natural and open rather than artificial and predetermined. The cold, blinding, fluorescent lighting never turns on in my office. The student sits in a chair beneath an original photo of downtown Pittsburgh, its surrounding bridges, the connecting rivers, and rippled clouds as far as the eye can see. I miss that scene. After all, I’ve left the city and friends to follow the path my career has demanded of me whether I like it or not.

If I'm going to be of any service to this student, I need to meet him where he's at, earn his trust, prove that I can understand him, and have both of us learn that I can sincerely care about him. We need to establish a trusting, working relationship. How to begin? Well, I begin with what I know and feel from him in our emails. I begin with appreciation for his coming in, stating that I imagine he doesn't want to be here and this might very well be the last thing he wants to be doing right now. This is a sacrifice.

Not a bad start. In general, my style of counseling follows honesty as the best policy. Sincerity goes a long way. He responds in turn by genuinely admitting to how little he wants to be here. He owns his resistance and I help him find words for it. We briefly discuss why he has to be here. Things warm up between us despite his resistance. Indeed, acknowledging and honoring his resistance is the very thing that brings us closer.

Over the course of the hour, the 'despite himself' becomes the theme of our hour-long conversation. We both learn that doing what he least wants to do will be the object of our work. Suddenly, unexpectedly, shockingly he lost someone very close to him... a person he could have heart to hearts with and who nurtured him. A man of great intelligence, the student has wonderful and troubling powers of avoidance and intellectualization. The very last thing he wants is to confess and grapple with the fact that the death has effected him and has the power to change his life. For months, he's exerted every ounce of his being avoiding feelings and thoughts about the death. He hates talking to anyone similar in age or appearance to the deceased. He has attempted to move forward as if the death is nothing to him. He tells himself again and again, nothing can stop you from being who you are, you are a rock, you are an unwavering ship, you are in control. Yet, on long trips when he's listened to every CD he has, he breaks down

crying, thinking of his loss. In long conversations with a loved and trusted companion, he eventually speaks of and feels his loss even though he didn't mean to. Once an excellent student, his work, grades, and overall scholarly production have decreased quite significantly. He's in a kind of academic trouble that defies his understanding of who he is. He cannot be who he knows himself to be anymore just as he can no longer avoid our conversation.

I listen to him, I follow his thinking, and I mirror what he says, showing I've understood. Then, I push him playfully in as safe a way as I can. I tell him the truth of my assessment. I tell him that he's realized that the death has affected him whether he likes it or not. He's tried to proceed with the status quo and it simply isn't possible. He knows this too, and though it pains him, he acknowledges the truth of it. He needs me to make him talk about the person he's lost, what the person meant to him, the role the person played in his life, and the meaning of his loss. In a caring, sincere, and straight-talking tone, I tell him I have to make him do exactly what he doesn't want to because he can't do it himself. I know he doesn't want to do this. He knows he doesn't want to do this. We've been discussing just that for an hour. It's going to be hard for both of us. Sitting, facing each other, mutually recognizing what our work together must be, we're struck with the absurdity of it and laugh. There's something humorous about the tragic and true. He says he doesn't want to do this and in the same breath agrees to the endeavor with another laugh and smile. Together, we have just embarked on a journey that for him is a sacrifice. I've told him as much and in so doing I've offered him the words for what he already knew but didn't yet know how to say. With my help, he has begun to find his voice. After our initial phase of work, we planned a break in treatment

so that the client could assess for himself whether he wished to continue therapy or not. When he determined solely for himself to return, our deeper work began, and the deeper damage is best...

While this story illustrates that Kierkegaard's philosophical insights into the nature of sacrifice are useful for therapists, I cannot say the same of his most profound notion of the suspension of the ethical. It's this concept and capacity that makes Kierkegaard most suited to be Abraham's therapist. The philosopher can bear the suspension of the ethical, both in his ability to grasp Abraham's situation as a moral predicament related to faith and in his nonjudgmental attitude. He demonstrates the capacity to hold Abraham's paradoxical position in confidence, enabling the prophet to speak what must not be spoken knowing that Kierkegaard will honor the importance of his silence and will be as bound to it as Abraham is in good faith. It is this condition, more than any other, that enables Abraham to find his voice, find relief, and find another to join him in his pain. But what can we take from these insights regarding the suspension of the ethical in general? After all, Abraham is a most unique figure in a most peculiar relationship with God. And Kierkegaard is writing about ethics at a specific time and place where we don't find ourselves now. How are we to learn about therapy in general from such a specific and unusual example? Kierkegaard may be a good therapist fit for Abraham, but that does not make him a good therapist for anyone. Nor does it show us how we might learn something about therapy in general from his insights into the suspension of the ethical regarding Abraham. He can help the prophet find his voice, but can the philosopher's insights help me and others find our philosophical voice as

therapists or understand how therapy in general is fundamentally about finding voice? If we consider only *Fear and Trembling*, then we are left with too specific an instance of the suspension of the ethical for generalization. However, by following a philosophical interpretation of Kierkegaard's text by another, contemporary philosophical star, we may proceed another step closer to the object of this inquiry into philosophy, psychotherapy, and finding voice.

Chapter 3: Derrida the Supervisor

Suffering a Double Secrecy

Well over two hundred years after the first publication of *Fear and Trembling*, French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida² (1995) returns to and reinterprets Kierkegaard's reading of Abraham's sacrifice. It is a very different time and place than the one the nineteenth century philosopher knew. There is no longer a union of church and state in most European or Western countries. Quite to the contrary, the Western world has become increasingly secular and continues to do so. Hegelian ethics still has prestige, but it is not the prevailing ethics of the day. Indeed, to claim that one ethics prevailed over all the rest would be difficult in the late twentieth century when Derrida wrote about Abraham's sacrifice. So would it be today, which is not much later. After all, we're in the age of internet communication when many, perhaps even infinite, perspectives on any subject are at one's fingertips, so close to the keyboard so constantly. In the chapter entitled "Whom to Give to (Knowing not to Know)" from his book *The Gift of Death*, Derrida closely follows Kierkegaard's arguments in *Fear and Trembling*, introducing them with his own emphases. Despite closely following Kierkegaard, Derrida ultimately revises Abraham's paradoxical ethical position, making it applicable to everyday life. While Kierkegaard might have found such a move intolerable, Derrida believes that by generalizing Kierkegaard's insights into Abraham's moral position, he is "at the same time reinforcing its most extreme ramifications" (p. 78).

Derrida generalizes Abraham's frightful moral predicament by scandalously conceptualizing Abraham's relationship with God as an instance of a very particular kind of relationship, which he refers to as a relationship with the Other. Like Kierkegaard,

Derrida offers compelling words for the horror that Abraham's sacrifice inspires in his readers, the philosophers, and especially Abraham himself:

The story is no doubt monstrous, outrageous, barely conceivable: a father is ready to put to death his beloved son, his irreplaceable loved one, and that because the Other, the great Other asks him or orders him without giving the slightest explanation. An infanticide father who hides what he is going to do from his son and from his family without knowing why, what could be more abominable, what mystery could be more frightful vis-a-vis love, humanity, the family, or morality?

But isn't this also the most common thing? what the most cursory examination of the concept of responsibility cannot fail to affirm? (pp. 67-68)

The story is monstrous, outrageous, barely conceivable, but isn't it also the most basic aspect of the experience of responsibility? What a daring philosophical move! The philosopher draws attention to the horror of the sacrifice – to Abraham's fear and trembling before his duty to God - in order to affirm that just such a horrible experience teaches us the meaning of responsibility for us all. The thrust of Derrida's argument is rooted in the power of his assertion that Abraham is to God what each of us – Abraham included – is to the Other.

Our guiding question, then, is how is it that Abraham's relationship with God is an example – perhaps the ultimate example – of a general experience of a relationship with the Other? And how does a general experience of such a relationship in turn generalize Abraham's moral predicament to a common experience of responsibility? And what does such a philosophical conceptualization teach us about psychotherapy as finding voice? Three insights will structure our path towards answering these questions.

First, the relation with the other is one constituted by difference not similarity. Second, Abraham suffers a double secrecy in his relation to God and his family as well as community, which is a consequence of any relation to the Other. And third, Abraham's suffering a double secrecy in relation to the Other exemplifies the relationship to the other as a singular relationship that no other can have in your place – a relation that leaves you alone suffering a double secrecy that demands sacrifice.

Abraham's relationship with God – like the relationship with the Other – is asymmetrical and defined by difference. While Abraham is a man on earth in the company of men, God is transcendent and absent. God appears to Abraham from on high and from a place beyond human knowledge or experience. Abraham cannot call on God or demand reasons from God. No one could. Abraham's powerlessness to know God's reasons defines the difference between them and the asymmetry of the relationship.

Derrida writes:

If the other were to share his reasons with us by explaining them to us, if he were to speak to us all the time without any secrets, he wouldn't be the other, we would share a type of homogeneity. (p. 57)

If Abraham were on equal terms with God, if he related to him as an equal, God would not be the Other – that is, beyond knowledge, transcendent, and able to call Abraham to a duty whether he likes it or not. Derrida characterizes this asymmetrical relationship paradoxically though nonetheless accurately as a “relation without relation” (p. 78).

While Kierkegaard refers again and again to Abraham's silence, Derrida is drawn repeatedly to Abraham's secrecy. It's a subtle shift in rhetoric resulting in a fresh perspective on Abraham's pain. To be in secret is very much like being silent from

Kierkegaard's point of view. To be in secret is also to be silent, suffering the pain of non-disclosure. However, to be in secret does not simply mean being silent. One can be in secret by not speaking what one knows. One can also be in secret because one does not know the very secret that one bears. In such a case, one maintains the pain of silence not by choice but because one does not know. It is a mysterious secret that one must bear because its hidden content remains unknown. While Derrida honors Kierkegaard by affirming that he too reflected on Abraham's suffering secrecy, Derrida goes further than Kierkegaard in developing the idea. Derrida takes up the idea of secrecy to follow Kierkegaard in articulating, understanding, and empathizing with Abraham's painful situation:

In Fear and Trembling Kierkegaard reflects on this double secret: that between God and Abraham but also that between the latter and his family. Abraham doesn't speak of what God has ordered him alone to do, he doesn't speak of it to Sarah, or to Eliezer, or to Isaac. He must keep the secret, but it is also a secret that he *must* keep as a double necessity because in the end he *can only* keep it; he doesn't know it, he is unaware of its ultimate rhyme and reason. He is sworn to secrecy because he is in secret. (p. 59)

Sworn to secrecy because he is in secret, Abraham suffers a double secrecy. First of all, he wishes he could confess his terrible obligation to the Other to his family, to his friends, or his fellows. He wishes he did not have to bear this burden alone. But he knows what they would say. They would tell him what some part of him tells himself every moment of every day, "You cannot do this. You are becoming a murderer of the worst kind: a father ready to kill his son." They would stop him from performing his divine task, so he

keeps it secret from them. Second, because God –the Other – has called him to this duty, he does not know why it has been asked of him. God keeps secret about his reasons. Abraham's relationship to the Other – like every relationship to the Other – leaves him bound to a secret he does not know whether he likes it or not. And so he cannot tell his family why he must kill his son. He cannot explain himself because God has not explained himself to Abraham. He suffers a double secrecy that anyone suffers in relation to the Other, who calls on us to act without giving reasons, leaving us sworn to secrecy because we are in secret, unable to justify ourselves before others yet bound to a secret duty nonetheless.

Derrida draws attention to how suffering a double secrecy may also be characterized as being absolutely alone in a position of singularity:

To the extent that, in not saying the essential thing, namely, the secret between God and him, Abraham doesn't speak, he assumes the responsibility that consists in always being alone, entrenched in one's own singularity at the moment of decision. Just as no one can die in my place, no one can make a decision, what we call "a decision," in my place. (pp. 59-60)

Since God – the Other – has called on Abraham, he is alone in his responsibility. God has appeared to him and no one else. There were no witnesses. Abraham can offer no proof. More to the point, no one could take Abraham's place. One cannot will the transcendent God to appear and place a call or duty upon oneself. One can only receive the call, not place it. The Other is beyond human control or intention. No one could substitute themselves for Abraham. Similarly, Abraham could not ask someone to take his place. He has been called. It is his burden alone whether he likes it or not.

In summary, Derrida emphasizes the following aspects of Abraham's relationship with God: God is different in that he is beyond Abraham's knowledge or control; Abraham cannot speak to anyone of his secret task because doing so would prevent him from accomplishing it; Abraham cannot tell anyone God's reasons for calling on him because he does not know them himself; and Abraham's relationship with God leaves him utterly alone in painful silence with a task he did not appoint to himself but is his responsibility nonetheless. While Kierkegaard is drawn to Abraham's pain like a moth to the flame from a position of empathy, Derrida affirms Abraham's singularity yet paradoxically approaches the prophet out of sympathy. The philosopher identifies himself and his readers with the terrible position of the prophet as he writes: "Abraham himself is in secret, cut off from both man and God. But that is perhaps what we share with him" (p. 79). And he continues:

We share with Abraham what cannot be shared, a secret we know nothing about, neither him nor us. To share a secret is not to know or to reveal the secret, it is to share we know not what: nothing that can be determined. (p. 80)

This is Derrida's most valuable offering for understanding therapy and his radical departure from Kierkegaard: at the moment when we are most alone, suffering a double secrecy, we paradoxically find ourselves sharing an experience that any relation to the Other entails. The very secrecy that makes one suffer singularly in silence does not forbid one from relating to this very pain of singularity and secrecy. Although one cannot relate to the particulars of Abraham's situation, one can relate to the formal structure of it, namely what it means to bear a double secrecy in relation to an Other.

Derrida somewhat scandalously finds parallels between Abraham's relation to God and our everyday relationship to Others that put us in a similar position. The philosopher writes:

... what can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to every other ... in particular my relation to my neighbor or my loved ones who are as inaccessible to me, as secret and transcendent as Jahweh. (p. 78, my omission)

Here, he is referring to the kind of commitment that love and responsibility entail. Ultimately, it does not matter why we love who or what we love because we don't really know. It is not a matter of justification or deciding who to love in the sense of a calculated decision. Rather, like God who calls on Abraham, the others in our life – that is, our loved ones, our neighbors, our inspired and passionate pursuits in work and life – place a call on us that we can only receive.

Like Abraham, we are left to decide whether or not to live up to our duty to the Other, left to accept responsibility for the call placed on us, and yet we did not ask for the burden of such a decision. And like Abraham, there are other Others placing a call on us. Derrida reinterprets Abraham's moral predicament not as a decision to sacrifice universal ethics for absolute ethics, but as a decision to sacrifice his duty to one Other for the sake of another Other. Allow me to explain further. By reinterpreting Abraham's relationship to God as a relationship to the Other, Derrida views Abraham's relationship to God in the way he also views Abraham's relation to his family. His commitment and love for his family is ultimately not justified by any rhyme or reason. Just as God has placed a call on Abraham, so too, deep down, at his core, Abraham truly does not know why he loves

his family: he simply does. They have placed a call on him as another Other in his life, besides God. The terror of Abraham's position – his fear and trembling before God in the moment of sacrifice, as he raises his knife above his son – is its resonance with anyone in a position of responsibility. Derrida writes:

As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others. I offer a gift of death, I betray, I don't need to raise my knife over my son on Mount Moriah for that. Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am doing that, raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably. (p. 68)

From Derrida's perspective, everyday we are called to by an Other in such a way that we must choose to sacrifice our commitment to one Other for another Other. To respond to the call of his passion for philosophy, Derrida must sacrifice his responsibility to also respond to the call of his family or of friends. In response to the call of his family, he might also sacrifice in that moment a commitment to passionate work or another Other altogether. He rephrases Abraham's paradox in terms of responsibility: in order to be absolutely responsible before an Other, I must in that very moment act irresponsibly towards another Other or the other Others whose call I am also responding to.

On the one hand, Derrida's insights set the stage for considering Kierkegaard's relationship to Abraham as the kind of relationship a therapist has with a client in general and the suspension of the ethical as a defining characteristic of the therapeutic space. On

the other hand, Derrida's generalizations have the potential to go so far that he undermines his own insights. By asserting that everyday we each find ourselves in a position of sacrifice similar to Abraham's, Derrida loses sight of the role the law and transgression play in the sacrificial drama. God demanded Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, which we can easily imagine would have been a sacrifice for Abraham whether it was forbidden by universal ethics or not. But it was forbidden, which changes the situation significantly. Had there been no law against infanticide, Abraham might have spoken to his fellows about it, for they would not be obliged to uphold their common law by stopping him. Similarly, when Derrida goes so far as to suggest that when he chooses to pursue his commitment to his family rather than a passionate interest that calls him at the same time, we can imagine that he could share his experience of sacrifice with his family or peers without fear of being stopped. Granted, he might not ultimately know why he so loves philosophy or what reason there is for his devotion and attraction to his wife, and in this sense he remains in secret, called by the Other who gives no reasons. However, in everyday ways we are prepared for these kinds of decisions that make the sense of sacrifice less pronounced or less emphatically constitutive of the situation. We have ways of speaking about priorities and obligations that allow room for these little sacrifices of which – in my opinion – Derrida makes too much of at times.

Allow me to temper the drama of his reading. Derrida's generalization holds with the following clarification: we all may face a sacrificial position that parallels Abraham's in so far as responding to the call of an Other requires us to sacrifice an obligation to another Other in the form of a transgression that institutes a double secrecy. When I

decide to stay late at work rather than return home, for instance, I am making a sacrifice but I need not be quiet about it. As Derrida argues, I may not be able to ultimately justify why I have taken on the responsibility of home or work in the particular way I have, but that is not suffering a double secrecy as Abraham's sacrifice exemplifies. When a patient calls upon a doctor to administer a treatment that is illegal but may very well save the person's life, for another example, the sacrifice the doctor makes in treating the patient requires that he also remain silent and secret about it. He suffers a double secrecy, not knowing why this patient found him or why he feels he must treat him and being in the position vis-à-vis the law and his peers of keeping silent and secret about it. Or consider another example. A young woman uses contraception but despite precautions finds herself pregnant with the father gone forever. Furthermore, her family feels so strongly about abortion that even discussing it is clearly forbidden. She feels strongly that terminating the pregnancy is her duty. She also has her family as her primary support and she wants to honor the family ethos. She finds herself suffering a double secrecy, singularly and alone, not knowing why she feels so compelled to abort the baby and also unable to speak with her loved ones about it.

With this revision of Derrida's insights in mind, we may return to Kierkegaard's profound notion of the suspension of the ethical to teach us about therapy in general as finding voice. Imagine again that Kierkegaard fulfills his desire to go back in time and accompany Abraham on his journey, though this time with a shift in rhetoric paralleling Derrida's rephrasing. The philosopher would find himself included in and bound to the prophet's secrecy. Kierkegaard would not enact judgment of Abraham according to social norms and the law in general, though he would no doubt be aware of them. The

philosopher would bind himself to Abraham's secrecy, earning his confidence. Sitting in the sanctuary of a shared tent, a canvas stretched above them to provide privacy and separation from the world beyond the shelter, Abraham's secrets may safely and similarly stretch to include the philosopher. The prophet trusts the philosopher, whose duty is the keeping of and dwelling in secrets and empathizing with the suffering accompanying them. Kierkegaard understands and can articulate the importance of Abraham's secrecy. Through his understanding of both sacrifice and double secrecy, he empathically helps the prophet find his voice, holding and articulating the tension of Abraham's terrible situation. Kierkegaard may paradoxically both honor the singular position Abraham is in and in so doing relieve the pain of being alone with such a burdensome responsibility. By creating a confidential space, the philosopher creates the conditions needed for Abraham to find his voice exactly when he shouldn't. The philosopher offers a suspension of the ethical such that the prophet may find the relief of speech without yet being translated into the universal and being judged according to the laws and social norms. Such is the nature of every therapy. While the law, social norms, and local rules such as those instituted within a family may construct a situation demanding double secrecy, by endorsing therapy as a lawful endeavor they also offer a short circuit by which the pain of secrecy may be relieved. The very thing that must not be said, that must remain secret, may be spoken and explored without the consequences of enacting such a transgression outside the therapeutic space. In short, the law and social norms endorse the existence of a space in which one may find their voice without yet breaking the secrecy to which they are bound. Indeed, the meaning, consequences, and possibility

of breaking this secrecy and finding one's voice outside the therapeutic space may itself be explored, practiced, and considered.

Relief

The philosophical reading of Abraham's sacrifice has perhaps surprisingly furnished us with insights into psychotherapy. The reflections on sacrifice, suffering double secrecy, the call of the Other, the relief of speech, and the empathic suspension of the ethical are rich conceptualizations for describing what therapy offers. Despite the few examples given, we as of yet have failed to demonstrate the use of all of these concepts with reference to a particular case. Allow me, reader, to illustrate the value of these insights with reference to my work with a student. I will introduce the case with a short vignette in which the client discovers for herself the kind of relief that therapy offers...

Counseling Services can be difficult to find on campus unless you're looking for it. To get there, you have to follow a strip of blacktop along a dark stone wall around the back of a building. The strip is just wide enough for a car. Usually, a police officer sits in an automobile right where the blacktop begins, making it difficult to see that there is anything at all at the back of the building. The rear of the building is not at all like the front, which faces a clearing of the greenest grass where students sit, read, talk, and play. People walk the paths around and through the clearing. They sit at picnic or coffee tables and watch as many come and go on their way to the academic buildings along the perimeter. From this side of the building you would never know that the black top strip leading to counseling services even exists on the other side. The building rests on a slope

such that what is the basement on one side is the ground floor entrance on the other. In short, our front door is truly a back door that is difficult to find - nearly impossible to find by accident. Counseling Services is safe and secluded.

Inside, you're obviously in a converted basement. Various pipes and ventilations ducts hang suspended just below the ceiling, running water and air through the dorms and classrooms above. It's not as attractive a place as I'm sure the staff would like. We're buried down below the lively hustle and bustle of changing classes and dormroom drama above. There are no stairs connecting the basement to the building above. There are no elevators. The only way in is around back through the door with an old, black, heavy metal lock on it that a blacksmith may have made years ago. It's fitting, in a way, that Counseling Services is in a basement and is so hard to find. We're protected from the many eyes and ears of students and faculty: a private place where secrets reside.

I'm in my office talking with a client. She sits in the velvet blue chair across from me. We're surrounded by windows on two walls. Every blind is closed. Despite the absence of sunlight, the plants in the room still manage to grow. The lamps in my room cast a warm light far less severe than the cold, florescent lighting that I refuse to turn on. Like the lighting, the room feels warm to me. I'm comfortable here, hidden away behind closed blinds in a basement office, hearing my client articulate for the first time a series of mysterious events from her past.

She doesn't remember much from a few years of her childhood. What she does remember is remarkable, intriguing, and bizarre. Everything seemed to begin over the holidays around her 5th birthday. She remembers opening presents with her parents and sibling. She remembers something happened, but what she's not sure. She has an image

of a knife firmly in her mind. Perhaps something happened in a kitchen or maybe it was the bedroom. She's not sure, maybe both. The rest of her recollections don't have a specific time or date that they occurred. It all happened over the course of a couple years that blur together while the individual memories are nonetheless vivid. She remembers watching the news during a great flood outside the city. She saw the river pass over a graveyard. The tide pulled caskets out of the ground that floated quickly downstream like dead men's boats on the river Styx. She visited both parents in separate places at separate times. One had a white, private room with a bed. The other was in a room with other people around. She remembers a police station where she sat and clutched her stuffed animal so tightly. She remembers the death of a relative. She had a dream of her front yard in which a great, blue backhoe digs up an old tree and buries her relative's casket there. She still has this dream now and then. She knows she lived with a grandparent for a while after that holiday and that her parents were divorced. This is everything she remembers, though I have left out some specifics. They are pieces to a puzzle that she fits together as best she can, not having any idea of what the final product is supposed to look like. This is all she knows of her childhood story from these years. No family member has filled in the gaps with missing pieces or provided the whole story. When she has asked, they avoid the question and promise to tell her someday over many drinks. Someday is yet to come.

How mysterious. I check in with her as we move along. My primary concern is that she feel secure and accompanied on this strange trip. I listen patiently and closely, asking simple questions to facilitate her remembering. I repeat some of the memories back to her. I give words to the sense of mystery about her past and wonder what it's like

for her to carry this mystery with her and even face it here, now, in this room. She says that she's shared a few of these details with different people at different times. Never before has she looked at all the pieces together. Never before has she faced the mystery like this. She works so hard in this session. Her facial expression reveals her concentration as she finds words for images and remembrances that didn't have words before. She takes a previously disconnected series of private thoughts and offers them to me in language. I bear witness to them. I carry them with her. They are secrets that now have a home in my office. She is not alone.

A week later, we have another session. She begins by telling me about her experience immediately after our last talk. She walked out of Counseling Services onto the blacktop where no one could see her. She took a deep breath and felt a great sense of relief. She tells me that a pain had been lifted that she didn't even know she had - that a burden she didn't know she carried had been lifted off her shoulders. She thought to herself, "This is how therapy works." She wants to write a book about her mysterious past and everything we talked about the week before. She feels like the author of her story now, both metaphorically and literally in her desire to write it all down. She thinks it's a damn good mystery and so do I. Therapy offered her relief from the secrets she suffered in silence. In the session the week before, she found her voice...

Like Abraham, the client suffers a double secrecy. First, she shoulders the burden of a mysterious past. Although she would like to know what her fragmented memories are telling her, they offer no explanation, rhyme, or reason. Like God to Abraham, a repressed trauma calls her to the task of remembering, whether she likes it or

not. This is an instance of the call of the Other. She is sworn to secrecy because she is in secret. She neither knows what she is trying to remember nor why her psyche demands that she engage in so difficult a task of remembering in dreamlike fragments.

Nevertheless, she finds herself called to and singularly so. She and she alone is appointed to the mysterious task of remembering. No one can take her place. She is responsible for having the memories which come to her even despite herself. Her relief comes in part from no longer walking her path alone, suffering the silence of secrets.

From this session to our last, I bear witness to her memories which we explore in good faith. By listening to her in an affirming way as she tells her story, we address the first component of the double secrecy. Second, she cannot share her pain or knowledge of her strange past with her family. At least not yet. Prior to coming to college, this student lived for many years without friends. She was closest and is closest to her family. When she has tried to discuss these fragmented memories of her past, wanting them to fill in the gaps, she meets a prohibition. No, the family does not want to and is not ready to discuss whatever it is she's trying so hard to remember. Later they say, over drinks maybe, which amounts to a time that they never want to come. You shouldn't think about it, they tell her. But she does. So the client carries the secret, forbidden to discuss the memories. She loves her family and does not want to betray them. And yet she has these memories whether she wants to or not. Despite herself, she is called to know and also despite herself, she remains in secret about it, honoring the family imperative to not speak of it. She suffers a double secrecy.

When she has spoken to friends about the memories, they have proved unable to stay with her. They seem to lack an insight necessary for relating to the client. They try

to relate by coming up with what the secret might be or by echoing the family's imperative to not think about it. Her friends do not understand a way of relating that Derrida articulates so well: to share a secret is not to know or to reveal the secret, it is to share we know not what: nothing that can be determined. Her therapist, to the contrary, knows this in spades. I help her find words for the pain of carrying the secret and empathically I share it with her, drawn like a moth to the flame. Paradoxically, joining her in relation to the secret, binding myself to the secrecy to which she is bound, offers her relief. We speak about and relate over the secret. She is no longer alone. Furthermore, in dwelling with the secret trauma we learn more and more. The secret *secretes* more and more information, leading us further and further along her path to Mount Moriah.

Similarly, I understand the sacrifice that discussing these memories in the first place entails. I help her find words for the guilt she feels. She loves her family and considers herself, perhaps first and foremost, one of them. Although she knows I will not betray her and that her secret will not be revealed, the feeling and thought of betrayal is present in the room alongside her love and commitment. She is making a sacrifice. Part of her does not want to speak of these memories. She would prefer not to because she loves and obeys her family, who tell her these things must not be spoken. And yet she must speak of them. With me, in the safe sanctuary of my office, she knows she may speak in confidence and in secret. I help her find her voice in such a way that honors her guilt as part of her devotion to her loved ones. We continue to explore the memories, learning more and more, piecing the puzzle together along the way. We also continue to explore the possibility of finding her voice not just with me, but with her family. She

considers transgressing the family imperative to remain silent. We explore the feeling of guilt around the thought of it, the potential consequences, and the strength such a confrontation may require. She knows enough from working with her fragmented memories to have good suspicions about the trauma that calls to be known. We process the ways in which she's testing the waters in the family, teasing out in little ways the kind of reaction she can expect with fuller disclosure. She meets great anxiety and the reiteration of the family imperative. She also makes progress. They sense the disclosure coming and themselves begin to reconsider the law of silence and secrecy. In my office, her voice grows stronger and stronger. She's better and better equipped to discuss her situation with her family. Eventually, she courageously pushes them to the point of revelation. She finds relief from the double secrecy. She finds a voice she never knew she had, the one that can speak of the terrible scene she witnessed, the one that can free her from its hold.

Had it not been for the suspension of the ethical, the student would not have been in or benefited from therapy. She entered a space of non-judgment where paradoxically she was expected to discuss in confidence the very things that should not be said. Although I am not her family, I cared for her and listened. Because I am not her family, I did not have to enforce the imperative not to speak. We shared a mutual trust in a collaborative and secret effort to help her find her voice when she had none, nurture it, and use it to find relief. What effected change was not a mechanical process, it was a relationship set up to be nonjudgmental, genuine, secret, and safe.

Faith

Before departing from Abraham's sacrifice, Kierkegaard the therapist, and Derrida's almost supervisory reinterpretation of the case, allow me to rephrase some of the lessons of this investigation into finding voice in terms of faith. Consider the following example of how making a psychological and life transition with the help of a therapist involves faith. My work with the client just described did not begin with addressing the childhood trauma. She came to counseling for help in a difficult time of transition like so many clients do. For many years previously, she lived without friends, devoting herself to her studies and video games. At the time she came to me, she found herself for the first time in a long time with a craving for social life. She risked opening up to peers and earned a few supportive friends in the process. Also for the first time in a long time, she was struggling with her academic work. On the one hand, she was excited about who she was becoming. She was shedding the skin of social isolation and withdrawal that she'd worn for so long. On the other hand, she was anxious about who she was becoming too. She worried about the academic challenges facing her. More than that, opening up to people and socializing worried her. She sometimes felt uncomfortable and unlike herself in social situations. She wasn't sure why she remained and at times still wanted to remain socially isolated. I described her to herself in a contradictory way that made a lot of sense to both of us. She felt comfortable, even safe, isolating herself from everyone, yet paradoxically she also felt that she was truly finding herself and growing positively by opening up to others. She often denied herself the comfort of social withdrawal, moving forward into a social world that was new, anxiety-provoking, exciting, and mysterious. In other words, she found herself making sacrifices in the name of change. She had so much faith in the goodness of her opening up that she

came to a therapist for support as part of the process. She knew that true change put her faith in herself to the test. Working through her transition from social isolation and withdrawal to a lifestyle that included a larger, social world and trusting friendships required her to transcend herself whether she liked it or not. In me, she found someone to nurture and share her faith in herself, someone to bear witness to and appreciate the sacrifices she was making in order to become a different person without knowing who that person would be.

By having faith in her, I mean first and foremost having respect for her finding her own voice. Ultimately, she did not know why she wanted to open up to others and build intimate relationships with peers when previously she lived without them. Her desire to open up to and get close to others had a self-evident quality for her. She found herself inspired to change. Her inspiration, which came from she knew not where, motivated her more than any reasons, which she articulated secondarily or after the fact. Here we may again make use of the call of the Other to describe her situation. She found herself called to sacrifice her familiar way of being alone and withdrawn in the world. She, herself, responded to this call and she alone decided to work towards change. Towards this end, she made an appointment with a therapist.

There is a temptation for therapists to respond to the client's call for support by telling them what to do and making their decisions for them. In succumbing to this temptation to be directive, therapists undermine the very motivation that brings the client to therapy in the first place. When therapists tell clients what to say and make decisions for them, stuffing their own voice in the client's mouth, therapists undermine the client's sense of responsibility. To be responsible means to be able to respond to the call of the

Other with one's own voice for the call is placed singularly on you. The effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship depends on the therapist's capacity to respect the client's autonomy, thereby honoring the singularity of their position, their responsibility for changing, and the faith such change requires. Considering that therapy is a particular kind of dialogue, the way a therapist concretely offers respect is by respecting the clients' voice. This doesn't mean the therapist neither talks nor offers insight. Quite to the contrary, the therapist speaks in such a way that mirrors, nurtures, and develops the client's voice or offers ideas the client hasn't considered without being directive about it. The strengthening of the client's voice enables him or her to better take responsibility for their life in thoughtful, well articulated ways. When a therapist does not respect the client's voice in the therapeutic dialogue, it indicates that the therapist does not have faith in the client as the one who is responsible, thereby undermining the very faith the client has to have in him or herself to effect the change that brought them to therapy in the first place.

Consider as well that the client who suffered the childhood trauma did not originally present with this as an issue. Through fragmented memories as well as recurring dreams, the traumatic past had placed a call on her for some time though she did not initially disclose these experiences to me in therapy. I suppose that my sharing her faith in herself also nurtured her trust in me, allowing her to feel safe enough to find a voice with which she could address a significant psychological pain that otherwise might not have found relief.

Accomplishing any psychological transition requires quite a bit of faith from beginning to end. While personality theories and diagnostic categories fail to articulate

the work of faith taking place in psychotherapy, we might do just that with the help of philosophy as I've here demonstrated. In doing so, we may depart from mainstream descriptions of psychotherapy outlined in almost mechanical, manualized terms, but we nonetheless follow a path trodden since ancient times by philosophers who, like Epicurus, took up the relief from suffering in others as their aim, art, and responsibility.

Part Two: Finding Voice: Existence and Transcendence in the Therapeutic Relationship

Chapter 4: Inspiration: an Interdisciplinary Method

From 1959 through 1970 at the home of psychiatrist Medard Boss, philosopher Martin Heidegger taught a monthly seminar attended by 50 to 70 of Boss's colleagues (Boss, 2001). Boss offered his fellow psychiatrists the opportunity to engage the phenomenological insights of Heidegger, who himself wished for his philosophy to have an impact on disciplines beyond philosophy - such as psychiatry. Heidegger, Boss, and the guest psychiatrists met two to three times a semester on average and attempted to have a conversation, usually about the limits of a purely scientific approach to psychiatry as well as the importance of developing a phenomenological method for psychiatric research.

Reading the transcriptions of these seminars (Heidegger, 2001), I am not surprised to witness the philosopher speaking in highly philosophical terms and the psychiatrists scratching their heads wondering what in the world he is talking about. It is as if Heidegger's style of speaking brings a wide chasm into view that separates the discipline of philosophy from psychiatry. Thankfully, the long moments of silence have been noted in the text, allowing a feel for the conversation as it unfolded. Heidegger speaks of ontology, phenomenology, Dasein, being-in-the-world, and even more obscure terms. Then silence, as if all one could hear is a long, distant, and fading echo of the philosopher's words in the canyon between him and the psychiatrists, who know not what was just said or how to respond. Medard Boss, who founded a psychiatric approach called *Dasein-Analysis* on Heidegger's phenomenological method, describes the seminars similarly in his preface to the publication of their transcription (Boss, 2001):

Some of the seminars were recorded in a way that must make it obvious to the reader, from the written record, just how exceedingly difficult the seminars were at the beginning. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that the discussions and responses were separated by long silences and pauses and by the fact that these scientifically educated doctors had never encountered most of Heidegger's questions as questions. Many participants seemed to be shocked, even outraged, that such questions would be permitted in the first place. At the start of the seminars in the late 1950s, even I was able to assimilate Heidegger's thinking only as a beginner would. I could provide very little help in overcoming the pauses in the conversations. Quite often, the situations in the seminars grew reminiscent of some imaginary scene: It was as if a man from Mars were visiting a group of earth-dwellers in an attempt to communicate with them. (p. xviii)

Oh, how I resonate with Boss's words! Reading translations of *Being and Time* – Heidegger's magnum opus and one of phenomenology's foundational texts – I found myself frustrated to the point of despair searching for quotations accessible to a general audience and relevant to research into psychotherapy. Oh, reader, just thinking of that period of research brings the groan "Arggghhh!!!" to mind. When I would finally find, often late in the work, a summary of primary concepts in digestible language, my heart would leap with inspiration and hope. Inevitably, however, when I returned to these quotations in which Heidegger used words we could all digest, the sheer number of concepts referred to in just a single sentence made my heart sink in a sea of complexity and hopeless exegesis. It would take an entire article or book to make one of these rare quotes palatable, requiring references to so many other quotes and concepts. It would be

like serving a main course that looked good but was truly inedible without a whole table of spices, side dishes, drinks, and deserts to draw out the inherent complexity of the meat's flavors. Indeed, psychology has benefited from an abundance of phenomenological research fitting to this metaphor. Whole articles and entire books tarry with a few of Heidegger's concepts, explaining words and passages which challenge even the trained philosopher let alone the daring therapist willing to venture into the thick conceptual weeds of such philosophical ground.

Despite the great gap in language and understanding separating the psychiatrists and Heidegger, neither party gave up on the seminars, no matter how difficult it was to hear the voice of the other yelling across the chasm. The early seminars could easily have driven either party away. In the first ten pages of the seminar's transcription, Heidegger presents his detailed reading of Immanuel Kant's philosophical work to open questions about the nature of space. If that drink was hard enough to swallow, for roughly 30 of the first 50 pages of the seminar's transcription, Heidegger leads a discussion about a clock and questions what time is. Very interesting to a philosophy class, but psychiatrists? Ultimately, such Heidegger-lead conversations might prove to have profound psychological value – I certainly think so - but as an opening act he found mostly confused and defensive responses from his audience. Yet despite the philosopher's troubled ice-breakers and the psychiatrists' defensiveness, they kept at it, looking across the distance at each other, shouting across the chasm, unwilling to turn away. Medard Boss (2001) describes the determination of both parties:

Considering the enormous difficulties in communication then, the strangest thing about the Zollikon Seminars was that neither Heidegger nor the seminar

participants grew tired of them. From the beginning and over the years, the teacher and students worked persistently toward achieving a common ground.

(p. xix)

Having read the transcription of the Zollikon seminars, I strongly believe they are best read backwards. Their value lies in the slow but persistent effort to establish a dialogue between the disciplines fruitful for both. For Heidegger, the seminars offered an exercise in maintaining a philosophical position while finding a voice that psychiatrists could better hear and respond to. For the psychiatrists, the seminars offered an education in philosophy tailored to address and redress the philosophical underpinnings of their otherwise strictly scientific approach. By the time of the final seminars, the philosopher and psychiatrists understood each other well enough to entertain highly theoretical questions about the nature of psychological research. Despite this achievement, however, the group never adopted a language accessible enough for general readers. Furthermore, rather than provide a means of agreeing on some basic, applicable principles for psychological research or therapeutic practice, the improved communication fostered more complex discussions that in turn raised more complicated questions. For the purposes of an introduction to therapy for philosophers and an introduction to philosophy for therapists, the Zollikon seminars fall far too short of the mark.

I experience within myself a desire akin to Heidegger and the psychiatrists who kept coming back year after year, face to face, attempting to speak to each other despite the distance and difference between them. Many psychologists and philosophers share this desire as well. Phenomenological psychologists – the most numerous and prolific of the philosophically-inspired psychologists – speak a philosophical language. However,

these works speak to those already initiated into the complexities of a specific, theoretical discourse. Research of this kind is and has been abundant. Introductions that serve as hospitable invitations to the genre, however, are and have been scarce. The guiding theme of the present work is finding voice, which means (among other things) providing a readable introduction to therapy and philosophy through which therapists and philosophers may find a common voice. Given these obstacles, how might such finding voice be accomplished?

In his extensive, historical study of phenomenological psychology, philosopher Herbert Spiegelberg (1972) refers to J. H. van den Berg's *A Phenomenological Approach to Psychiatry* (1955) as "the earliest, and in many ways still the simplest and clearest, introduction to phenomenological psychiatry." Although he made this remark in 1972, the revised and updated version of the book, titled *A Different Existence* (van den Berg, 1972), is still in print and used as an introductory text for students of various levels at schools teaching phenomenological psychology. For instance, both undergraduate and graduate students alike read *A Different Existence* in psychology classes at Duquesne University, whose psychology department has a longstanding phenomenological orientation. In a recent issue of the interdisciplinary journal *Janus Head* dedicated entirely to scholarship related to J. H. van den Berg's work, phenomenological psychologist Michael Sipiora (2008, p. 428) refers to *A Different Existence* as "a masterpiece of phenomenological psychology" in that the author so clearly and concretely concerns himself with therapeutic practice by making psychological observations that parallel Heidegger's philosophical ones.

While Heidegger and the psychiatrists at Zollikon attempted to bridge the canyon between the disciplines, van den Berg achieved far more success by not trying to unite them into one per se. Rather, he watched Heidegger from across the chasm, studied the philosopher's insights, and then himself made psychological insights that paralleled and were no doubt inspired by what he learned from the philosopher. By not trying to force philosophy to be psychology or psychology to be philosophy, van den Berg avoided the need to use Heidegger's dense, alienating language while nevertheless presenting a similar way of thinking to the reader. His very readable introduction presents a phenomenological approach to psychopathology with reference to a case study and scenes from everyday life. The analysis of the client's existence found there parallels Heidegger's analysis of human existence in *Being and Time*, particularly the first part of the book.

For Heidegger, human existence is about relating. He considers the relationships between the human being and objects in the world, the self, others, and time. Indeed, he argues that these very relationships define what it means to be human. At the end of Part One of *Being and Time*, these considerations culminate in the revelation that human existence is ultimately a relationship with existence itself. To exist means to care for and maintain one's existence. In short, the work of existence always has existence itself as the object of its work. Inspired by this aspect of Heidegger's phenomenology, van den Berg argues that a similar principle structures the way a client relates to his psychological pain. Paying close attention to how the client uniquely describes his experience of things, the body, others, and time, van den Berg hears the client's style of perceiving the world serving to reinforce and maintain his painful way of existing in it. Listening in this

way, van den Berg identifies themes in the client's experiences that provide insight into the his particular, painful way of existing and relating. Working on the principle that existing means maintaining this way of existing, Van den Berg's approach to psychopathology parallels Heidegger's approach to analyzing existence. Despite its highly accessible style, *A Different Existence* lays a foundation for a more challenging, psychological reading of Part One of Heidegger's most influential work and a no less challenging engagement with further research in phenomenological psychology. Having read the introductory work, the more challenging concepts of the latter readings feel familiar.

In the following chapter, I will present van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology in *A Different Existence*. In so doing, I provide an approach to conceptualizing and gaining insight into what is troubling a client. At the same time, I accomplish two other goals. Although I present van den Berg's approach to psychopathology in the following chapter, I do so by also referring to accessible works by phenomenological psychologists that convey van den Berg's insights. These references suggest a path for further scholarly engagement while also reinforcing the validity of van den Berg's ideas. I also present summaries of Heidegger's insights in Part One of *Being and Time*, introducing aspects of Heidegger's philosophy while further confirming that van den Berg's approach parallels and is inspired by Heidegger's.

While the strength of *A Different Existence* is its resemblance to Heidegger's thought, this is also its weakness as an introduction today. Time does not stand still in philosophy or psychology. As the philosophical landscape becomes increasingly post-phenomenological, psychologists inspired by philosophical works are finding themselves

drawn to new terrain and a change in climate. Among students and faculty interested in phenomenology, there has been a steadily growing interest in Emmanuel Levinas, whose work was born from a critical response to Heidegger's work, particularly *Being and Time*. One can find Levinas' writings on the required reading list of courses with a philosophical emphasis. Even in classes devoted specifically to Heidegger, Levinas is inevitably referred to, leaving students anticipating or dreading (depending on one's orientation) a new direction beyond a Heideggerian phenomenological psychology. Psychological scholarship inspired by Levinas' writing is similarly finding professional venues hospitable to it. In June of 2005, the *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counseling and Health* released a special issue dedicated entirely to the work of Emmanuel Levinas (Loewenthal and Kunz [Eds.]). Furthermore, The North American Levinas Society recently hosted its third conference which again included a number of panels dedicated specifically to psychological research, especially research relevant to psychotherapy. As interest in Levinas' work grows among psychologists, a need for an introduction becomes apparent and van den Berg is no longer with us to provide it.

Reading Levinas' magnum opi, *Totality and Infinity* (1969) and *Otherwise than Being* (1997), I again found myself frustrated to the point of despair searching for quotations accessible to a general audience and relevant to research on psychotherapy. I would often find myself reading a passage and drifting into thoughts about psychotherapy. Reading again what I had read, however, I found myself hopelessly facing such alienating language and long, complex sentences that frustrating groans bubbled in my mind once again. Similar to *Being and Time* and phenomenological psychology, *Totality and Infinity* has inspired most of the psychological scholarship on

Levinas. Whole articles tarry with just a few of Levinas' concepts, explaining phrases and passages that challenge even the trained philosopher let alone the daring therapist willing to dive into such philosophical depths. The object of the present work is finding a voice with which to address both philosophers and psychotherapists in an introductory way. Attempting to do so with reference to *Totality and Infinity* was like trying to speak underwater. My lips were moving, but no one could hear me.

While van den Berg has blessed phenomenological psychology with a voice that is inviting, introductory, and accessible, a Levinas-inspired psychology wants for such a scholar. I aspire to here find such a voice. Following van den Berg's approach, I study specifically chosen works by Emmanuel Levinas from across the chasm and then introduce insights into therapy that parallel the philosopher's insights in his own discipline. With regard to Levinas' work, an introduction's value depends on two things, both of which van den Berg accomplished vis-à-vis Heidegger. First and foremost, that the psychological analysis accurately parallels the philosophical analysis - even if it is in an introductory and thereby a necessarily simplified form. Second, that the introduction prepares the reader for further scholarly engagement with philosophy as well as psychology

A greater requirement looms over these two requirements, however. In order to properly introduce psychotherapeutic practice, I must introduce both an approach to psychopathology as well as an approach to therapeutic intervention. In the following chapter, I introduce an introductory, phenomenological approach to psychopathology so that the nature of the client's psychological difficulty may be conceptualized. In order to make use of such a conceptualization of what therapy needs to address, I must in turn

introduce an approach to conceptualizing therapeutic interventions to treat the client's psychological suffering. Can an introduction to specific, philosophical texts by Levinas satisfy this requirement for an introduction to psychotherapeutic practice? Yes, it can and by a clever route.

Heidegger's insight that the work of existence is the maintenance of this very way of existing inspires van den Berg's approach to psychopathology. This very same Heideggerian insight also inspires Levinas' early work though in a different way. In Levinas' first two original books, *Existence and Existents* (1978/2001) and *Time and the Other* (1987), which were published within a year of each other, he develops his early philosophical project by critically challenging the principle that existence always refers to itself in an inescapable effort to maintain itself. As Robert Bernasconi (2001) writes in his forward to the first text:

... what makes *Existence and Existents* a classic in its own right is that it is one of the boldest instances of one thinker finding his voice by turning to a description of experience in order to contest the vision of another thinker. The fact that it has taken so long for readers to recognize that already in this book a decisive contestation of Heidegger - perhaps *the* decisive contestation of Heidegger - was taking place does not make it any less true that it happened here. (pg. xv)

In *Existence and Existents* as well as *Time and the Other*, Levinas criticizes Heidegger for understanding existence as a closed circle that always refers to and maintains itself. There is no thought of a relationship to something other than existence.

He does not argue that Heidegger is altogether wrong. To the contrary, Levinas affirms that Heidegger's insights have validity and constitute a profound contribution to

philosophy. Levinas does not rebel against phenomenology as an adolescent rebels against a parent, forgetting how much his own thinking is indebted to his former teacher.

Consider the following comment in the introduction to *Existence and Existents*:

If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian. (p. 4)

The early Levinas' issue with Heidegger is that his reasoning goes too far. From Levinas' perspective, Heidegger's analysis of existence forecloses the possibility of there being anything other than existence for the human being to encounter. Levinas considers the human being's relationship to things in the world, the self, others, and time. In opposition to Heidegger, Levinas argues that these relationships that define our existence are not inherently a relationship with and maintenance of our existence. To the contrary, he articulates ways in which these relationships are a relation to that which is definitively not our existence. He responds to phenomenology with a philosophy of transcendence, limiting and relieving Heidegger's excessive analysis of existence trapped within itself.

Similarly, van den Berg's approach to psychopathology in *A Different Existence* forecloses the possibility of the client encountering something that does not serve to maintain his painful way of existing. The client's existence is inescapable from this perspective. There's no way out. No exit. The early Levinas criticizes the very Heideggerian insight that inspires *A Different Existence*. He introduces a philosophical understanding of how we relate to something other than existence. Inspired by these

criticisms and transcendental ideas, I will similarly criticize *A Different Existence* and introduce a psychological understanding of how the therapist offers the client a way out of the maintenance of a painful way of existing. Although born of criticism, the Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention will nicely complement van den Berg's approach to psychopathology.

Van den Berg (1971), himself, offers an accessible, phenomenological introduction to understanding psychotherapeutic treatment in "What is Psychotherapy," for instance. My critique of *A Different Existence* is not a criticism of van den Berg's work in general or the scholar himself. To the contrary, I am criticizing his introduction to psychopathology in a manner that allows me to write a kind of sequel to it. Like Epicurus and van den Berg, I am aspiring to introduce philosophy and an approach to therapeutic practice in the same voice. The spirit of the present work is as van den Bergian as it is Epicurean.

Beginning with Levinas' early works offers a further benefit. *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* are much more accessible works than his later, mature works *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. They are briefer, often clearer, and - although they are challenging in their own right - do not have the same degree of overwhelming complexity and breadth found in the later works. Richard Cohen (1987), following his remarks about the consistency of Levinas' work across his career, writes in the translator's introduction to *Time and the Other*:

Time and the Other (and *Existence and Existents*, for that matter), then, provides an early but lasting sketch of Levinas' mature thought, and thus affords a clear, bare bones version of its initial stages. (p. 4)

Preparing the reader for an engagement with Levinas' early works is sensible in that such an engagement is a useful - and for many readers a necessary - starting point from which to advance to the later works. Furthermore, the two early works are remarkably similar. The analysis in *Existence and Existents* ends with an articulation of 'time and the other.' *Time and the Other* not only follows a similar trajectory as the previous work. It also expands and deepens the previous analysis of time and the other as the title suggests. Although there are differences between the two works, the similarities are much more striking.

In *Totality and Infinity*, arguably Levinas' most influential work in philosophy as well as psychology, he reintroduces the concepts that I introduce in chapter six with reference to *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*. In *Totality and Infinity*, these concepts appear as part of Levinas' ethical philosophy, which is the focus of the book. Ethics is not even a subject let alone a guiding theme in the two earlier, more accessible works. Nevertheless, engagement with these texts prepares the reader for studying *Totality and Infinity* and psychological scholarship referencing it. The concepts presented here will make an engagement with Levinas' ethical reinterpretation of them in *Totality and Infinity* more digestible and accessible.

The following chapter on psychopathology presents an approach involving the client finding a voice with which to describe how he uniquely experiences things, his body, others, and time. Listening closely to the client, having found such a voice, enables the therapist to conceptualize the client's suffering. The subsequent chapter presents an approach to conceptualizing therapeutic interventions in which the therapist finds a voice to disrupt the client's maintenance of a painful way of existing. This chapter serves as

supplement to *A Different Existence* and could have been appropriately titled *Different than Existence*.

Chapter 5: Van den Berg, Heidegger, and Psychopathology

A Different Existence

Phenomenologists believe that we too often are "not concerned with what we see, but with what we ought to see" - to borrow a phrase from philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/2006, p. 36). What we ought to see is usually what others expect us to see. When we see something different than what is expected of us, we find ourselves unable to describe our experience to others in a way that they can recognize and appreciate. We are left alienated from others, suffering silence and secrecy. And doubly so. When our experience is not what it is supposed to be, we are silent and in secret because our culture, social environments, or family do not offer us the words and ideas we need to sincerely describe or understand our mysterious experience, our different existence. In order to understand the way a client exists, the therapist needs to offer her an invitation to be creative and develop a way of talking about her experience that her culture, family, and social groups do not. A phenomenological approach to psychopathology involves collaborating with the client in the creation of a way of speaking: finding a voice for what one already knows but doesn't yet know how to say.

Van den Berg (1980) describes therapy as offering a home for divergent thinking in an age in the Western world when everyone's experience is expected to be convergent or the same. He invites clients to describe their experiences without requiring them to be normal, objective, or subject to judgment in any way. By doing so, he gains insight into what pains them and what needs to be addressed in their therapies. Similarly, psychologist Michael Sipiora (2008) describes therapy as offering a home for the spiritual dimension of human experience that our current, function-oriented, cultural perspective

cannot give voice to. Working phenomenologically with clients to gain insight into their way of existing, he often discovers that the mysterious psychological problems that interfere with their functionality are spiritual, rather than functional, in nature. Finding a voice for the spiritual in the safe sanctuary of the therapist's office renders the at first mysterious difficulties quite understandable. Working with almost any client, the experiences that cannot be discussed, described, or even thought in relation to the family prove to be the most revealing once the client finds the voice with which to describe them. Inviting the client to find her voice in these ways is the art of a phenomenological approach to psychopathology. I introduce the basics as I understand them here, following van den Berg's *A Different Existence* as well as particular philosophical insights from Part One of Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Experiencing the World

Inspired by the philosophical works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological psychologists gain insight into psychological phenomena by listening to how they are experienced or immediately perceived (Burston and Frie, 2006). Such listening stands in stark contrast to the search for a single, right, and universally true description of phenomena that we call in common language an objective description. When we explain phenomena objectively, we abstract ourselves from our immediate perception and cut ourselves off from insight we might gain from paying close attention to what our experience has to teach us. When we pursue a common, objective explanation, we turn to a process of reasoning by which we filter out the 'irrational,' 'irrelevant,' or 'unexplainable' aspects of our experience. What remains is not the fullness of our immediate experience but an explanation or interpretation.

When we reflect objectively on our experience, we produce answers that often cover over and leave behind aspects of our experience that might reveal something of who we are.

When we pay attention to our pre-reflective experience and struggle to describe it sincerely, we open ourselves to questions about who we are and aspects of ourselves that we forget or ignore because they don't fit into our current perspective on life or self.

These aspects of ourselves nevertheless make us who we are.

The phenomenological psychologist exercises a disciplined resistance to abstraction in order to listen to what the phenomena themselves have to say in the fullness of our experience, no matter how different such an experience may be from cultural norms or others' expectations. Psychologist Steen Halling (2008) writes:

In everyday life each one of us is something of a phenomenologist insofar as we genuinely listen to the stories that people tell us and insofar as we pay attention to, and reflect on, our own perceptions. (p. 145)

Van den Berg (1980) makes a similar observation that "every storyteller is unsuspectingly a phenomenologist." A good story allows you, reader, to see the world through the author's eyes. When each of us describes the world in detail as we uniquely experience it and learn about ourselves in the process, we practice phenomenological psychology. Allow me, reader, to better introduce phenomenological psychology by recalling a simple story from *A Different Existence* that illustrates this practice in a most simple way.¹

The warm sunlight that has illuminated van den Berg's room fades as evening closes the winter day. He rises from his desk, passes by the fire, and flips the light switch on the wall by the window. Looking out, he sees the electric light of street lamps

twinkling in the sky as it reflects off the falling snow. The soft white ground glitters. He hears the bang of boots against a stoop as a neighbor arrives home. Van den Berg rubs his hands together for warmth and smiles as he imagines his friend arriving at his door in an hour. Gazing out the window at the winter's ways, the arrival of his friend seems even more pleasant to him.

He turns from the window to walk to a shelf where a bottle of fine wine stands still in its brown paper bag. He removes the bottle and places it on the table by the fire before sitting down at his desk once again. For a half hour or so, he opens envelopes, reads his mail, saves some papers, and throws others away. The phone rings. It is his friend, calling to cancel their plans for a pleasant evening. They speak briefly and reschedule. He hangs up the phone. The stillness of the room is suddenly striking. He again imagines the evening before him, though now the hours feel drawn out and dreary. Disappointed, he rises and places a log on the fire, then returns to his seat with a good book. He opens the smooth canvas cover, flips through the opening pages, and soon gets lost in the world of written words on the soft white pages.

Some time later, a passage in the book refuses to become clear. The words lose their hold on him. He awakens from his reading trance as he lifts his head up to face the room. The lonely wine bottle immediately catches his eye. The flicker of the fire's flames reflects off the green glass. He again feels the absence of his friend. He looks down to face his book and once more the words take hold.

Recalling this story for his students, van den Berg asks what happened in the moment when he looked up from the book. Well, we might state the obvious: he saw the wine bottle. Probing further to prove a point, he asks what he sees when he observes the

bottle. We might answer by describing the object in more detail. He saw a bottle containing about 750 mL of wine. He saw the green of the glass in the fire light. He saw the foil and cork sealing the bottle. He saw the white paper label indicating the kind of wine and the vineyard.

Considering these facts about what he observed, van den Berg does not recognize what he experienced in the moment of that winter evening. He cannot deny that the objective description of the wine bottle is factually sound, but it does not capture what he actually saw. His perception of the wine bottle was really an experience of seeing the disappointment of the evening and the loneliness of a friend's absence. Although we know that he observed the objective facts of the wine bottle in retrospect, in the moment of perception he did not attend to the factual details at all. In the moment, the wine bottle gave voice to his subjective condition. Looking back on this experience sincerely rather than objectively, he recognizes his feelings of loneliness and disappointment in his experience of the object. Indeed, the object itself expressed his feelings to him poetically. Its green glass held wine he meant to share and similarly reflected the light of a fire he had built for their comfort. The bottle, the emotions, and the reminder of his friend's absence were inseparable. The story teaches that our feelings and situations are not disconnected from the world around us, residing somewhere inside an invisible self that is removed from reality. Quite to the contrary, by giving voice to our immediate experience of the world around us we may gain insight into our affective state and the situation that shapes it. In short, one gains insight by attending to the poetry of our perceptions rather than the objective description of what we see.

Van den Berg took inspiration for this basic lesson from Heidegger (1962), who worked to offer a scholarly alternative to objective description. Heidegger's primary philosophical question was this: what is the meaning of being in general? He discovered a first clue to help him unravel the mystery of being: the human being must have some knowledge of being in general in order to ask a question about it. Following this lead in Part One of *Being and Time*, Heidegger took on the question: what is the meaning of human existence? An insight guiding his rigorous response was that existing has existence, itself, as its end. He emphasized that to exist in the everyday sort of way that we all exist means to be in a world in which we find things ready to hand for the work of maintaining our way of existing. This fundamental, reflexive quality of existence put Heidegger at odds with the common notion of objectivity. The understanding of the world as a conglomeration of separate things with particular objective values struck Heidegger as valuable for measuring, quantifying, and scientifically studying things. However, he found that this view of the world did not resonate with the everyday experience of things that we have as we live and work. We experience things not as measured quantities but as tools useful for existing and maintaining our existing. An objective description of a thing is generally static and removed from this basic quality of everyday human experience.

One might objectively describe a hammer, for example, as having a specifically measured weight, size, color, shape, and construction (vis. *Being and Time*, Ch. 1, Sec. A, Pt. 15). Such a description fits the point of view we might have of a hammer as we stare at it and study it, attempting to define it, but more often than not hammers do not exist in order to be stared at, measured, and defined. In the immediate act of using hammers, we

do not experience the objective measuring of the hammer as one would wielding a measuring device. Rather, we experience the hammer as a tool that ties us to a purpose and context. In the immediate act of nailing shingles on a roof, the hammer does not appear as a quantified weight, size, and design unless we pause, take a break from our nailing, and begin to measure the hammer rather than use it. In the act of lifting the hammer and dropping a well placed blow on the head of a nail passing it through the rough gray skin of a shingle, we experience the hammer as a tool in relation to a purpose and context of which the hammer, itself, is a part. The hammer connects us to the hammering, to the pile of shingles awaiting their turn, to the nails we repeatedly reach for, and to our muscles that contract and release with hammer in hand. This immediate experience of hammering in turn ties us to a greater purpose and context: to the progress of the project, to the needs of the shelter being repaired, to the family living below, and to the pay one receives for the work. The objective description of things poses the danger of covering over a basic truth of human existence: we are always in motion, engaged with a world of tools that tie us to the environment, people, and purposes around us. The danger Heidegger reveals in the objective description of things is that this truth gets hidden from view. Objectively speaking, one argues that the objective description is what the thing really is without reference to a greater context, while the truth of the matter is that the thing appears in this objective way because that is how one approaches it. The hammer connects the objective viewer not to the world of hammering but to a world of cataloguing knowledge and the task of measuring. It becomes a tool ready to hand for the purpose of the one who perceives it. The roofer and the objective measurer

experience the very same hammer in very different ways, but in both cases the hammer serves as a tool that continues and maintains each person's way of existing.

Van den Berg (1972) writes, "The relationship between man and world is so close that it is erroneous to separate them in a psychological or psychiatric examination" (pp. 39-40). He illustrates this point with reference to a patient who describes an otherwise normal street in a peculiar way. The patient describes the houses as "old and dilapidated," "about to collapse," and says "they lean over and threaten to crush him." He says "the streets and squares seem fearfully wide and empty." From this description, van den Berg concludes, "He is a lonely individual; the objects are far away and hostile" (pp. 46-47). Without consciously intending to do so, the client nevertheless experiences the world in such a way that serves as a tool for maintaining his painful way of existing.

Experiencing Time

Developmental psychologist Eva Simms (2008) uses a phenomenological frame of reference to gain insight into child psychology. In textbooks, one often learns abstract conclusions about the many stages of psychological development through childhood that feel distant from our everyday experiences of children. Simms brings the child's psyche to light by connecting us to the world in which children live. In the midst of scientific and philosophical arguments, she tells stories from her own childhood, stories about her own children, and stories others have told about their children and childhood. Since the adult mind often experiences the world quite differently from the child's, these stories are all the more necessary for appreciating developmental psychology. They orient us to a way of perceiving and thinking that we may have forgotten. Childlike experiences and

childhood memories don't usually fit into our minds. It's like trying to put a VHS tape into a DVD player. Our old memories get stored back in the dusty closet of the unconscious and children's experiences seem strange to us because we no longer format the world that way. In order to truly learn about children's experience of time, for instance, we must open ourselves to experiencing time as the child does. Consider the following example from Simms' book *The Child in the World* (pp. 149-151), which serves as a further introduction to phenomenology and psychopathology.

When Nicholas was six years old, he and his family left their old home to live in a new house. The world that was so familiar no longer appeared before him. When he stepped outside, he no longer saw his favorite climbing tree whose bark and branches inspired him to climb like a monkey amidst the leaves. His new street was not the familiar theatre of his earlier adventures. His old neighbor and best friend, Daniel, who accompanied him on these imaginative journeys, wasn't his neighbor anymore. So much had changed and so much of his world was gone. Nevertheless, Nicholas handled the transition well enough. After all, he got to see Daniel each morning in kindergarten and his family and toys came with him to live in the new house.

Then something happened which surprisingly devastated Nicholas. It was also time for the family to get a new car. One day, a woman named Penny came to buy the little red Toyota that had been in the family since he was an infant. On the fateful date of the sale, Penny made a deal with his father and took the car away. That night, little Nicholas sobbed and wailed. Wanting to soothe the boy, his father took him in his arms. But Nicholas couldn't face him. He looked away and said, "That was the car in which we picked up Winchester when he was a puppy, and you took me to my first day in

kindergarten. I loved that car. *You sold my memories.*" His body shook as he continued crying as he would each night before bed for the next six weeks.

Describing the family car objectively, we would note the make and model, interior and exterior colors, the size of the engine, and number of seats. But this would neither do justice to Nicholas' grief nor describe his immediate experience of the car. We cannot understand Nicholas' pain until we consider the purpose the car served for him and the greater context it connected him to. Following the work of developmental phenomenologist M. J. Langeveld (1960), Simms explains that children experience their past as a present inherently tied to things. She writes:

For the child, memory is not an intangible, mental reproduction of mnemonic traces in the brain - it belongs to the things themselves. ... The red car gathers a world around it, and the world threatens to slip into oblivion when the car is no longer present. The child is not grieving for a lost object, he is mourning a lost world. ... As long as he could sit in the car, touch it, and feel it, the old neighborhood was still present. Now it is severed from the visible world, a pure memory: *it is no longer there.* (p. 150, my omissions)

While the adult distinguishes between memory and reality, the child experienced the memories elicited by sitting in the car as the actual presence of the old neighborhood. It was not simply the loss of the car that he mourned, but the home he once knew that the car carried away like a passenger of a past time. While his new house was foreign to him, the sight of his past driving away with Penny at the wheel proved too much for him to bear without tears. For many adults, the car would likely be perceived as a commodity

that carries us from place to place. For Nicholas, the car presented the past as if it were present: a vehicle of time.

Adults sometimes experience time in a similar way when losing themselves in a memory summoned by their relationship to an object. When loved ones die and the funerals have passed, their things still remain. In the process of sifting through all the stuff, occasionally something appears which brings the person back to life in the mind's eye. When such sentimental things are kept and then lost, it can feel like losing the person all over again. Like cherished photographs, such things connect us to times, ways, places, and people in the present despite the fact that these all have past. This is more than remembering, it is living again, even if for a moment, in a context and world we've lost.

Our relationship to our environment often includes memories which serve our present needs. When we need to remember a lesson taught to us by a parent, a photo or object catches our eye, reminding us of their guidance when we need it. Or when someone loses a loved one without whom living in the world seems impossible, something is worn in remembrance, allowing the person to still connect to the world in the other's absence for their spirit is present in the thing in memoriam. And when such talismans are finally taken off, it may signal that the loved one's passing has become more bearable and accepted.

Like things in the world in Heidegger's view, our memories and fantasies of the future serve our present purposes and connect us to a greater context. When we live through situations similar to ones we've lived through in the past, we find ourselves remembering and contemplating memories that shape an image of the future. When our

life situations pull us forward in directions with the strength of a current, we experience visions of what lies down river to guide us as we steer the boat. Our experience of time is a tool already in use, tying us to the environment, people, and purposes around us. Our remembering and envisioning teaches us about our present tasks, feelings, and interests as much as they also take part in this process.

Consider a man who often feels doomed. He experiences the world as threatening and unfair, as a place where he's cursed. When the past appears to him, he remembers so many bad things having happened to him without reason. He remembers experiences with others in which he suffered an ill fate but they were spared his bad luck. The theme we might use to describe his memories also describes his present experience: the world is unjust and there is no hope for him in particular. Van den Berg (1972) writes:

The past plays a part; it has to fulfill an actual task for better or for worse. If the past has no task to fulfill, none at all, then it isn't there: then no recollection of this past is possible. (p. 82)

Whether he likes it or not, the man's past appears to maintain his present way of existing in the world: hopeless and expecting the worst.

When the future appears to him, the scenes resemble his past. He expects to fail in his ambitions not due to any lack on his part but rather due to unforeseeable and unfair occurrences. He expects to watch those around him succeed while he walks a path of undeserved suffering. In his future as much as in his past he feels like Job. The future appears to him in order to maintain his painful way of existing. Van den Berg describes the past and future as feeding off of and depending on one another:

... the past is that which lies there behind us, but only because a future permits it to lie there. And the future is indeed yonder, before us, but only because it is fed by a past. (p. 91)

Whether the man who feels cursed finds himself looking backwards or forwards in time, he's in the same situation. Time surrounds him with the trouble of his present. Paying attention to how he experiences time offers insight into the painful way he exists now in the present where past and future meet him.

Experiencing Body

We often think of the self as something that exists on its own, separate from the world. From a phenomenological perspective, the line drawn between the self and the world makes little sense. If you subtract from the idea of the person all relationships to purposes, people, tasks, and things outside oneself, is there really anything left? One might suggest that there is feeling, imagination, and memory, but are these interior things not inherently bound up with our engagement with the world around us? Don't they cease to have any meaning without understanding them in a greater context? The more one pays attention to individual experience, the more clearly a greater context outside our interior selves comes into view. As human beings we are always in motion, engaged in some task however clear or unclear. The psyche is the medium of this engagement. We are not cut off from the world. It is the very way that we relate to the world and take it up that reveals each of us to ourselves.

From a phenomenological perspective, the line drawn between the mind and the body makes little sense as well. When we describe our immediate experience sincerely,

we find the body and mind indistinguishably entwined. When we cry, the tears welling in our eyes and the trembling in the body is the feeling of sadness. When we remember being injured physically, the remembering is feeling the physical sensation again in the body just in a different way. When we express a thought, the elaborate dance of one's tongue and teeth in the act of forming breath into words, the coordination of the face muscles, and all the other physical gestures involved are the expression. When we think a thought, we literally hear words being spoken within us. Listening closely, one can even identify the particular voice one is hearing, for instance the voice of a parent, friend, or teacher that we've made our own. We must abstract ourselves from our immediate experience in order to distinguish objectively between the mind and the body. When the phenomenological therapist listens to how a client experiences her body, the therapist hears the client relating to the world and her life situation. Consider the following example from my own experience.

During the final year of my doctoral coursework, teaching responsibilities, and practica training, I began suffering stomach pains as I never had before. Thinking objectively about causes of stomach problems, I identified lifestyle choices that might account for my new, awful pains. As an academic, I had been in the habit of drinking a few cups of strong coffee everyday. When I wasn't drinking coffee, I preferred seltzer water. Both of these can irritate the stomach though they had never bothered me before. Outside of work, I enjoyed going to bars with friends to drink and talk when time permitted. Although relaxing, I knew that alcohol (especially beer) and second-hand smoke can aggravate the stomach. But again, they had not been problematic in the past. Perhaps most significantly, I enjoyed eating to excess as I had all my life. Eating too

much especially in the evenings is considered a recipe for pain. Although I had lived with such eating habits for years without stomach trouble, I reasoned that my ways were catching up with me. It was time to make lifestyle changes. I began drinking teas instead of coffees, consumed stomach medicine suggested by the doctor, managed my social drinking carefully, stayed away from smoky places as well as carbonated beverages, and avoided eating too much or too late. I found some relief through these changes. However, in general my pain remained, often occurring without there being a clear reason why.

Some insight came to me from those around me. During this year, I often began the day at the University Clinic by leaning on the filing cabinet where the office mailboxes also rested as I chatted about the week with the assistant to the clinic director. She sat at her desk across from me behind countless pens and paperclips, a pile of paperwork and files, and a welcoming jar of candies. She had worked in the clinic for many years and had seen many students as well as faculty come and go, which made her a valuable source of insight. She also talked straight talk, which I found refreshing. Our morning conversation usually included our current burdens and football (we were, after all, in Pittsburgh, the capital of Steeler Nation where everyone talks football). I had many stresses to share since there was always more work for me to do than could realistically be done. On weeks when my workload was at its worst, she would wonder about my physical condition and ask, "So how's your stomach?" More often than not, my stomach grumbled with the worst pains during those weeks when I grumbled the most to her about the intensity of my stress. In the student offices just down the hall, my close friend and peer would similarly inquire about my sick stomach as we spoke about

exhaustion and demanding deadlines fast approaching, knowing that there was no difference between my stomach and my relationship to my work. Both of these coworkers noticed that describing my experience of my stomach gave voice to my anxiety and stress.

Listening to my body, I learned to gauge my stress level. It's amazing how easily stomach pain translates into regular English in situations like mine. We have so many stomach metaphors for stress! Even though I had not overeaten literally, I experienced the same stomach pains from overeating at times when I had 'too much on my plate' at work. Throughout the year, my stomach impressed upon me that I had 'bitten off more than I could chew' when I took on such an overwhelming schedule. My perception of my body reminded me that my belt was bursting and I had taken on more responsibility than I could 'stomach.' I was sick from overeating though it was not food I had consumed but too much work. I carried the stress in my sick belly like too many helpings. The week immediately following the close of the academic year and the end of my responsibilities, my terrible stomach pains remarkably disappeared along with my overwhelming stress. Even reasonable stomach pains that I experienced from occasionally overindulging in a meal decreased remarkably in both intensity and duration. I no longer had too much stress to digest. I returned to the state of health I found myself in a year earlier.

Like the stomach, the lungs relate to anxiety and stress as well. At times when we are overwhelmed, we find ourselves unable to breathe. The chest constricts, breath shortens, and the body refuses to take in the air from the world around us. When there is more to do than can possibly be done, we find ourselves 'suffocated' by our

responsibilities. When we're under more pressure in life than we can bear, the lungs suffer as if they're literally subjected to intense pressure as well. The world closes in and we panic because there is no way out and no relief. We find ourselves experiencing the exact opposite of being outdoors in open space where we 'get a breath of fresh air.' What happens literally to the body expresses metaphorically the psychological situation behind the anxiety attack. When the world threatens to overwhelm us, our bodies refuse to breathe as if the air were poisonous. We suffer so many obligations that we have no opportunity to 'catch our breath' or 'take a breather.'

We embody our way of existing in such a way that a strictly anatomical investigation covers over. Like our experience of the world and of time, our experience of our bodies reveals connections to the demands and dynamics of our life situations. So does our experience of others.

Experiencing Others

Heidegger (1962) introduces our relationship with others by drawing attention to two basic, phenomenological observations. First, our experience of things as tools connect us to the people for whom the work is intended as well as those who work with us. When nailing shingles, for instance, the roofer experiences his hammering as a hammering for the family below. And the roofer experiences the shortening stack of shingles as from such and such a supplier, who comes closer and closer to the roofer's experience as the need for more shingles increases.

Second, Heidegger observes that in our everyday experience of living and working to maintain our existence, we are not isolated subjects that must find some way

to connect to others. We are always already in motion, taking up some task in some context for some purpose with others. We are always already connected to others just as we are always already related to the world. Heidegger (1962) writes:

By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me - those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself- those among whom one is too. (p. 156)

Paying attention to our experience of others, we find ourselves connected to a common frame of reference and a common experience of the world. Consider again the story of my stomach pain. Although my stomach grumbled, both of my coworkers experienced the pains in relation to the stress of my and their work situation. By bearing witness to my pains in our shared context, they brought me closer to my perception of my body and its relation to my stress. Working together towards common ends, we approach and experience the world in a similar way. Heidegger uses the preposition 'with' to describe a fundamental quality of what it means to be human. We experience others alongside us in motion with us, taking part in our particular way of existing and maintaining this existence.

Even experiencing others as not with us but against us depends on this fundamental quality of human existence. We exist in communities organized around common purposes in common worlds, even when we find ourselves excluded. Heidegger describes being alone among others as another, negative mode of being with others. One is alone only with reference to the others from whom one feels alienated.

Consider a man who regularly feels alone as well as rejected by others. Throughout the days and nights, he often privately has thoughts about how ugly,

incompetent, and unlikable he is. He remembers names that students used to call him in his school days. He feels that the world and others still wish him ill. He sometimes wants to die. He judges himself so harshly. Today, he walks down an otherwise normal street in the city. The sun is shining. He has just eaten lunch and feels content. The self-loathing he often feels isn't plaguing him. He sets his sights on the city itself, enjoying its many faces and facades. As he walks along the sidewalk, observing the skies, buildings, trees, windows, and rooftops around him, a group of students on a balcony comes into view. Catching sight of them, he feels frustrated, angry, awful, and alone. The sunny, busy world he saw a moment ago shrinks back from him as if he were not really in the city anymore but trapped in his skin. His perception of his body overwhelms his consciousness along with the feeling that he's being watched intensely as well as judged. Everything around him seems empty and irritating. He experiences the students as mocking him, calling him horrible names, and damning him in the very ways that he damns himself in private. He suddenly exists in their world where he doesn't belong.

Later, thinking objectively, he realizes that he had no idea what these students were saying or whether they even noticed him. The balcony was far enough away that he couldn't hear them. Considering the facts, he doesn't know whether they were watching him or not, judging him or not even noticing. Nevertheless, his experience of the students bears a truth about his way of existing. Even though the students were out of the range of his clear hearing and clear vision, in the moment of perception he could honestly sense them watching him and saying terrible things about him. Even though on second thought he knows that he couldn't have perceived these things, he was not lying about his experience. He really did perceive them, whether it was objectively possible or

not. He perceived the students in such a way that served the work of self-loathing and loneliness that he often engages in. The lonely, awful world that the sight of the students brought into view is a world he knows all too well. His experience of frustrating isolation requires that he experience a shared world with others in a negative mode. In order to do the work of depression and maintain such a way of existing in the world, whether he likes it or not, he must experience a shared world with others in which his role is one of exclusion. In other words, if there were no common world between he and the students, he could not feel excluded from it. What attention to this man's experience of others reveals is not simply that he is alone, but that in order to maintain his lonely existence he approaches the world with the bully and abuser, seeing it as they do: it's their world where he doesn't belong. The tragic truth is that it must be his world first too in order for them to take it from him. His experience reveals this truth profoundly.

Consider that perhaps something about the student's appearance or gestures informed him unconsciously that they indeed were bullies and abusers. Consider that he was absolutely correct about their character. From a phenomenological perspective, the truth revealed by his experience is the same. In a street full of people, buildings, and noises to attend to, he perceived the bullies and abusers. He found the very people who allowed him to take up again the work of self-loathing and return to the world where he and everyone else exclude him.

To exist in an everyday, human way means finding oneself with others who approach the world in a similar way. Things in the world appear to us in ways that serve the needs of our lives and work. We perceive time in such a way that serves our way of existing. We experience our bodies in relation to the demands of our life situations. We

find ourselves always in motion, approaching a world that we've already shaped for the work we do in it whether we know it or not. We find ourselves already with others who take up similar tasks, approach the world in a similar way, and share in our perception. These basic, phenomenological principles provide the psychotherapist with useful clinical tools.

The Poetry of Perception: Working with Experience

I'm reminded of a client who offered us insight into her struggle with grief by describing her perception of scenes on cards. Using as basic a procedure as possible, I simply asked her to describe each scene to me. Phenomenologically speaking, the fact that the therapist is presenting cards to the client during a therapy session must influence as well as shape the client's responses. The task of describing the cards connects her to the therapist and the work of therapy. Whether or not the client can produce a meaningful description for each card depends on whether or not the scene depicted offers the client an opportunity to express something related to what brought her to therapy in the first place, namely her grief which itself is embedded in her greater life context. In this sense, the card is either a tool for the work of the therapy or it is not. Some scenes required her to force herself to make up a story because the images were not meaningful for her. She perceived some scenes, however, as immediately meaningful and a description came naturally to her as if from the card itself. Indeed, the scene and her story were one and the same in the moment of her perception. These cards appeared as metaphors for her experience, offering her the opportunity to communicate something meaningful about her presenting issue at the beginning of therapy when the assessment

took place. By sincerely describing these scenes as they immediately appeared, she perhaps unknowingly gave voice to her experience of overwhelming grief and estrangement, providing insights into how her relative's death has rippled through her life in various ways that underlie her pain and desire to seek therapy. Indeed, the cards provided clues to what other aspects of her life had been affected by the loss, revealing that the grief itself was only part of a bigger picture. By listening closely and making inquiries into how the descriptions of the cards were meaningful for the client personally, I made productive use of how she authored her perception. I will now tell you about this client's descriptions of scenes on cards, the phenomenological interpretation of her responses that reveal as well as clarify her difficulties, and the University Psychology Clinic where we met...

The waiting area in the Psychology Clinic is on the top floor of one of the university's downtown buildings. Students, faculty, and staff alike climb the stairs and ride the elevators all day as classes change and meetings begin as well as end. Throughout the building, bright florescent lighting puts a spotlight on everything and everyone. In the waiting room, it's no different. People sit under the lights like plants in the wood framed furniture with paper or magazine in hand. From any of the seats, one faces a handful of wooden doors that match the furniture. A plastic gray sign is attached at eye level to every one. The sign has a sliding piece that reveals words saying either IN SESSION or NOT IN SESSION. Although all the doors are the same, every room is different. The therapist chooses the setting for the therapy. The choice of room is a

signature of sorts written against the anonymous background of the waiting area. My room of choice is 911.

Inside room 911, there are two wood-framed armchairs and a matching sofa. The furniture sits around a square wooden table. Strangely enough, all the clients I've seen here - with only one exception - have sat on the sofa and I always sit in one of the chairs closest to the window. This arrangement is fine by me because I find the chair comfortable even with my back problems. Sunlight pours through the windows. A few healthy plants grow in the room. I never use the obnoxiously bright fluorescent lighting. Rather, my clients and I turn on the lamps together upon entering the room in the evenings and on gray Pittsburgh days. Two of the four walls in 911 are enormous windows, one of which faces downtown, the river, and Mt. Washington. The tall corporate buildings, small houses, water, boats, and hills go on as far as the eye can see. We can see the sky, clouds, and stars. We see people walking on roofs and cranes building new ones. There's truly more out there to look at than one could describe at once. Clients have a better view from the sofa and occasionally notice something and point it out to me. One client has an extensive knowledge of Pittsburgh architecture and occasionally tells me part of a building's story. Sometimes he notices planes passing overhead, which also appear in his dreams of disaster. Another client follows the presence of a few men who show up on the roof of a bank building now and then. I often look out at the sky and comment on the weather while entering or exiting the room. Our different views through the same window express something about each of us.

On this particular day, I've moved a chair perpendicular to the sofa so that the client and I are at a right angle from each other. I've got a stack of white cards slightly

bigger than everyday printer paper lying face down on the table in front of us. I explain to the client that I'm going to turn the cards over one at a time. Each one has a black and white image framed by a thick white border. After I turn over a card, I'll ask her to tell me what she sees in the card: to offer a description of what's depicted. I reveal the first card, which invites her to tell a story that resonates with her recent experience.

She: A man just sitting and looking... he wants out.

Me: He's trapped?

She: Yeah...

Me: In the blackness in the room, what can't we see?

She: Whatever he's hiding from.

There's a moment of silence. I move the card to the side. I'm reminded of what has brought her to therapy. A younger relative close to her died unexpectedly. It's been months since the death and it haunts her. She has trouble finding anyone in the city to talk to about how the death has affected her. Her closest friend isn't supporting her and the friendship is falling apart. Until very recently, she lived alone. She does not have family in the city. She faces the death everyday singularly and in silence. She cannot hide from this experience that weighs her down until, on some days, she finally collapses or, on other days, she refuses to bear this burden alone and acts out in a moment of rage, hitting a wall. She is trapped like the man in the card, hiding from something that relentlessly pursues her and wanting out.

I reveal the next image. Again, there is both a man and darkness in the picture. She tells a different story about this card but guesses that it's the same man from the previous scene. I ask her about the darkness again.

Me: What do you associate with the blackness... with the darkness?

She: Just the things, the parts of yourself that you can't get away from but try your best to.

Me: Lately, has there been anything along those lines going on with you?

She: The struggle with losing somebody so young because there's no way to really understand why or where she went.

Again, there is a pause and again I move the card to the side. She sees the same man and describes a similar scene. She tells me again, in a different way, through a perception of a different card, that she cannot escape a pain she knows but cannot give voice to or understand.

I reveal the next card. She describes what she sees. This story doesn't carry the same weight that the others did. She doesn't perceive the scene as personally meaningful. The description seems forced and bears no affective resonance. We finish with it quickly.

In the next card, she offers an interesting story about a woman who makes a sad gesture as she walks through a door.

She: She's coming out of the blackness into what is her future. She's in that stage when you're still bordering on whether you're going to fall back into it or get out.

Me: This card made me think of grief, which is obviously related to you in some way. The way you describe it, it sounds like she's in transition, this thing with the darkness and the light. Anything else you'd like to say about this one?

She: I mean, she's holding it in until she's gotten inside and then falls to pieces.

She expresses the strain this woman feels so genuinely. The tone, tempo, and emotion in her voice as she describes the card expresses her struggle too. She's conveying to me that she at times experiences a future when she can express her pain and learn to carry it rather than be overwhelmingly burdened by it. She's showing me her hope as well as her pain. I respond with a question about her rather than the woman in the card.

Me: Do you feel like you need to put up a front sometimes?

She: Yeah, like with my best friend that is no longer my friend. I see her in class and I just need to get through it. I don't want her in my life too much because she backed out on me when I needed her.

She conveys that her grief has tested her friendship and it's failing. She also conveys her want for relief, to let the pain out through expression, but she doesn't get the chance since her best friend has abandoned her when she needs her most. She carries the weight of being alone with a burden in silence. When with her friend, she must pretend, defending against the anger she has for not being supported as well as defending against voicing the pain that the friend will not hear. I'm glad that I can offer her the opportunity to find a voice for her experience. In the act of expressing her loneliness, she's also beginning to overcome it.

The next few cards unfortunately don't offer her this opportunity for expression. Her description of one of the last few cards, however, allows her to find her voice again. She picks up the card and holds it in front of her face, looking into it.

She: This one's about aging. She looks happy [pointing to the older woman in the card]. The earlier version of her [pointing to the younger woman] is looking for something and later she found it.

Me: So it's the same woman at two different times?

She: Sure! [She begins to laugh and I laugh with her]

Me: Why not! Does that relate to anything you've been thinking about or anything from your experience? Is there a way you're changing?

She: Well, living on your own and everything you get to that. I have to go visit the one side of the family soon and I haven't been down since the funeral. It's kind of like you revert back to who you were before but I've changed from this person that I used to be [pointing again to the younger woman]. But they still see this version of her.

Me: How would you describe this person again?

She: She doesn't look very happy. She's trying to find something that's just missing.

Me: And your relationship with this side of the family is difficult already, as you said before.

She: Yeah, they see me like a twelve year old tomboy. I can't really grow out of that one.

In her description of the card, I hear her struggle with coming from childhood into adulthood as well as her struggle in relation to a side of the family that's already strained due to her parents' divorce as well as religious differences. The relative's passing broadens and deepens the client's experience of an already apparent gap separating her from the family. Along with grief comes estrangement. Unlike the other members of the family, she felt very close to and heard by the relative that has unexpectedly passed. When her relative was alive, the client had someone who could

bear witness to and hold her experience of herself in a family that otherwise saw her still as a child. Now there is no such bridge between her experience of herself and the family's experience of her. What's missing and can't be found is this witness and her unhappiness stems from the futile search for the one who's gone. She hurts from now only being seen as what she's not by people she cares very much about. It's as if she is no longer in the family, because the person she is with them feels disingenuous. She not only lost a close relation but also the person who bridged the gap between her and this side of the family perhaps more than any other. To address the pain she brings to therapy, she needs to address this gap. After conveying this to me through her perception and description of this last card, she puts it down on the pile.

A week later, we're back in 911. She sits on the sofa reading the report I wrote about her based on our work with the cards and some other assessment tools. I sit quietly and comfortably, looking out the window. She reaches the final page of the report, which is unfinished. It's normal procedure to discuss the report with the client before writing the summary section, which has a heading and no body of text below it. I ask her what it's like reading the report. I ask her what resonated with her and what didn't. She smiles and says it's a bit bizarre reading a report about yourself. She then adds that the report does a good job describing how she's been experiencing her life. We discuss the parts of the report that stood out most for her.

Once she's drawn our attention to the highlights, I pick up the small, black laptop that I brought in with me and laid on the table at the beginning of the session. I tell her that I'd like to co-author the summary section with her now in light of our discussion. She's surprised, interested, and open to taking on the task. I ask her whether she would

prefer to type, for me to type, or for both of us to. She prefers that I do. We talk and write. I repeat back what's on the screen. We edit and continue, doing our best to emphasize the compelling and insightful aspects of the report that speak directly to her experience. For the summary, we have to write about her in the third person. This shifts the perspective in an interesting way. Rather than speaking of herself as 'I,' she describes herself from a position outside herself as if she were an image in a card whose story she needs to tell. One of the themes we summarize is the tension between how one side of the family sees her and how she experiences herself to be. She wants a respected voice with these relatives. She feels pigeon-holed and silenced, trapped in an identity that isn't her or her's. She wants more authority over who she is. In contrast to her relationship with them, I offer her authority over her own experience as we co-author a document that in some way defines her in our relationship. The report about her is also of her making.

About nine months later, we're in room 911 once again. So much has transpired here since we wrote that summary together. Over the course of the therapy, we have continued to pay attention to her experience of suffering without the cards. We have explored the meanings revealed in that early session in more depth with reference to her experience of weekly struggles, memories, dreams, and developing relationships. Listening to her experience has offered us more than insight into the nature of her struggle. We have also cultivated and nurtured a voice with which she expresses herself to me and later expresses herself to others outside the therapy room. She has left her comfort zone and risked saying things that she previously hid from other people and herself. She soon found herself opening up to others in these ways as well. She has

earned new friends and strengthened her relationships with existing friends, building a supportive foundation of people who listen to her. Exploring her experience of grief unexpectedly has guided her towards making unforeseen changes in her life which have offered her significant relief as well as growth. The collaborative dynamic between us has also nourished her sense of self-determination in relationships.

Today, she's brought in her laptop to show me a digital slideshow of her portfolio project. I get out of my chair, walk around the table, and sit next to her on the sofa. She shows me a series of black and white images with white borders, one at a time. We talk about each one. I describe aspects of the images that stand out to me. I associate some of the images with what I know of her. The images are of her family, especially the side of the family that's been the topic of our many conversations. It's fascinating to see the people I've heard so much about. Ingeniously, she's used her portfolio project to find a new voice with them, sincerely connecting, bridging the gap between them even in the absence of her deceased relative. Working collaboratively with each family member, she has created images of each of them in their element that also genuinely expresses how she experiences them. The facial expressions, dress, and setting tell the stories that she's told me in our sessions. Her family can now see who she perceives them to be. She feels more like herself with them now.

Once we've gone through the slides, I stand up and move around the table. We continue talking about the portfolio. I sit down in my chair again. I wonder how her life and project will continue to develop.

I will conclude this introduction to a phenomenological approach to psychopathology by commenting on this illustration. It evokes appreciation for a critical component of the phenomenological approach to therapy: respect for the client's authority. From a phenomenological perspective, we are each the author of our own experience. For psychotherapists, this means that the client has a magisterial authority in the therapeutic relationship. How things appear to one person may differ greatly from how they appear to another. When looking out the window of room 911, for instance, every person's attention is drawn to something different. And when asking different clients to describe their perception of the same cards, the answers are as different as the clients themselves. As the authors of their experience, the clients alone have the authority to teach us how the world shows itself to them. The word 'authority' itself teaches this lesson. To be an 'authority' is to have the quality of being an 'author.' The 'author' is an 'author'-ity. It's up to the therapist to make good use of the client's authority for therapeutic purposes.

A phenomenologically-oriented therapist often notices themes in the way clients author their perceptions. The therapist asks questions which bring the client closer to the particularities of her experience that provide insight into her pain. For example, the client from the story once shared a dream about cooking breakfast with her dead relative and some members of that side of the family. I asked her questions about the dream, including what it brought to mind and what might account for her having the dream now. She associated the color of the meal with the color of the deceased relative's room in the house where the client would visit the family. She dreamt this scene at a time when these family members had planned on visiting her, but they since cancelled after the death.

Again the theme of estrangement from her family appeared alongside her grief like it did in the cards as well as other experiences. The dream also expressed a wish to be connected to the family again. Discovering recurring themes is like finding signs along the way to a destination that is not yet clear. Themes direct the therapist and client towards what needs to be addressed. By cultivating a better understanding of the client's experience of the world and their psychological struggles in particular, the client and therapist in turn are better able to find meaning in these phenomena and navigate the world in which the client's troubles are couched. All this depends on the client being an authority in the relationship as the author of their experience. A phenomenological approach to psychopathology is inherently a collaborative process.²

The collaborative dynamic in our relationship in this story also appears in distinct contrast to the dynamic in her relationship with the family members she feels estranged from. In an intuitive or self-evident way, our relationship appears in the illustration as a therapeutic intervention effecting change in the client's way of existing. The strength of van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology rests on the principle that the client experiences the world, her body, others, and time in such a way that maintains her present way of existing. The relationship with the therapist should therefore appear as another experience serving to reinforce and maintain the client's painful way of relating. But it clearly does not. Instead, the relationship with the therapist disrupts and inspires a change in how the client experiences, how she relates. In order to find a voice with which to conceptualize and describe therapeutic interventions, we must turn away from the phenomenological approach to psychopathology introduced in *A Different Existence*, away from Heidegger's approach to analyzing human existence

in Part One of *Being and Time*, and turn towards a transcendental approach to analyzing human existence in Levinas' early work. In so doing, the basic approach to psychopathology presented here will find its complement: an approach to therapeutic intervention that responds to and depends on a phenomenological conceptualization of the client's pain.

Chapter 6: Levinas-Inspired Therapeutic Encounters

Different than Existence

When philosopher Emmanuel Levinas describes our relationship with existence when suffering insomnia, he might as well be describing a theme that guides his whole early philosophical project as well. He writes in *Existence and Existents* (1978/2001):

The impossibility of rending the invading, inevitable, and anonymous rumbling of existence manifests itself particularly in certain times when sleep evades our appeal. One watches on when there is nothing to watch and despite the absence of any reason for remaining watchful. The bare fact of presence is oppressive; one is held by being, held to be. (p. 61)

In insomnia, we are bound to our existence whether we like it or not. The early Levinas finds himself similarly burdened by Heidegger's analysis of existence. There's nothing but existence. We relate only to Being. Like a man suffering insomnia, Levinas wants to encounter something other than existence. His first significant and original contribution to philosophy is finding a voice to describe the encounter with something other than existence. He responds to Heidegger's philosophy of existence with a philosophy of transcendence.

The early Levinas critically responds to the very principle from Part One of *Being and Time* that also inspires van den Berg's phenomenological principles of psychopathology in *A Different Existence*. Levinas' central criticism of Heidegger is that human existence always has itself as the object of its work. To exist means to relate to existence in such a way that maintains this way of existing. It's a closed circuit. There's no exit. In a parallel way, the same criticism may be made of the approach to

psychopathology presented in the previous chapter: experience and perception always bend to reinforce and maintain the client's way of existing. In short, there is no way out. Everywhere you go, there you are. Following this logic, the client could only relate to the therapist in such a way that also maintains his way of existing. Van den Berg's introductory, phenomenological approach to psychopathology does not provide the language or concepts necessary for describing the kind of changes that surely he bore witness to and effected with his clients. By critically responding to van den Berg's phenomenological principles of psychopathology in the way that the early Levinas responds to Heidegger, I will find a voice with which to describe how the relationship between client and therapist offers paths to new ways of experiencing.

Such an approach to conceptualizing therapeutic interventions depends on van den Berg's approach to psychopathology. In order to reason how a way of existing may be transcended, one requires an understanding of that very way of experiencing the world in the first place. Although I will criticize van den Berg, I will in the same breath cultivate a need for his approach. Phenomenological psychology offers the tools for conceptualizing the client's psychological difficulties. In response to such a conceptualization, a Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention offers the tools for conceptualizing how the relationship between client and therapist effects a transition to a new way of existing. The subject of this chapter, then, is existence and transcendence in the therapeutic relationship.

Just as Levinas is concerned with transcendence, in a parallel way an approach to therapy inspired by Levinas' early work concerns itself with transition. The words 'transition' and 'transcendence' speak of their similarities if we allow them to briefly tell

their story. Etymology teaches us that the words ‘transition’ and ‘transcendence’ bear a meaningful resemblance. The word 'transition' developed from the Latin verb 'ire' meaning 'to go'. Considering that the prefix 'trans-' means 'beyond' and the suffix '-tion' means 'the act of', we arrive at the etymological meaning of the word 'transition': the act of going beyond. The word transcendence developed from the Latin verb 'scandere' meaning 'to climb' or 'to go'. Considering again that the prefix 'trans-' means 'beyond' and the suffix '-ence' means 'an instance of,' we arrive at a very similar etymological meaning: an instance of climbing or going beyond. Transition, a word commonly used in scholarship on therapy, and transcendence, a word commonly used in philosophy, have parallel meanings.

As psychologist Steen Halling notes in *Intimacy, Transcendence, and Psychology: Closeness and Openness in Everyday Life* (2008), the word 'transcendence' is "often used to imply something otherworldly, religious, metaphysical, or outside the lives of ordinary people and relationships." Despite the frequently abstract use of the word, he suggests and demonstrates that transcendence also refers to a "venturing into, or an opening up to, something new." I similarly interpret the early Levinas' ideas about transcendence as ideas about making a psychological transition in therapy.

Prior to this portion of the present writing, the theme ‘finding voice’ has been focused on the client finding his voice. In the following development of a Levinas-inspired understanding of psychotherapy, I will describe ways in which the therapist finding her voice effects change by staging an encounter between the client and the therapist. By referring to Levinas’ work for inspiration, I will describe how the therapist can suggest, empathize, and dynamically interpret in such a way that facilitates the client

making a psychological transition from one way of experiencing the world to another – in other words, transcending himself. In response to the encounter with the therapist’s voice, the client finds a new voice that relieves and addresses the pain in his way of existing that brought him to therapy, reorienting the way he experiences the world. My intention, reader, is to make use of Levinas’ transcendental ideas to articulate how this occurs. The route towards this end follows Levinas’ philosophical beginnings from a distance. I first introduce Levinas’ early work in as digestible a way as possible, examining how he introduces his ideas about transcendence. Then, I adopt his style of thought to introduce ideas about effecting psychological transition in therapy. My introductory contribution to conceptualizing therapeutic intervention further demonstrates how philosophy can inspire scholarship on psychotherapeutic practice.

Encountering Nourishment: Therapeutic Suggestions

Perhaps the most straightforward and clear objection the early Levinas raises against Heidegger concerns the phenomenological description of the world. This objection appears in the beginning portions of both *Existence and Existents* as well as *Time and the Other*. Levinas (1978/2001) shows appreciation for Heidegger:

In the effort to separate the notion of the world from the notion of a sum of objects, we certainly see one of the most profound discoveries of Heideggerian philosophy. (p. 34)

Such appreciation, however is always followed by a ‘but...’ He demonstrates ambivalence towards Heidegger, praising and criticizing him in the same breath:

Since Heidegger, we are in the habit of considering the world as an ensemble of tools. Existing in the world is acting, but acting in such a way that in the final account action has our own existence as its object. Tools refer to one another to finally refer to our care for existing. In turning on a bathroom switch, we have opened up the entire ontological problem. What seems to have escaped Heidegger - if it is true that in these matters something might have escaped Heidegger - is that prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments. (Levinas, 1987, p. 63)

Here in *Time and the Other*, he makes a criticism very similar to criticisms in *Existence and Existents*. On the one hand, Levinas is grateful for Heidegger's assertion that the world is not simply a scientific sum of measured objects. On the other hand, he disagrees with the reduction of our engagement with the world to a means of caring for our own existing. In the final analysis, our existence in the world is determined by our care for our existence, which makes the world a world of tools at our disposal for this very purpose. Levinas claims that Heidegger has missed the essential meaning of the world: it nourishes our existence.

The early Levinas understands the world as one of nourishments and sincerity. Without being a world of tools for existing, a world of nourishments nonetheless maintains our existence. The crucial difference for Levinas is that there is no existential, ulterior motive on our part, even if this motive is an unconscious one. He begins with the example of food. Food may maintain our existence, but this is not our intention. We do not eat because food is a tool of our existence. We eat because we are hungry. Following this simple example, Levinas (1978/2001) continues,:

This structure, where an object concords fully with a desire, is characteristic of our whole being-in-the-world. Nowhere in the phenomenal order does the object of an action refer to the concern for existing; it itself makes up our existence. We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk. All that is not for the sake of living; it is living. Life is a sincerity. (p. 36)

Levinas' description of the world shifts the emphasis from the 'for the sake of existing' and tools to satisfaction and enjoyment: actions with sincere ends. For the early Levinas, Heidegger's understanding of the world is insincere in that what appears to be an engagement with the world covers over a more fundamental relationship with our existing itself. We may seem concerned with the world but only insofar as we may satisfy an existential, ulterior motive: the care for our own existing. Levinas (1978/2001) writes of Heidegger:

Seeing objects as 'material' - in the sense that we speak of 'war material' - he has included them in the care for existing ... But he has thereby failed to recognize the essentially secular nature of being in the world and the sincerity of intentions. (p. 34, my omission)

To further argue against Heidegger's world of tools, Levinas (1978/2001) considers a situation in which nourishments are treated as tools for existing:

When one has to eat, drink and warm oneself in order not to die, when nourishment becomes fuel, as in certain kinds of hard labor, the world also seems to be at an end, turned upside down and absurd, needing to be renewed. (p. 37)

The 'for the sake of existing' that governs Heidegger's world of tools makes this world necessarily desperate and unsatisfying. The care for existence can never find satisfaction.

In Heidegger's world of tools, we can never escape the burden of existing. In existing for the sake of existing, we must always already have more work to do. We are like workers who never get time for a break. By contrast, Levinas describes a world in which relief is possible. The possibility of satisfaction, of attaining an end, offers he who exists some relief from the burden of existing:

So in the very instant of the transcendence of need, placing the subject in front of nourishments, in front of the world as nourishment, this transcendence offers the subject a liberation from itself. The world offers the subject participation in existing in the form of enjoyment, and consequently permits it to exist at a distance from itself. The subject is absorbed in the object it absorbs, and nevertheless keeps a distance with regard to that object. (Levinas, 1987, p. 67)

By our existence in the world, we find some relief from this existence through satisfaction. We may not escape the irremissible burden of existence altogether, but in enjoyment we nonetheless loosen the bond we have with our own existence.

Following Levinas' philosophical description of a world of nourishments and life as a sincerity, I find myself remembering an experience I had as a client with a therapist. My presenting issue was stress from taking on more work than could possibly be done, as I described earlier in the previous chapter. Everywhere I went, I felt stressed and found myself constantly reminded of what had to be done. My stomach grumbled with having bit off more than I could chew. In sessions with my therapist, I would describe this stress at great length, finding relief from venting but still feeling stressed and trapped. In

response to my description of a world in which stress and responsibility feels inescapable, my therapist surprised me with a very nourishing suggestion. “Don’t go to work or do anything about work for one day, just to realize there’s something other than this, that you have a choice,” he said. I was a bit shocked at first by his suggestion. Playing sick seemed so wrong, so forbidden. At the same time, however, it seemed so right. Like a person starving for food, I was hungry for a break from my responsibilities, but the possibility of taking one had never occurred to me. I was experiencing the world in such a way that taking a day off could not occur to me. Here, the relief came not from me finding my voice first, but through the therapist finding his voice, giving me advice that wouldn’t fit into my experience of possibilities in the world at that time. It was an encounter, by which I mean I was surprised, almost disoriented for a moment, and then found myself saying I could do something that a moment ago would be an impossible thought. I was inspired. I found a new voice of agency in response to the therapist’s statement that pointed me in a direction beyond the way I was perceiving things at the time. I took a day off and felt rejuvenated. For that day I was not living for the sake of work responsibilities. Rather, I nourished myself with sincere intentions, eating because I was hungry, reading for the sake of reading, watching a movie just to watch it, etc.

Ironically, by following the early Levinas’ criticisms of Heidegger, I find myself articulating principles of therapeutic intervention which depend on and nicely compliment the principles of psychopathology inspired by Heidegger. Once a phenomenological approach to psychopathology furnishes the therapist with a thematic understanding of the painful way the client exists, the therapist can then think of a strong suggestion that is a nourishing possibility. I remember a client who looked tired as if he

had been carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders for some time. The expressions on his face and the tone of his voice were unmistakably depression. His sincerity as he insightfully spoke also impressed me as an indicator of strong character. He imagined moving away to live alone or simply killing himself as fine alternatives to his present state of affairs. In the first sessions with this client, I observed a theme in his experience of depression. Whether he talked about the school system, how society treats the environment, the economic system, or the government's negligence or abuse, he experienced himself as the powerless victim of forces greater than himself. Everything was determined for him and he had no agency in his existence no matter where he turned. In his serious consideration of suicide as well as living a hermit's life in the wilderness, I also heard a desperate cry for autonomy. Thinking, as therapists often do, that this pattern in his life began in the family, I asked if there too he found himself in a depressing situation, feeling trapped and powerless. The client replied in the affirmative, elaborating on how the same feelings were deeply entrenched in family relations. Collaboratively we explored his present and past experience of the family system, noting that one had to be vigilant because people were often angry and threatening as well as judgmental, making it unsafe to have a voice in any vulnerable or open way. Furthermore, one family member seemed to rule the rest and while this person might act like you have some input or autonomy, it's all smoke and mirrors.

He vented in particular about this family member's expectation that he would quit another, important obligation to do something he had no investment in doing. He found himself particularly frustrated because the family obligation was to honor a person whom he'd already honored that week at a similar family event. Furthermore, the very person

being honored found the family member's expectation frustrating as well. Angry and hopeless, the client could see no way out. I observed that he is depressed because he needs to experience himself as autonomous rather than trapped. I suggested that he say "no" to attending the event and stand his ground, knowing that he would have to face the upset of the controlling family member. He needed to nourish himself with an experience of agency for which he was so hungry that emotionally he was wasting away. It may seem simple to some, but for the client such a thought was impossible to consider on his own. He was surprised as I was when my therapist told me to take a day off. The suggestion disoriented him for a second. Then, having thought it over for a moment, he gave a look of being inspired and committed to taking the advice with a hopeful smile. The client returned the next session with pleasant expressions and looking strikingly rejuvenated. He found great satisfaction in saying "no" and similarly found his spirits lifted. It was hard in the act, facing protests, having to stand one's ground, though also inspiring and relieving. Hearing the advice from my voice was an encounter with an idea impossible for him to realize on his own because his way of experiencing the world would not allow such a thing to be thought. To offer the client relief, the therapist finds a voice that the client could not find in himself on his own.

While it is perhaps obvious, it's worth noting too that therapists often discuss nourishment of basic needs with clients. While most therapists are not medical doctors, they still discuss eating, sleeping, and exercising habits with clients. Talking about food, exercise, rest, and even creative outlets fits with an understanding of the world as one of nourishments. When these 'habits' are taken on for their own sake, as ends in themselves, then they can offer relief from existential pain and sincere satisfaction.

From the previous chapter, it's already apparent that a phenomenological understanding of the world based on van den Berg's *A Different Existence* (1972) parallels Heidegger's understanding of the world as described by Levinas in his early work. Van den Berg asserts that the world is not simply a scientific conglomeration of objects. Like Heidegger, van den Berg finds the meaning of the world in the relationship that we have with it, but this relationship with the world is ultimately reduced to the client's care for his own existing. Remember the example of van den Berg's depressed client. In order for the client to maintain his lonely existence, the world appears as a means toward this end. The streets are empty, which maintains his loneliness. The buildings are dilapidated, which maintains his feeling that all things are coming to an end. He is always already in a lonely and threatening world. He maintains his painful existence by finding the world as he needs it to be, whether he knows it or not. Remember too the example of the bullied man referred to earlier. In the act of perceiving the world, it bends to his need to feel bullied such that he can't escape that way of being in the world, whether he likes it or not.

We may thus develop an ambivalent response to van den Berg's phenomenological understanding of the world in *A Different Existence* that parallels the early Levinas' response to Heidegger. Van den Berg's analysis suggests that the client has an existential, ulterior motive in his experience of the world. The client always experiences the world as an ensemble of tools for the maintenance of his way of existing, whether he knows it or not. What seems to have escaped van den Berg in *A Different Existence*- if it is true that in these matters something might have escaped van den Berg - is that prior to being a system of tools for maintaining the client's troubling existence, the

world is an ensemble of nourishments. Actions with sincere ends, things one does simply for the sake of doing them, offer satisfaction and relief from the burden of always maintaining one's way of existing. In therapy, the client encounters nourishing suggestions from the therapist that disrupt and relieve the client's maintenance of his painful way of existing. These suggestions inspire the client to actions with sincere ends that do not serve an existential, ulterior motive. Nourished with such suggestions and sincere actions, the client transcends himself and transitions to a different way of existing that he could not accomplish on his own, trapped in the never ending work of caring for his painful existence.

Encountering the Other: Dynamic Interpretation

Although Levinas clearly and simply criticizes Heidegger's conceptualization of the world in his early work, his disagreement with Heidegger regarding the relationship between the existing subject and others in the world is a heavier and richer dish, though still digestible. For the early Levinas, Heidegger's phenomenology cannot describe the relationship with the other person because it cannot appreciate the other's alterity, which is beyond experience or wholly otherwise than the existence known by the subject.

Alterity is mystery: that which is inherently unknown, a darkness no light can penetrate. The other person is first and foremost a stranger for Levinas. The other in its alterity is what cannot come to light and cannot be known. To describe the relationship with the other as alterity, Levinas (1978/2001) turns away from phenomenology:

Phenomenological description, which by definition cannot leave the sphere of light ... will not suffice. Qua phenomenology it remains within the world of

light, the world of the solitary ego which has no relationship with the other qua other, for whom the other is another me, an *alter ego* known by sympathy, that is, by a return to oneself. (p. 86, my omission)

For phenomenology, the other person is always one we can relate to, identify with, and understand. The other is known by sympathy. Every relationship with another is an experience of that person as somehow like me or a part of my world. Although he parts with phenomenology in general in describing relationships with others, Levinas (1987) also highlights this departure as a departure from Heidegger in particular:

Finally, the other in Heidegger appears in the essential situation of *Miteinandersein*, reciprocally being with one another. ... The preposition *mit* (with) here describes the relationship. It is thus an association of side by side, around something, around a common term and, more precisely, for Heidegger, around the truth. It is not the face-to-face relationship, where each contributes everything, except the private fact of one's existence. I hope to show, for my part, that it is not the preposition *mit* that should describe the original relationship with the other. (pp. 40-41)

For Heidegger, the other is always with us, alongside us, and in our world of experience. There is nothing mysterious about the other in whom we find a reflection of ourselves. Like the relationship between the subject and the world, the relationship between the subject and the other person offers no relief from existing. Heidegger cannot describe a relationship in which people are in relation without this being a common way of existing. The relationship with the other is ultimately another relationship with our own existence

that we share and care for with the other, who is in some sense always another me, more of the same.

From the perspective of van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology, the relationship with the other is similar as we already know. The relationship with the other person is not a relationship with a stranger or someone foreign to our way of being in the world. The other is inherently tied up with our experience of the world, sharing this experience with us. It follows that in order to relate to another, this other must first have a reason to appear alongside us in the world. There must be something of the client's existence shared with the other in order for this other to exist for the client at all. Even if the other appears in a negative mode as 'not-with' the client, this negation nevertheless maintains the client's existence as the term that brings the other into relation with the client. Again, this was clear in the example of the man who exists as bullied. He perceives others in such a way that he is not with them – they are the bullies while he is the bullied – but in this way they are entirely with him, filling out the roles that must be played in his experience of the world.

Using van den Berg's phenomenological principles laid out in *A Different Existence*, one cannot describe how a client could relate to another without this being a relationship to the client's familiar way of experiencing the world. All others come into relation to the client in terms of 'withness.' No other is isolated from the client's experience or foreign to the client's world. In his care for his painful way of being in the world, the client can only relate to another if the other serves as a tool for the client's existential maintenance. In other words, the other must be an alter ego. This leaves us unable to describe how the client might come into contact with another who does not

reinforce and enable his way of existing. Van den Berg hints at a hope for a change in the client's world – for a new world to appear before the client – but he does not present the rhetorical tools to describe how this change is possible. In van den Berg's example, the client's disturbed contact with other people has furnished him with a world where everyone already appears from a distance, as a puppet, or as an obstacle. Others may only appear on a stage set he's already set and they will read lines that are all too familiar to him.

This is confirmed in the client's relationship with the therapist, which van den Berg briefly describes towards the end of *A Different Existence*. Van den Berg finds his relationship with the client repeating the old, troubled relationship between the client and his father. He presents a hope for change based in the power of the other to shape the client's world, but he does not follow through with a description of how this is possible in phenomenological terms. Van den Berg asserts that the repetition of the problematic relationship allows the therapist and client to develop the relationship and follow through with it in a different way. But he cannot go into detail because the introductory phenomenological approach to psychopathology cannot describe how the relationship with the therapist might be something other than a repetition of a problematic relationship. He leaves me wondering how a truly different relationship is possible and effects change. Van den Berg's psychological rhetoric in *A Different Existence* does not offer a means for articulating how a client's relationship with another may commence otherwise than the maintenance of his existence requires.

We may thus make a criticism of the phenomenological approach to psychopathology that parallels the early Levinas' criticism of Heidegger. In *A Different*

Existence, the relationship with the other is a being alongside another with a common purpose and in sympathy. For the client, whose existence has a troubled character, others appear in relation to the client's maintenance of his troubled way of being in the world. The relationship with the other is originally and primarily a 'witness' for van den Berg. He offers no means of describing a relationship with another that is a relationship with alterity, a mystery, or something beyond or otherwise than the client's existence. Van den Berg of course knows from his clinical practice that therapy offers the client an opportunity for transition to a new way of existing, but this cannot be conceptualized using the phenomenological approach to psychopathology. Is there no way to describe a client transitioning to another way of experiencing others, relating to another without this other being with the pathology? For a Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention, it can not be the preposition 'with' that describes the original and primary nature of the client's relationship with others. And insofar as our interest is primarily describing psychotherapy, the preposition 'with' especially can not describe the relationship with the therapist.³ Having first understood what it means to be with the client, the therapist must in turn find the voice to deliberately not be with the client while still relating to him or her nonetheless.

In contrast to Heidegger, the early Levinas (1978/2001) asserts that the relationship with the other is a relationship without any intermediary structuring it:

To this collectivity of comrades we contrast the I-you collectivity which precedes it. It is not a participation in a third term - the intermediate person, truth, dogma, work, profession, interest, dwelling, or meal; that is, it is not a communion. It is the fearful face-to-face situation of a relationship without intermediary, without

mediations. Here the interpersonal relationship is not of itself the indifferent and reciprocal relationship of two interchangeable terms. The Other as other is not only an *alter ego*. He is what I am not ... (p. 98)

Although Levinas admits that the other is an alter ego, he emphasizes that the other is first and foremost different than me. The other and I are not two of a kind, interchangeable, or identified with each other. The other is only like me in so far as this resemblance involves the recognition of an inherent difference from me that cannot be overcome:

The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a mystery. The other's entire being is constituted by its exteriority, or rather its alterity ... (Levinas, 1987, pp. 75-76)

In contrast to the experience of sympathy and being with the other, Levinas introduces the encounter with the other as a mystery and the fearful face-to-face without intermediary. The relationship with the other might better be described as a relationship *to* the other or a face to face with the other. It is a relationship that is not qualifiable as an experience. Rather, it is an encounter with that which is beyond (and perhaps prior to) experience. For Levinas, the other is a stranger.

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas (1978/2001) develops his notion of the encounter with the other by modeling his description on the failure of communication he finds in love:

What is presented as the failure of communication in love in fact constitutes the positive character of the relationship; this absence of the other is precisely his presence qua other. The other is the neighbor - but proximity is not a degradation of, or a stage on the way to, fusion. (pp. 98-99)

Love for Levinas is not a fusion, a oneness, or a sympathetic love. It is a relationship with a mysterious other who never comes to light. The failure of reaching the other by identification or sympathy is the very positivity of the relationship. The practice of this kind of love relationship offers Levinas insight into the relationship with the other that he contrasts to Heidegger:

In civilized life there are traces of this relationship with the other that one must investigate in its original form. ... I think the absolutely contrary contrary, whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine*.⁴ (Levinas, 1987, pp. 84-85, my omission)

Levinas invokes a “feminine” way of relating to inspire his articulation of a relationship in which the difference from the other is not lost in a ‘withness.’

Before I present the early Levinas’ conceptualization of the other, which appears in sexed terms, I will here pause and make note of how sex appears in Levinas’ early work. In *Existence and Existents*, he has not yet brought sex into his philosophical project. That begins in *Time and the Other* where distinctly patriarchal gender roles at first inspire his conceptualization of the subject, the other, and the subject’s relationship to the other. He then proceeds, however, from presenting these roles as an inspiration to taking the problematic step of presenting them as fundamental concepts in his

philosophy. Using Levinas' rhetoric, the subject is always a masculine subject. The other is always the feminine other, experienced as alterity by the male subject. The new subject borne from their encounter is always a son. The patriarchal gender roles go from being an inspiration to being expressed as philosophical truth. Instead of "feminine," one could convey the philosophical meaning with the words 'mysterious' or 'elusive.' Instead of "the feminine other," one could refer to 'alterity.' Instead of the "masculine" subject, one could refer to 'the subject in relation to alterity.' Instead of "fathering a son," one could convey the philosophical meaning with 'parenting a child.' Scholars have challenged Levinas' inscription of sex into his philosophical concepts with reference to *Totality and Infinity* in particular where it is the most extensive (Heinemaa, 2009). His early work is subject to similar observations and concerns. After presenting Levinas' explicitly sexed philosophical concepts, I will articulate parallel psychological ones. In so doing, I will depart from his language in the ways I have just suggested he, himself, could have.

Levinas has already asserted that phenomenological analysis is restricted to experience and "the sphere of light." The feminine from a patriarchal perspective offers Levinas an inspirational example of a being that refuses to enter the light. The art of hiding oneself, forever retreating from advances, and eluding another's grasp characterize the feminine:

What matters to me in this notion of the feminine is not merely the unknowable, but a mode of being that consists in slipping away from the light. The feminine in existence is an event different from that of spatial transcendence or of expression that go toward light. It is a flight before light. Hiding is the way of existing of

the feminine, and this fact of hiding is precisely modesty. So this feminine alterity does not consist in the object's simple exteriority. Neither is it made up of an opposition of wills. The Other is not a being we encounter that menaces us or wants to lay hold of us. The feat of being refractory to our power is not a power greater than ours. Alterity makes for all its power. Its mystery constitutes its alterity. (Levinas, 1987, p. 87)

The modest hiding of the other resists the powers of the subject to maintain its way of existing. In the relation with the other, we glimpse the possibility of escaping from the existence to which one is bound. For Heidegger, existence ultimately refers back to itself. The existing subject is incapable of not having its existence as its ultimate end: its power is its prison, its bravo is its inescapable burden. Even in contact with others, the subject is bound to its existence. The other can only be contacted through the intermediary of care for this existence. In the encounter with the other, Levinas sees the possibility of this power refracting and failing. The existing subject encounters something impossible, that which existence can not take hold of for its own ends. The other can not be a tool for existence. The other is defined by this impossibility, which is the possibility of encountering something beyond existing. The encounter with the other stands in stark contrast to the relationship with the other from Heidegger's phenomenological perspective.

In thinking of the clear response to van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology that parallels Levinas' response to phenomenology, I'm reminded of a recent experience with a client. She lived and had grown up in a world governed and managed on another's terms, be it her family's terms, an abuser's, the legal system's, a

boyfriend's, a friend's, the school's, work's, etc. In session, she often expected, asked, or demanded me to give her advice, tell her what to do, tell her what I would do, or tell her whether her plan was right or wrong. She made efforts to put her life on my terms. Early on, I intuitively sensed this was not what she needed, but could not fully explain my resistance, leaving her frustrated. Then I got it (we all are slow sometimes). In response to a break up, she reported relating to her friends in the way I noticed she often related to me. Taking a phenomenological approach, I observed a theme in her relationships. I observed to her that while she is pained by everything being not on her terms, in this instance the breakup, she is part of this dynamic. By asking others to tell her what to do, she invites a world that is not on her terms. She laughed and quickly noted that she's been hearing her friends' advice and then doing the opposite. I responded with another observation. In the act of rejecting the advise, directives, and terms she solicits from others, she briefly experiences the world being on her terms instead. Although this approach offers some relief, this dynamic ultimately leaves her still dependent on the terms of others because it is only in the act of rejecting the other's terms that she feels in control. Then, I found the voice to resist being with her in this dynamic. I spoke with the voice of alterity, becoming the other in relation to the client. In response to her plea for a directive, I stated compassionately that I knew she needed things to be on her terms and that if I gave her what she was asking me for, I would be doing her a disservice, preventing her from finding a way to truly experience the world on terms that come from her without needing another. I resisted her powers used to maintain her way of existing in relationships. Instead of being frustrated, she smiled a surprised and relieved sort of smile, relaxing more than she had through the recent appointments. For the remainder of

the session, she related to me differently, exhibited less pain, and opened to the possibility of finding a directive voice within herself. This example illustrates how the client's relationship with the therapist parallels Levinas' description of the encounter with the other.

Central to setting the stage for such encounters is the therapist maintaining anonymity. The therapist has a mysterious character: never fully coming into the light for the client. The relationship between the client and the therapist parallels the relationship of the existing subject to the other. The therapeutic relationship does not lead to fusion and is not based in sympathy. Neither does the therapist model the healthy way of being to the client. The therapist is not an alter ego of the client. The disciplined art of remaining a stranger in a relationship without this ending the relationship is the therapist's challenge. From a position of being a mystery, the therapist is freed to take on roles in relation to the client that might not fit the therapist's usual interpersonal style naturally employed with coworkers, family, or friends. Often, in order to refract the powers of the client who pulls the therapist into a dynamic that maintains his painful way of existing, the therapist must act in ways out of character. Anonymity prevents the therapist from sabotaging opportunities for relating to the client in therapeutic ways.

As an aside, the effect of this on the therapist is a mixed bag. On the one hand, the therapist relates to people in new ways, growing in relational capacity, understanding and experience. On the other hand, the therapist relates to people in new ways, taking on roles that she would rather not have to play but must nonetheless. When addressing damage from abusive figures, for instance, the role played by the therapist may require endurance, strong insight, and a capacity for sacrifice in favor of the client's well being.

Encountering Oneself: Empathic Reparenting

Levinas' articulation of the subject's relationship to the other invites parallel insights into the role the therapist plays in relation to the client. But what of the role the client plays in relation to himself? From Levinas' perspective, what happens to the existing subject who encounters the other? The subject is not taken into the other's way of existing as the subject wishes to take in the other. The subject is also not menaced by the other. What becomes of the subject face-to-face with the other? What is the effect of the encounter? The question that concerns Levinas in this regard is how the existing subject can remain itself in the encounter:

How, in the alterity of you, can I remain I, without being absorbed or losing myself in that you? How can the ego that I am remain myself in a you, without being nonetheless the ego that I am in my present - that is to say, an ego that inevitably returns to itself? How can the ego become other to itself? This can happen only in one way: through paternity. (Levinas, 1987, p. 91)

It can, indeed, happen only in one way, through parenting a child. In parenting a child, the subject finds itself again as a product of the relationship to the other. On the one hand, the child is the subject's return to itself. The encounter with the other creates a new version of the parent, an alter ego. On the other hand, the child is its own, individual self and not the parent. In this sense, the subject's existence returns to itself as other than this existence, bearing alterity in its identity. The child is the parental subject's relationship to itself as other than itself:

Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me. (Levinas, 1987, p. 91)

In this way, the encounter with the other produces transcendence and transition: both an escape from existence as well as a return to it without this existence being the same one with which the subject began. The existing subject encounters the other and thereby becomes reborn. The metaphor of parenting a child describes the subject as first parent and then child. The subject as parent takes up the work of existing in a particular way, encounters the other, and in consequence can take up the work of existing in a new way while nonetheless still being itself: a child who is but is also different than the parent.

In relation to the therapist as other, the client engages in a process of reparenting in a process that parallels Levinas' description of parenting a child. In response to clients who present with feelings they can't understand, I respond with an approach that is both empathic as well as reflective, using the alterity of the other to effect a reparenting of the client. Feelings we don't understand yet repeatedly feel are often feelings from experiences in childhood we're yet to process. When we're children, we often don't have the insight or verbal capacity to describe how we feel, but we certainly have feelings. Similarly, caregivers often don't provide us with the words we need to express what we're feeling. By remembering past times that the client associates with this feeling, starting with the earliest memory of the feeling, he can relive the memory in the present, giving words to the experience and the affect in a way he wasn't able to as a child. Through finding his voice in this way, the client can fully express the feeling and

articulate the situations in which it was felt, thereby processing the past and freeing himself from the lingering feelings.

Levinas provides us with concepts to better describe how such processing effects change. The difference between empathy and sympathy is crucial here. Sympathy is a relationship of 'witness' that leads to a fusion of client and therapist. By sympathizing, the therapist loses her alterity. The feeling shared in sympathy holds the feeling in the contexts in which therapist and client similarly experience it. This forecloses the possibility of following the feeling to other contexts, namely memories of the past. Empathy, by contrast, is hospitable to such reflection. Because the therapist has a mysterious, hidden, anonymous character, the empathic comment comes not from someone who has been through the same thing as the client but from someone whose experience is inherently unknown and unknowable. In the voice of the empathizing therapist, the client encounters a powerful affect that is undeniably himself and yet this affect is divorced from the client's present experience, residing somewhere new and unforeseeable in the therapist as well. The therapist holds the feeling for the client outside of the recent situation in which the feeling appeared. The therapist demonstrates that the affect can move and be followed into mysterious, unknown places. Just as the client can experience the feeling outside himself in the heart of the anonymous therapist facing him, so too can the feeling be followed into the previously unexplored regions of the client's past. At this moment of empathic relation, the therapist may find her voice at the right time and instruct the client to associate to the feeling and recall the earliest, most powerful, or first memories that come to mind. The affect is unchained, the instruction has been given, and the client then relives the past by addressing and encountering the

empathic therapist, giving words to everything he couldn't before like a parent might. At the end of the process, the client reports being freed and changed, no longer as he was but still who he is, which parallels the subject's relationship to itself as parent and child as described by Levinas.

I'm reminded of a powerful experience of this process in relation to a client who reported on a situation in which he felt guilty. I empathized with his guilt in this situation and asked if he often feels this way. The client reported feeling guilty quite often and at times when it seemed unreasonable to him. While the feeling of guilt was still ripe in the room, I responded with the explanation of the process I just shared with you, reader, and instructed the client to associate to his guilt and recall the earliest, most powerful, or first memories that came to mind. The powerful, early memory that appeared in his mind's eye captivated him. He described at length a scene from when he was just entering adolescence. A parent was sick and had been for some time. On the particular night he was reliving, the ambulance came to pick up the parent for transport to the hospital. On the stretcher headed out the door, the parent asked the client for a kiss. The client was embarrassed and did not fulfill what he did not know was his parent's dying wish. He would never see the parent again. As he recounted this story for me, I continued empathizing with him. The guilt led us to sadness. We cried together through the story and after. I found my voice again, telling him in tears but with strength that he was a child, he did not know his parent would die for the parent had been in the hospital so many times before, and that he could be forgiven. In the next session, the client reported having made a breakthrough, feeling changed, feeling freed from the burden of guilt. He

also reported recounting the experience to his remaining parent, reliving it again, and further strengthening both his relief and their bond.

Following the insights illustrated in this example and the previous one, I may respond to van den Berg's understanding of the relationship with other people in a manner that parallels the early Levinas' response to Heidegger. The relationship with the therapist is not originally a sympathy or a being alongside the other as an alter ego. Rather, the client encounters the therapist as anonymous and hidden, as alterity. The therapist resists the client's way of painfully existing with other people. The therapist also empathizes with the client, divorcing the feeling from the client's present situation enough to follow the affect through the past summoned to the present. The client summons the past for the therapist as other. In the act of describing the memory to the other in the encounter, a kind of rebirth occurs. The client in such a relation to the other transitions from one way of existing to another. The client identifies with himself the way Levinas describes the parent identifying with the child as the same yet other and new.

Encountering the Future: Dynamic Interpretation

In considering the alterity of the other and the parenting of a child, we have not exhausted Levinas' description of the relationship to the other person in his early works. For Levinas (1987), the relationship with the other person is also an encounter with the future:

Relationship with the future, the presence of the future in the present, seems all the same accomplished in the face-to-face with the Other. The situation of the

face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship. (p. 79)

In order to understand how the relationship with the other makes time possible, we might first, quickly consider again how van den Berg describes time from a phenomenological perspective and then consider how Levinas describes the future by contrast.

In *A Different Existence*, Van den Berg (1972) describes time as inherently a present time. Both the past and the future appear to us in the present:

The present has dimensions; at times it contains a whole life - as an exception, it may even contain a period longer than an individual existence. The past is within this present: what was is the *way* it is appearing now. *The future*: what comes, the *way* it is meeting us now. (p. 91)

From this phenomenological perspective, the past and future are made of the present as well. A client sees a future now from the point of view of his present concerns, which gives the future a meaning for him. The future he sees coming towards him now is interpreted as aiding in the maintenance of his present way of experiencing the world. Similarly, the client's present concerns also shape the experience of the past. Memories that appear now serve the client's present way of existing. Time for van den Berg is a solitary time that ultimately refers back to the client alone in his care for his existence. The future and past serve the needs of the present, offering no relief from a painful way of experiencing the world.

In contrast to the future that we imagine in the present, which reduces the future to a modality of the present and the solitude of the existing subject, the early Levinas

(1987) draws attention to the future as a transcending of the present and as inherently inaccessible and other:

The future is what is in no way grasped. The exteriority of the future is totally different from spatial exteriority precisely through the fact that the future is absolutely surprising. Anticipation of the future and the projection of the future, sanctioned as essential to time by all theories from Bergson to Sartre, are but the present of the future and not the authentic future; the future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future. It seems to me impossible to speak of time in a subject alone, or to speak of a purely personal duration. (pp. 76-77)

In addition to being mysterious and hidden, the other is inherently surprising and unexpected. As other than our existence, the future is encountered but not experienced. It is made of alterity. Experiencing the future amounts to an experience of the future in the present. The future is be mediated by the present. The authentic future, however, is the future precisely because it is beyond the present moment, including the future we may imagine. The future cannot be experienced as part of one's present existence. The authentic future can only be faced as one faces a mystery. It can only be encountered.

Time, then, is not only social because we agree on how to measure time, whether it be by a clock or the sun. In other words, time is not only social in the sense that we are with each other in the same time, experiencing the same time. More importantly, time is a departure from the present moment that is mine alone towards a nothingness that we

can only encounter and not experience. For the early Levinas (1978/2001), the social relationship is more than a means of agreeing on how to measure time, it is time itself:

Is not sociality something more than the source of our representation of time: is it not time itself? ... The dialectic of time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the other, that is, a dialogue which in turn has to be studied in terms other than those of the dialectic of the solitary subject. The dialectic of the social relationship will furnish us with concepts of a new kind. And the nothingness necessary to time, which the subject cannot produce, comes from the social relationship. (p. 96, my omission)

The present is born from our encounter with the future as other, which we relate to precisely because it is radically different than our existence. Time is a relationship with the other: an encounter. Just as the subject's encounter with the other produces a child, so too does our encounter with the future produce a new present. Like the child to the subject, the new present is identical to the previous moment – they are connected – and yet different as well. Encountering the surprising and unexpected other transcends the subject's present way of existing.

In response to a successful interpretation from the therapist, clients often appear disoriented or shocked for a moment as a shift in their way of relating and experiencing the world takes hold. The client presents one way of experiencing the world, then the therapist surprises him with an interpretation, and then the client makes a psychological transition, adopting a new way of being present to the therapist and the world. For van den Berg's phenomenological approach to psychopathology, the future is experienced in the present as a tool for maintaining the client's way of experiencing the world. For a

Levinas-inspired approach to describing time in the therapeutic relationship, the therapist embodies the future. When the therapist finds a voice with which to correctly interpret the way the client relates in the present, she knocks the client out of the present. I might even describe it paradoxically as knocking the client out of time for a moment. Surprised and momentarily disoriented, the client arrives in the present but not back in the same present. A transition is made in the process. The client transcends the present to find a new present, a new voice, and engage in a different way of relating.

I'm reminded of an experience with a client having relationship difficulties. He arrived in my office by getting a ride from his girlfriend. He was noticeably more withdrawn, repressing anger, and appearing depressed. Usually, he would talk readily and respond to me with openness. This session was different. It took some work to get him to speak. He recounted the frustrating discussion in the car. He was telling her things he needed and wasn't getting from the relationship as he had been for months. His complaints struck me as clear, coherent, and reasonable. He also felt frustrated with not being heard as he had for months. It seemed that no matter how or when he tried to tell her, the message wouldn't get through. He felt like the relationship had to end, that he couldn't keep doing this. In response to my questions and comments, he spoke reservedly. There were long pauses between us. He repeated the same situations and expressed the same frustration without anything changing. We were going in circles, going no where. He was defended and we were stuck. A feeling welled up in me such that I was afraid I was going to lose my relationship with him, that I was failing him. I realized that this is probably a feeling he inspires in his girlfriend as well. Thinking phenomenologically, I found myself with him in a repeating, troubling dynamic. I

realized he needed me to act otherwise. I found my voice as the therapist, making the following interpretation, “In the way you’re relating to me now, you’re showing me what it’s like to relate to your girlfriend. You talk about the same situations over and over again but it feels pointless. Nothing is changing.” In response to this interpretation, I could see in his widening eyes that he was reorienting himself. Then we were suddenly unstuck. He moved past the withdrawn attitude and depressed feelings to discuss the relationship in new ways. He had room for more feelings, different possibilities to consider, and had meaningful memories through the rest of the session. He found his voice.

This example illustrates the way time in the therapeutic relationship parallels the early Levinas’ description of our relationship to the future. The client encounters the therapist’s interpretation as the future, thereby effecting a transition from one way of relating to another. To flesh out the idea of the encounter with the future, consider that you cannot see the place from which you are looking. If, for instance, you’re standing by a window, you can see outside but you cannot see the very place you’re standing. In order to see where you were looking from, you need to move to a different position. Similarly, when the client encounters the therapist interpreting successfully, the client comes face to face with the way he’s presently relating, which is similarly impossible to experience. For a moment out of time, he encounters the way he presently relates, shifting him to a new point of view, so to say. The adoption of a new way of relating in the present is effected by a leap from the original presentation, through the future embodied by the interpreting therapist, to a new present. In response to the therapist

finding her voice in such an interpretation, the client finds his voice in a new way, having accomplished a psychological transition.

The theme of Levinas' critical response to Heidegger has been a need to describe relief from the subject's bond with a burdensome existence and the possibility of transcendence. In the world of nourishments, satisfaction offers this relief. And in relation to the mysterious and surprising other, the existing subject finds transcendence and the possibility of commencing with existence otherwise than existence itself makes possible.⁴ The early Levinas offers philosophy what Heidegger's phenomenology could not: a philosophical rhetoric that describes the encounter with that which is beyond our experience and is resistant to its powers. My response to *A Different Existence* has also had this theme. I here offer what *A Different Existence* does not: a theory that describes how encounters with the therapist effect change in the way the client experiences the world. In the therapeutic relationship, the client encounters the therapist speaking as the other, finding a voice of alterity that offers nourishing suggestions, empathy, and dynamic interpretation.

Just as the early Levinas depends on Heidegger's phenomenology for his insights, so too does a Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention depend on a phenomenological approach to psychopathology. The phenomenological approach to psychopathology furnishes the therapist with tools for understanding in what way the client exists. A Levinas-inspired approach to therapeutic intervention furnishes the therapist with an understanding of how to help the client transition to a new way of being.

Conclusion

Chapter 7: A Chorus of Philosophers, the Blues, and Ghosts

Reading through the preceding chapters, I hear the voices of the philosophers joining mine – and perhaps yours too, reader – in a chorus. Here at the end, I hear our echoes blending into a resonant harmony. I’ve brought these voices together. What verses have we sung? What are we here singing in sum?

With Kierkegaard and Derrida, we no doubt sing a spiritual song. I hear the power of parable, as in folk blues. *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard, 1843/2006) and “Whom to Give to (Knowing not to Know)” (Derrida, 1995) summon a song of sacrifice, silence, and secret pains. Doubly secret, I should say. The verses I’ve drawn from these texts speak to the nature of a client’s pain, the basic desire of the therapist, and the way in which the therapeutic relationship can uniquely address pain through finding voice. Although complex, there’s something so clear coming through in the concepts of the suspension of the ethical and double secrecy. It’s as if psychotherapy has been distilled into its moral essence here. These chapters beat steadily and passionately. Part One is the overflowing heart of the work, pumping a steady, unwavering rhythm.

Part One’s song conjures memories of clients with whom I’ve journeyed towards an unknown destination. I am particularly drawn to clients, like the client in the vignette, whose journey leads down strange paths to a past at first unknown and then realized as trauma or abuse. The imagination, dreams, and endurance of these clients fascinate me. I learn so much from them, some of which the texts by Kierkegaard and Derrida have helped me express here.

While spiritual, there is also something scandalous about my relationship to these philosophical texts. I dare to name Kierkegaard the therapist and appoint Derrida as the supervisor. I praise and tease Kierkegaard for being as we are, moths drawn to the flame. I applaud and hush Derrida, enjoying following him as he goes too far, then reigning him in. Similarly, there's something naughty yet clever going on as I stage a friendly battle between myself and van den Berg, imitating the early Levinas' relationship to Heidegger.

With the van den Berg (1972) of *A Different Existence* and the early Levinas, we seem to sing the blues. The basis of the blues, some musicians declare, is the tension between two lovers. The dirty rhythm holds the line between one player and another, staging a fiery game of improvisational call and response. One instigates the other, getting a rise, as the other pushes back, retreating to inspire the first to advance again. The phenomenological approach to psychopathology calls out first. The therapist and client collaborate in creating a way of speaking: finding a voice for what the client knows but didn't yet know how to say. This original expression of insight in turn instigates a Levinas-inspired response. Having uncovered and heard how the client painfully exists, the therapist must find a voice to respond in a surprising and disrupting way. Such a response relieves the client but also can leave him unnerved, wanting to assert his painful way of existing again despite himself. At one moment, you're gaining insight and in the next you're making interventions, then you're gaining insight again. The therapeutic relationship has a rhythm all its own. Although the encounter with the well-timed, surprising bend of a note on the guitar may be the recurring highlight of a blues song, it takes practicing such a rhythm over and over again to set the stage for such breakthroughs.

The chorus all of these thinkers sing with me – and perhaps with you too, reader – is an invitation to philosophers and psychotherapists to find a common voice. Like Epicurus, I write a recurring refrain proclaiming that philosophy be practiced as a healing art. At every turn, I have deliberately and carefully developed as accessible and hospitable an aesthetic as I could in researching and writing this work. I chose the primary texts for their accessibility, their relevance to psychotherapy, and their not so demanding length. I've designed the present work as a guide for a course in which one could realistically cover all of the primary texts over a semester. I chose quotations with the most straightforward and accessible language possible, which is no easy task with philosophy. Similarly, I carefully chose my words and developed my writing style to be as digestible and unalienating as possible, presenting rhythmic turns of phrase whenever possible that perhaps are most apparent when read aloud. At every step in the research and writing process, I have thought of my audience: the general reader, the philosopher interested in psychotherapy, and the psychotherapist interested in philosophy.

Here, at the end, I am thinking of what I do not hear in the songs sung by my handpicked choir of philosophical texts. I want to hear more about working with a family history. Learning about a client's family is the bread and butter of psychotherapeutic practice as I know it. Family experiences often appear as metaphors for what's happening with the client in the present. Although I refer to families in the illustrations, I do not focus specifically on just family. To really introduce the importance of family, I think one would have to write a long and detailed case study. This could make for quite a story, but to be done right I imagine it would have to be a work of on its own, which perhaps explains why I have not approached such a topic here.

Such a work might fit the present theme of finding voice, both by offering philosophers and therapists a common voice and by presenting psychotherapy as a project about finding voice. When I began learning psychotherapeutic practice, I imagined a metaphor for therapy: I saw a therapist and client sitting in a sanctuary with the client's voice summoning ghosts to be addressed. Any person's voice, I think, is really many voices uniquely and originally blended into one. We each speak the language of our parents, our siblings, our ancestors, and our friends. Any single, solo voice is really a chorus in disguise. Psychotherapy is about recognizing how one's way of being in the world is born from and continues to address ghosts of the past (whether the people in question are still alive or not!). Psychologist Leswin Laubscher (2010, September) turns to Derrida's (1994) "hauntology" to think carefully about the politics of remembering and remembering as a ghostly yet healing activity. Although he is doing so for the Apartheid Archive, his interpretation of Derrida speaks to the work of psychotherapy as well. One can remember as a kind of mourning in order to keep the past in the past. Psychotherapy can become like a burial ground, a place to visit and address the ghosts of the past in order to keep the past separate from the present, to lay it to rest. One can also remember so as to not let the past repeat itself again, to exorcise a demon that one fears will come back to haunt you, to prevent you from making the same mistake again. In therapy, the voice of the client addresses not only the therapist, but the very ghosts that have made his voice what it is, whether one knows it or not. The transference is a kind of projective haunting in which the therapist is summoned into the role of someone from the past, a kind of ghost, so that the client may speak to and work through a relationship from the past in the present. Perhaps this is an approach to philosophy and psychotherapeutic

practice to be researched in the future: finding voice as the summoning of a ghostly chorus that Derrida might help us describe.

Endnotes

Introduction

¹ In his dissertation for the doctoral degree in philosophy, a young Karl Marx (1841), who had not yet become the political philosopher known to all today, draws attention to philosophy as more than a metaphysical project whose aim is the development of an all-encompassing reason. He reminds us that although it is too often overlooked as well as misunderstood in this regard, ancient philosophy concerns itself with understanding character and subjective experience. He writes,

It seems to me that though the earlier systems are more significant and interesting for the content, the post-Aristotelian ones, and primarily the cycle of the Epicurean, Stoic, and Sceptic schools, are more significant and interesting for the subjective form, the character of Greek philosophy. But it is precisely the subjective form, the spiritual carrier of the philosophical systems, which has until now been almost entirely ignored in favour of their metaphysical characteristics.

Marx is concerned about philosophy. He witnesses a neurotic narrow-mindedness in it, a kind of obsession with abstract, objective reason alone. Philosophers, such as Epicurus, who shape the spirit and character of philosophy, get wrongly written off as simple-minded or second rate. In his dissertation, Marx seeks to address this neurosis. He does so by working on a specific case, namely the relationship between Democritus and Epicurus and the history of philosophy. Marx cites a number of philosophers who make comments similar to the following one by Cicero,

In physics, where he is the most pretentious, Epicurus is a perfect stranger. Most of it belongs to Democritus; where he deviates from him, where he endeavors to improve, he spoils and worsens it.

In addition to citing other ancient authors with concurrent opinions, he finds similar remarks in more modern philosophy. He cites Leibnitz as saying,

Of this great man (Democritus) we scarcely know anything but what Epicurus borrowed from him, and Epicurus was not capable of always taking the best.

Although they have very similar atomic theories, Epicurus sure does get a bad rap while Democritus gets put on a pedestal. Marx, however, sees beyond just their atomic theories. He keenly attends to the bigger picture of what the two philosophers have to offer. He views such demeaning comments towards Epicurus and such admiring comments towards Democritus as symptomatic of a condition in philosophy. Like a good psychologist he draws attention to the symptom by highlighting it's strangeness. He writes,

a curious and insoluble riddle remains. Two philosophers teach exactly the same science, in exactly the same way, but – how inconsistent! – they stand diametrically opposed in all that concerns truth, certainty, application of this science, and all that refers to the relationship between thought and reality in general.

Marx then goes on to summarize the stark contrast between Democritus' and Epicurus' understanding of seemingly everything but atomism. Also like a good psychologist, he finds the contrasting themes of the philosophies in the lives of the philosophers themselves. He writes of Democritus,

he traveled to Egypt in order to learn geometry, and to the Chaldeans in Persia, and that he reached the Red Sea. Some maintain that he also met the gymnosophists in India and set foot in Ethiopia. On the one hand it is the *lust for knowledge* that leaves him no rest; but it is at the same time *dissatisfaction with true, i.e. philosophical, knowledge* that drives him far abroad. The knowledge which he considers true is without content, the knowledge that gives him content is without truth. It could be a fable, but a true fable, that anecdote of the ancients, since it gives a picture of the contradictory elements in his being. Democritus is supposed to have blinded himself so that the *sensuous light of the eye* would not darken the *sharpness of intellect*. This is the same man who, according to Cicero, wandered through half the world. But he did not find what he was looking for.

In sharp contrast, he writes of Epicurus,

But while *Democritus* seeks to learn from *Egyptian priests, Persian Chaldeans, and Indian gymnosophists*, *Epicurus* prides himself on *not* having had a *teacher*, on being *self-taught*. There are some people, he says according to Seneca, who struggle for truth without any assistance. Among these people he has himself traced out his path. And it is they, the self-taught, whom he praises most. The others, according to him, are second-rate minds. While Democritus is driven into all parts of the world, Epicurus leaves his garden in Athens scarcely two or three times and travels to Ionia, not to engage in studies, but to visit friends. Finally, while Democritus, despairing of acquiring knowledge, blinds himself,

Epicurus, feeling the hour of death approaching, takes a warm bath, calls for pure wine and recommends to his friends that they be faithful to philosophy. What a difference in character these men have! What different ways of being a philosopher!

Having brought the great differences in both the character of the thinkers and the character of their thought to light, Marx returns to the supposed identity of their atomic theories. He attributes great value to the one difference that gets written off as Epicurus' stupidity, namely the thought that the atoms, which originally fell in straight lines without contact, came to collide and give birth to the world because at least one atom swerved itself. Marx cites philosophers mocking Epicurus for explaining the movement of the atom without reference to an external cause. He cites Cicero stating "nothing more disgraceful can happen to a physicist." Marx, however, praises Epicurus' swerving atom as the discovery of self-determination. He flips philosophy's neurosis on its head. In order to explain how an atom could come to relate to other atoms through motion, Epicurus had the capacity to think that it might relate to itself as well. Marx writes of the swerve of the atom,

In it is expressed the atom's negation of all motion and relation by which it is determined as a particular mode of being by another being. In other words, the atom swerves not because of a relationship to some other being. Rather, it swerves on its own accord, negating the external determination of its motion and relation to the other atoms in the void. Marx continues,

This is represented in such a way that the atom abstracts from the opposing being and withdraws itself from it. But what is contained herein, namely, *its*

negation of all relation to something else, must be realized, positively established. This can only be done if the being to which it relates itself is none other than itself, hence equally an atom, and, since it itself is directly determined, many atoms.

In other words, the atom may only withdraw from a relation to other beings into a relationship to itself, namely, its self-determination, if it first, already relates to itself as an atom in general and thus all the atoms. Marx finds a Hegelian twist in Epicurus' swerve. In order for the negation of the atom's relationship to other atoms, and also its relationship to itself, to be recognized, it must already have been established. And surprise, surprise! – the negation of the negation of the relationship to other beings appears as the very realization of a relationship between the atoms which we already know to exist, namely their colliding and repulsion. Marx thus concludes,

The repulsion of the many atoms is therefore the necessary realization of the lex atomi (law of the atom).

So in lieu of a troubled, Democritean appeal to causality for an explanation of how atoms come to collide and repulse from each other, Epicurus discovers in the recognition that atoms relate to each other a necessary condition: atoms are first self-determined in their movement. In other words, the observation that atoms move each other also demonstrates that an atom may move itself.

Here, again, I see a sophisticated psychological sensibility in the young Marx who so values self determination, which is more interesting for a psychologist when applied to people rather than atoms. Just as the changes in relationships between the atoms requires a capacity for change in the atom's relationship to itself, so too do changes in a person's

relationships require a similar capacity for change in one's relationship to oneself. It seems that Democritus sought for truth outside himself to the point that his very vision was an impediment to his search. He was never satisfied. By contrast, Epicurus stayed put to search within himself for truth, where he also found satisfaction with himself and those around him.

² I have not included the following conceptualization of desire in the body of the introduction because it does not foreshadow concepts developed later in the work. However, it is relevant to the theme of setting limits on reason and is so prevalent in Epicurus' work that I cannot not draw attention to it.

Regarding desire, Epicurus (1947) sets limits on reason in order to procure psychological well-being. He argues that some desires are natural and necessary, while others are the product of an ill-used reason. He writes,

XXIX. Among desires some are natural and necessary, some natural but not necessary, and others neither natural nor necessary, but due to idle imagination.
(p.149)

The difficulty with idle imagination is that it cannot be satisfied. It is reason going beyond its limits, confusing fantasy for reality. To treat the idle imagination, Epicurus offers reality testing, distinguishing between natural desires in reality and those desires that can never be realized because they are made of reason and not reality. He writes,

XV. The wealth demanded by nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity. (p. 145)

and,

XXX. Wherever in the case of desires which are physical, but do not lead to a sense of pain, if they are not fulfilled, the effort is intense, such pleasures are due to idle imagination, and it is not owing to their own nature that they fail to be dispelled, but owing to the empty imaginings of man. (p. 151)

The theme of Epicurus' philosophical style is to rein reason in and thereby alleviate suffering. Just as it might take a philosopher to push reason as far as and even further than it can go, perhaps it also takes a philosopher to heal the wounds reason inflicts by overstepping its bounds.

Part One

¹ “Warming Up” is a reference to the opening of *Fear and Trembling* which has also been translated as “Tuning Up” and is followed by “A Preliminary Outpouring from the Heart.” Just as Kierkegaard begins the book with a brief, dramatic telling of the sacrifice of Abraham as he imagines it, so too does the present essay begin following a parallel structure.

² Although I have not mentioned the name of the son Abraham is to sacrifice, note that the three religions tell the story differently. As I will later explain and explore, the Christian and Jewish versions involve Isaac being sacrificed while the Muslim version involves the sacrifice of Ishmael, who knowingly accepts his fate and father.

³ I refer to Derrida as French-Algerian knowing the philosopher himself ruminates on the difficulty of identifying himself in such a way. In *The Monolingualism of the Other*,

Derrida (1998) considers how he was born in Algeria during French occupation, which leaves him developmentally confused about who he is, asking am I French? Algerian? Algerian-French? French-Algerian? And what are the implications of this confusion or the consequences of reducing my identity to one of these? How has living and affirming this confusion, my not-knowing, shaped the development of my thought? As in all his works, Derrida dwells affirmationally in contradictions, which perhaps also makes him well-suited to further developing our understanding of Abraham's suffering as a moral predicament we all might identify with insofar as we are responsible.

Part Two

¹ The ancient root of the word 'phenomenon' teaches us the basics of the phenomenological approach also taught by these stories. As philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962, p. 51) notes, the word 'phenomenon' comes from the middle-voiced form of the Ancient Greek verb 'phaino,' meaning 'to bring to light' or 'to show.' To understand the meaning of this verb in the middle voice may require a brief explanation. The middle-voiced form of a verb is in between the active and passive voice, hence the term 'middle' voice. There are different ways in which a verb may be both active and passive at once. In the case of the verb 'phainesthai,' which is the middle-voiced form of 'phaino,' the verb is both active and passive in that the subject of the verb is also the passive object of its own action. The verb is reflexive. In other words, the subject acts on itself as in the phrase "I got myself up in the morning" or "The child dressed herself." While the verb 'phaino' means 'to show,' the middle-voiced form of the same verb is 'phainesthai,' which means 'to show itself' or 'to bring itself to light.' Considering that the

word 'phenomenon' is a noun derived from this verb 'phainesthai,' we know the etymological meaning of 'phenomenon' that has stood the test of time: that which shows itself or that which brings itself to light. Furthermore, considering that the word 'phenomenology' is a combination of the word 'phenomenon' and the suffix '-logy,' which comes from the Ancient Greek word 'logos' that generally means 'the study of,' we arrive at the etymological meaning of phenomenology: the study of that which shows itself. In short, phenomenology is the study of experience and perception: that which shows itself in the very way it shows itself. So when we take a phenomenological approach to psychotherapy, we gain insight into a person's psychological condition by paying close attention to the particular way things show themselves to the client. This approach depends on a disciplined resistance to reducing an experience or perception to simply its objective or universal meaning. Quite to the contrary, the art of phenomenological therapy is the art of finding a voice for the meaning in a client's experience that gets covered over by objective explanations that don't do it justice.

² Collaborative, psychological techniques naturally complement a phenomenological approach to therapy. The story illustrates a few such techniques from collaborative assessment. Psychologist Constance T. Fischer (1985/1994) developed a collaborative approach to psychological assessment in which the psychologist produces more insightful interpretations of test data by treating the client as a co-authority in the assessment process. Throughout the assessment, the psychologist approaches the client in a spirit of mutual endeavor as I approach the client in the story. As the collaborative assessor, I sit close to the client, bringing us closer figuratively as well as literally. Sitting at a right

angle to the client rather than across from her facilitates discussion and makes my test materials openly visible rather than hidden in secret. Although I did not use notes in this session (it was tape recorded with client consent), when a client glances at the psychologist's notes in a collaborative assessment, the psychologist responds by revealing the clipboard and honestly inviting the client to take a look. When the client refuses, the psychologist might even insist. After I administer the tests and score them, the client and I discuss the results before writing the interpretive, summary section. She refers to concrete experiences in her life that give voice to what the tests abstractly conclude, offering more meaningful insight in a phenomenological spirit than the tests themselves can provide. Once the final report is written, she signs and receives a copy to keep for her files just like the psychologist.

In a standard collaborative assessment, the psychologist writes the interpretive summary section after discussing the results with the client. The final step is to give the client a copy of the report with a blank section at the end entitled "Client Comments" where the client may add to the report themselves. In the weeks before this assessment session, I conducted research into narrative therapy and collaborative assessment which lead to the idea of co-authoring formal documents such as the assessment report, session notes, and final psychotherapy summaries with clients who were up to the task. Counselors David Epstein and Michael White (1990) developed the narrative approach to therapy, which draws on the client's power as the narrator of their life story. One narrative technique is co-authoring documents such as letters to others or even oneself, certificates acknowledging significant achievements, and accounts of meaningful insights or experiences. By authoring documents with the therapist, clients reinforce a sense of

agency necessary for addressing problems in their life. Taking responsibility for the problems often seems easier. As a co-author of a document related to the problem, the client experiences authority over it as well. With Constance T. Fischer's supervision and clinic support, I began co-authoring clinic paperwork with a few clients. For example, in the story I bring in my small, black laptop and invite the client to co-author the interpretive summary with me in light of our discussion. We learn quickly that we can work well together on both the report as well as the therapy. As co-authors, we establish a strong therapeutic alliance when the therapy is just beginning. Co-authoring offers another benefit as I note in the story itself. At a time when she experiences a lack of authority over who she is, I offer her this authority in the assessment session. The report about her is also of her making. We further establish a respect for her voice in the therapy room.

Another quality of co-authoring is worth mentioning. It provides the client with something to take with them when they leave the therapy room and therapy all together. Co-authored documents are artefacts from the time of the therapy. When a struggle related to the therapy appears long after the therapy has ended, the document might provide useful insight again. It might express a hope or promise that the trouble can be addressed, relief can be found, or that someone else can bear witness to their experience and appreciate what they're going through. The co-authored artifact can express the client's authority to them, reminding them that they have the power to find meaning even in their troubles and use this insight to address their struggle.

³ What is Levinas' notion of the relationship with others? How is the relationship with another not a relationship described in terms of 'witness'? Answering this question is tricky because Levinas uses the phrase "relationship with the other" to refer to a relationship with another person, a relationship with the future, and a relationship with death. Levinas' description of the world is simple in contrast to his more profound description of "the relationship with the other." Despite his varied uses of this phrase, he does concern himself with the relationship with the other person exclusively at times. It is these instances that I will follow. As you shall see, reader, in his early work the relationship to the other person is also a relationship to the future. An introduction that considers the relationship with the other person must also introduce time. Following Levinas' notion of the relationship with the other, which is also a relationship to time, I will find a way to respond to the notions of the client's relationship to others and the client's relationship to time in phenomenological psychology. By restricting myself to limited engagement with Levinas' broader philosophical thinking about "the relationship with the other," I will be avoiding Levinas' understanding of death as a relation to the other as well as his temporal concepts that don't involve a relationship to the other person. Levinas establishes his understanding of death by criticizing Heidegger's analysis of death and anxiety. Since, following van den Berg, no ideas about death have been introduced from a phenomenological perspective within psychology thus far, there is no use in following Levinas' ideas here. Similarly, Levinas' philosophy of time put forth in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* has the relationship with the other entrenched in a number of other concepts about time including the instant and hypostasis. He establishes his understanding of time not in response to Heidegger but in

response to common philosophies of time throughout history. Making a parallel response to psychological ideas of time in general would be beyond the scope of this work, which would be dominated by the complex analysis of time leaving no room for other concepts more accessible and more fitting to a philosophical introduction to therapy or an introduction to philosophy for therapists. While restricting myself to Levinas' understanding of the relationship with the other person, which includes a relationship to the future, does not present a full account of what Levinas means philosophically and in general by the phrase "relationship with the other," it does better accomplish the aims of the present work. By considering Levinas' philosophical description of the future, I will prepare you, readers who are new to Levinas' thought, with a foundation for fuller engagement with his philosophy of time. Similarly, the very ideas of Levinas' that I'm restricting myself to are exactly the ones that offer an opportunity to respond to phenomenological psychology in a way that parallels Levinas' response to Heidegger.

⁴ So far, we have consistently and diligently referenced *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* side by side, demonstrating the continuity between the works and the value of reading them together as an introduction to Levinas' work. In pursuing Levinas' interest in the feminine and then paternity, we must depart from this approach and focus only on *Time and the Other* where these ideas first appear. In part of the following section where we investigate the relationship with the other and time in both of the early works, we must also briefly restrict ourselves to *Time and the Other* in considering the notion of the future.

⁵ Thus far, we have made Levinas-inspired responses to phenomenological psychology by paralleling the relationship to the other in philosophy with reference to the relationship between client and therapist. But what of relationships to others in general? Are all others in the world as mysterious as the therapist? Can we make a response to van den Berg with reference to people in general? On the one hand, we cannot say that there are no relationships of “withness” in the world. Relationships in general are dependent upon an intermediary such as the family, common interest, and work. It would be ridiculous to deny this basic insight. On the other hand, Levinas may not be denying that relationships exist around a third term. Recalling the quotation cited earlier, his criticism of Heidegger was that relationship with another is not originally or first and foremost organized around the preposition “with.” We may thus make a response to phenomenological psychology that parallels Levinas’ response to Heidegger with reference to the original relationship to the other. The original relationship with any other in the world is first a relationship with a stranger and not first a ‘withness.’ Even if this stranger becomes known and familiar and a ‘withness’ structures the relationship, the other may still break from this structure to surprise the other. The practice of long-term therapy attests to this possibility. The therapist must practice the restoration of strangeness in relation to long-term clients when therapy ceases to be surprising and effective. Over months and years of appointments, the therapist becomes a familiar sort of stranger. Relationships in general also attest to the primacy of the relationship with the other as an encounter. The other with whom one shares a common interest can suddenly appear as a kind of stranger, effecting a change in one’s life through the mysteriousness of the other who is no longer an alter ego. People surprise each other and create new ways of being that at first were wholly unfamiliar.

The original otherness of the other person can be encountered again as if for the first time, refracting the power of the intermediary task that makes the other an alter ego. Relationships often begin again and begin anew, attesting to the priority of the encounter with the other over being with the other around a third term. By describing the fundamental and original relationship to the other not as a “withness” but as an encounter, a Levinas-inspired psychology offers a means of describing the relationship with the other as the possibility of transitioning from one way of existing in the world to another, unforeseeable way. In its description of the encounter, a Levinas-inspired psychology thus contributes what is beyond the scope of phenomenological psychology, which is limited to the description of experience.

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