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Abstract. This article sets the study of Levinas in the context of therapists' use of philosophy, and in particular in Peter F. Schmid's use of Levinas. It offers an alternative emphasis in reading his work, based on three key themes: totality; infinity; the face. Each of these three themes will be explored as an aspect of Levinas' metaphysics. They will then be used to explore the Person-Centered Approach. Levinas' three categories will then engage with the three core conditions of therapy. This in turn raises the question of what it is to meet an Other — encounter. Finally the concept of performative, internal speech will be set out as a key to understanding the transformation of the therapist's attitude in encounter in the light of Levinas.

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Artikel stellt das Studium von Levinas in den Kontext, wie Therapeuten sich auf Philosophie beziehen, insbesondere wie Peter F. Schmid sich auf Levinas bezieht, und bietet einen anderen Ansatz, dessen Werk zu lesen. Dabei wird auf drei Kernthemen aufgebaut: Totalität, Unendlichkeit, Antlitz. Jedes dieser drei Themen wird als ein Aspekt von Levinas' Metaphysik untersucht und dann dazu verwendet, den Personzentrierten Ansatz zu untersuchen. Levinas' drei Kategorien werden in der Folge den drei Kernbedingungen von Therapie gegenüber gestellt. Das wirft wiederum die Frage auf, was es bedeutet, einen *Anderen* zu treffen — einander zu begegnen. Schließlich wird das Konzept performativer, internaler Sprache als ein Schlüssel vorgestellt, um die Transformation der Haltung des Therapeuten bzw. der Therapeutin in der Begegnung im Lichte Levinas' zu verstehen.

Resumen. Este artículo ubica al estudio de Levinas en el contexto del uso que los terapeutas hacen de la filosofía, y en particular del uso que Peter F. Schmid hace de Levinas. Ofrece un énfasis alternativo en la

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lectura de su obra, basado en tres temas claves: la totalidad, el infinito, y la cara. Cada uno de estos tres temas será explorado como un aspecto de la metafísica de Levinas. Serán luego usados para explorar el enfoque centrado en la persona. Las tres categorías de Levinas serán luego vinculadas con las tres condiciones básicas de la terapia. Esto a su vez plantea la pregunta de qué es encontrarse con un otro — un encuentro. Finalmente el concepto del discurso interno performativo será planteado como una clave para la comprensión de la transformación en la actitud del terapeuta en el encuentro a la luz de Levinas.

Résumé. L'article situe l'étude de Levinas dans le contexte de l'utilisation de la philosophie par des psychothérapeutes, plus spécifiquement de l'utilisation de l'étude de Levinas par Peter F. Schmid. Une lecture alternative de son œuvre est proposée, fondée sur trois thèmes clef : totalité, infinité, le visage. Chacun de ces trois thèmes est analysé en tant qu'aspect de la métaphysique de Levinas et permet une exploration de l'approche centrée sur la personne. Les trois catégories de Levinas au regard des trois conditions de base de la thérapie, posent la question de la nature de la rencontre avec l'Autre. Finalement, à la lumière de Levinas, le concept de la parole performative interne est posé comme une clef pour la compréhension de la transformation de l'attitude du thérapeute dans la rencontre.

Key Words: alterity, Emmanuel Levinas, exteriority, infinity, intersubjectivity, philosophy of therapy

In 2004, Peter F. Schmid addressed the University of East Anglia Conference, 'The Spiritual Dimension of Therapy', on community and trinity. As part of this, he offered a masterly, brief summary of his reading of Emmanuel Levinas, the French–Lithuanian philosopher and scholar of Jewish Talmud (Schmid, 2006, p. 238). He commented that Levinas is 'a thinker of tremendous importance, still to be discovered for the Person-Centered Approach' (PCA). This article is a first step towards exploring what meeting Levinas might come to mean.

Indeed, the time is ripe for this meeting. Within the discipline of person-centered therapy, the philosophical roots become more and more important to the maintaining of our identity and purpose. Schmid (1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006) has consistently argued that person-centered therapy is moving into a dialogic phase, and that this is an ethical imperative. We must meet as whole people, as Others. Therapy is not instrumental — the doing-to-another of useful procedures — so the client's distress is to be seen in terms of authenticity and relationship rather than disease (Sanders, 2005). Schmid's use of Levinas as a source of ethical thinking is crucial to the PCA's stance since we are principled proponents of human growth, worth and dignity, and thus oppose the prevailing force of the medicalization of distress. While there may be many *practical* reasons for challenging much current psychiatric practice, at heart our movement is rooted in *principled* practice and hence in a developing philosophy. The philosophical context of practice and our rapprochement with existential therapy is becoming more evident and available (Mearns & Cooper, 2005).

At the same time as this turn to philosophy within the humanistic therapies, continental philosophy is reassessing the importance of Emmanuel Levinas, a decade or so after his death (Moran, 2000, pp. 350–353). Simon Critchley's brief overview in his introduction to Critchley

and Bernasconi's (2002, p. 1–28) *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* stresses not only Levinas' uniqueness as a thinker but also his importance for all future ethics:

Levinasian ethics might not be a sufficient condition for a complete ethical theory, but it is, in my view, a necessary condition for any such theory. (Ibid., p. 28)

I note Critchley's words not just because they illustrate the positive re-evaluation of this grand master of French philosophy, but because they stress — not without justice — Levinas as an ethicist. Critchley and Schmid both focus upon the ethical consequences of his thinking. I want to bring to the debate the observation that there is a harder reading of Levinas than this. He has much to say about what else it is to be human. To summarize this in one word, it is that we orientate ourselves to the Infinite.

Always his words will puzzle and even infuriate us. He seems intent on frustrating, disorientating. Yet, I believe that this is more and better than his merely being obscure or difficult. His writing is nearer to a Buddhist koan. If I can tolerate the uncertainty, I might find enlightenment. In the remainder of this article, I will set Levinas' thinking in the context of Schmid's writing and then open up three key concepts: Totality, Infinity and the Face. I will use some of these challenging ideas to explore the meaning of encounter, the impact of Levinas on our thinking about the core conditions and finally his impact upon the attitude of therapists in their work. The beginning of this journey is to consider how therapists use philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH: THREE TYPES OF DIALOGUE

Philosophy and the PCA have entered into dialogue with each other on at least three different bases. The phenomenology of Edmund Husserl has provided the PCA with a system of knowledge, an epistemology, on which a principled stance can be made. It is because of the very nature of human knowing, says Husserl, that only the client can truly know the client, with the result that the therapist is ethically bound to remain committed only to a shared and experiential knowing and not an expert overview of another's living (Worsley, 2002, chapter 4; Spinelli, 1989). Philosophy provides a justification *post hoc* for Carl Rogers' approach.

Existential thought, with its many tensions and wide diversity, has expanded upon Rogers' notion of existential living — that the human project is best fulfilled when we exist in freedom to engage with our needs both as individuals and as co-responsible members of communities (Worsley, 2002, chapters 10 & 11). This is a different use of philosophy. Rogers is not so much *underpinned* by this. Rather, the breadth of thinking about existence alerts the therapist to the depth and potential of Rogers' seminal concept. This is more about imaginative elaboration than methodological justification.

Engagement with Levinas follows neither of these forms of dialogue. Levinas offers a radical and controversial account of what it is to be human. The self only exists over against — in encounter with — the Other. However, this is not a psychological or developmental

claim. It is metaphysical — rooted in, or even beyond, the nature of Being itself. (Metaphysics is the study of being and knowing, in areas beyond the concrete world, such as abstract universals. It is the study of those abstract subjects which Aristotle deals with after, beyond, meta-, his physics.) Levinas argues that the Other is absolute. This is difficult and possibly scandalous. What role then might Levinasian thought play? Firstly, it must have the quality of a ‘What-if?’ It is an act of the imagination. What if I see my relating in terms of Levinas’ categories? It is provisional. The testing of it is not in its truth but in its usefulness. I do not need to be a convert to Levinas, but rather an experimenter who is willing to engage with a hard reading of him.

OF SCANDALS AND HARD READINGS

I have just claimed that what Levinas writes is ‘possibly scandalous’, and that we should be committed to keeping a view of a hard reading of him. What does this mean? Both amount to the same thing. From its original Greek, the word scandal (σκάνδαλον) comes to us from the writings of St Paul as the expression stumbling block — also a snare or bait-stick. It is something that we should trip over, something that does not fit with our preconceptions. It should stick in our throat and ensnare us. In describing Levinas’ thinking as a scandal, I point to what I take to be his intention, particularly in his later (1998) work, to disrupt the way we think. Thus, to read Levinas is to strive to maintain that sense of being surprised, even confused. It is tempting to cry out: ‘Tell me what you really mean by the Infinite’. That is to miss his point. Levinas claims that we should be first of all ethical — ethics is the first philosophy — because of what it is to be human, namely oriented towards the Infinite. This is a metaphysical claim.

Ethics or metaphysics? Critchley’s (2002) sympathetic summing up of Levinas concentrates upon his undoubted importance to ethics. As an ethicist Levinas calls us to avoid egology — literally, self-study, and thus self-preoccupation, an eternal toying with the internal process of being, or presence — and to take seriously the encounter with the Other. His grounds for doing this are metaphysical: they are rooted in Being itself and not in psychology. There is another view of Levinas, namely that his importance is also in rehabilitating metaphysics in Western philosophy. This is a scandal to most philosophers of the Anglo-American analytic tradition. Hear Dermot Moran (2000, p. 352):

Because of its dense style and apparent abandonment of rational argument and justification in favour of repetitive, dogmatic assertions which have the character of prophetic incantations ... Levinas’ work is largely ignored among analytic philosophers.

This is harsh, but certainly gives a sense of the scandal which Levinas causes. It is Levinas’ metaphysics, how he describes what it is to be human, that is scandalous.

This means that there are available soft and hard readings of Levinas. I take the term ‘hard reading’ from the discipline of textual criticism. It warrants brief explanation. Whenever a text is to be established, say in biblical or Shakespeare studies, then variant readings have to be assessed. One principle is that the harder reading is often to be preferred, because meanings

are softened in transmission. For example, Hamlet laments: 'O that this too, too solid flesh would melt' (I. ii. 131–161). That, at least, is the first Folio reading, edited after Shakespeare's death. 'Solid' and 'melt' are predictable poetic companions. However, at least one Quarto — probably written down from a stage performance, and hence earlier than the Folio — reads 'sullied'. Most editors opt for the soft reading of 'solid' on the grounds that 'sullied' is likely to be a simple mishearing by the copyist. Yet, much commends the hard reading. Whether or not 'sullied' is a copyist's mishearing, it is better poetry, more provocative. It should not drop out of consideration. So it is with Levinas. Let us indeed hear his call to ethical being, but let us remain scandalized by his metaphysics.

It is my understanding of the writings of Schmid (1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006), limited though that is by my lack of German, that he seems fairly consistently to read Levinas with depth and insight, and then follows Critchley in opting for the softer reading, with its emphasis on ethics, gliding over the metaphysical claims. He is entitled to do this, of course. He and I do not disagree in fundamentals. We do opt for different emphases in reading. By way of illustration, I take Schmid (2001), written in German and translated into French. In this, Schmid is eloquent in his expression of Levinas' notion of the Other which is 'absolute, a permanent enigma, which "keeps watch", and in so doing offers permanent defiance' (p. 37). Exactly so! But then a paragraph later, Schmid observes that consequently psychotherapy is 'an engaged service of solidarity, stemming from a fundamentally socio-ethical attitude' (ibid). This is where the hard reading is missed. Levinas argues that human solidarity is a *metaphysical* property based on Infinity, and that ethics are consequent upon this.

The significance of this will further emerge in considering the three key concepts of Levinas.

THREE KEY CONCEPTS OF LEVINAS FOR UNDERSTANDING ENCOUNTER: TOTALITY, INFINITY AND THE FACE

Levinas' main texts (1963, 1969, 1983, 1998) show a complex development of thought. What is here is both a simplification, and a conflation. However, I try to keep focus upon his 1969 opus, while bearing in mind how his 1983 work particularly develops his thinking on Face and Infinity. To understand Levinas we must begin with Heidegger.

The German phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger, is the one thinker to whom all subsequent continental philosophers must respond, for such is his influence. Levinas reacts against Heidegger. Martin Heidegger roots our being in our concrete contact with life, and above all with tools:

Since Heidegger, we have habitually considered the world as an assemblage of tools. To exist in the world is to do, but to do is such a way that in the final account action has as its object existence itself. Tools refer back to each other in order finally to refer back to our concern for existence. (Levinas, 1983, p. 45)

For Heidegger, tools are defined by their alleged purpose. I have a pen in order to write. I have food in order to live. Levinas takes issue with this. Food does not function for us only to

keep us alive; rather it also gives us pleasure. For this word pleasure, Levinas uses the French word *jouissance* (Levinas, 1983, pp. 46–47.) It does not translate easily. It has a darkness to it. For Levinas, pleasure turns us back to the self, the ego. It is existence but it does not satisfy. He invites us to consider ‘being’ (*existence*) as that which remains even after every being/thing/creature has ceased to be. This is metaphysics, the study of abstract universals. In this, we need to hear his tone:

This impersonal ‘consummation’ (end point), being itself, anonymous but inextinguishable, that which murmurs at the bottom of nothingness-itself, this we fix by the term, the *il-y-a*. The *il-y-a*, in its refusal to take a personal form, is being itself. (Levinas, 1963, pp. 93–94)

Here is a darkness at the heart of being. Being itself — the *il-y-a* — is deeply impersonal and so amoral. Levinas would have us transcend this. The Infinite is that unboundedness which is beyond the *il-y-a*, the raw and merciless There-Is. The Infinite is the deeply personal and yet universal. Levinas invites us to intuit how it is that the most deeply personal is associated with a stretching out for the Infinite, the unknowable in each other and ourselves. We cannot know others or our selves for we are creatures of inexhaustible possibility. In this I take it that Levinas’ metaphysical claim that we are Infinite bears some resemblance to Rogers’ claim that we are unbounded because we are ever open to the actualizing tendency.

Levinas’ categories of need and desire further spell out the Infinite. Even in his early work, Levinas was beginning to make an important distinction between need (*besoin*) and desire (*désir*). Need is that which equates roughly to Heidegger’s tools, and thence to *jouissance*. Levinas proposes that to be human is to desire, and that what is desired is the Infinite. This is not a religious category. All we can see is Levinas pointing to a structure of being. Desire for the Infinite is a rupture. The Same is broken through in the Other. The circling interiority, egology, is broken asunder. We desire, we thirst for the Infinite. Levinas’ vocabulary is precise but difficult. Another rendering of the last three sentences may help. Egology is the Western, modern failing of being always preoccupied with the internal life. This circles round pointlessly. It is the paradigm example of what Levinas means by Same. The world of ego has no *beyond*. He holds that when we thirst for the Infinite — and we do this by virtue of being human — then we break apart, shatter to pieces, or as he says we rupture this everlasting and dreary self-preoccupation.

The second paragraph of *Totality and Infinity* makes this as clear as any passage:

No journey, no change of climate or of scenery could satisfy the desire bent towards [the *other*]. The other metaphysically desired is not ‘other’ like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like sometimes, myself for myself, this ‘I’, that ‘other’. I can ‘feed’ on these realities, and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or possessor. The metaphysical desire tends towards *something else entirely*, towards the *absolutely other*. (Levinas, 1969, p. 33)

To grasp further the Infinite we must look to its opposite, Totality. Totalization is the reduction of all to the Same. It is exemplified by the refusal to see the ethical demands of others as having an incontrovertible, prior call on me, so that all action is reduced to the ego. It is exemplified by totalitarian regimes in which the individual is subordinated to the Same of the state or the system. Totality, though, is a metaphysical concept, and so always exceeds any number of examples. Totality and the Infinite may express themselves in any number of easily grasped, concrete situations, but always go beyond.

The words above reflect the turn of thought of Levinas, which is never easy, always wanting to stretch us. A more down-to-earth example may help. It is 1996. I join the British Labour party and go to a meeting of my local branch. Ideas are debated. The leadership is at pains to promote a new way of being Labour. The old ideas *must* be left behind. After a while, I begin to suspect that this is not a debate at all, but a political maneuver. We must all conform to new standards — those of the would-be Prime Minister, Tony Blair. After a while I feel crushed. There is to be no debate. Surely, this is not even socialism!

The political maneuver is totalizing not because it is wrong, but because it wants to eliminate the beyond, the utopian aspirations of true socialism. The infinite resists just when I feel within me the deep conviction that the aspirations of the people must be set against the need to win the next election. The rest is history. It is one example, and no example explains Levinasian concepts.

The Infinite is felt as the resistance to that which totalizes. It is marked by a quality of that resistance. Desire resists but the Same uses. People must not, by their very nature and transcendent being, be absorbed into the Same. The Same ensnares and drags us back into a pointless preoccupation with internal process.

We must not too readily think we grasp all of this. We remain thrown, puzzled before the enigma. The Other is enigma because it is essentially unknowable in full. To begin to understand is to be absorbed by Levinas' thinking. Go to the text and be immersed. Yet, the best example is the one Levinas uses — the human face (*le visage*) (Waldenfels, 2002).

Levinas' prime metaphysical claim is that the face represents a rupture in totality because it has a status that is unique. Levinas is not making a psychological claim about the human face. He is saying that to face an-Other is to meet, or rather go beyond, the structure of being in a new way. In the human face, we encounter the Infinite, just because it cannot be totalized; just because the face makes an 'incontrovertible' demand to give priority to the Other. At first we stretch out in desire towards the Infinite in others, and then find that our encounter has become, or is experienced as, absolute ethical demand. As Levinas (1969, p. 201) puts it, the face is immediate, interminable possibility to which we must respond at all costs.

I want to give the flavor of Levinas' writing, but also of that which he tries to evoke in us by exploring just one moment in his thought. In his late work, *Otherwise than Being* (1998, pp. 89–93), he describes the phenomenon of the face in relation to proximity. He sees the skin as a membrane which is not simply the boundary of an organism, but rather the interplay of the visible and the invisible. It is, he says, quasi-transparent. By this, he means that at the skin of the Other we may intuit the Infinite, that which is beyond and summons us 'incontrovertibly'. Levinas strives to delineate the caress. The caress reveals the metaphysics of

the Other, but is as yet pre-ethical. Ethical summons will follow, emerge. Levinas' words seem both to struggle to comprehensibility and at the same time generate a volcanic eruption of imagery:

The tenderness of skin is the very gap between approach and approached, a disparity, a non-intentionality, a non-teleology. Whence the disorder of caresses, the diachrony, a pleasure without present, pity, painfulness. Proximity, immediacy, is to enjoy and to suffer by the other. But I can enjoy and suffer by the other only because I am-for-the-other, am signification, because the contact of the skin is still the proximity of a face, a responsibility, an obsession with the other, being-one-for-the-other, which is the very birth of signification beyond being. (Ibid., p. 90)

This fairly typical if beautiful moment from a two-hundred page book makes modern poetry seem positively simplistic. Yet, it began to unfold something for me after many readings. Firstly I want to have the impudence to offer a sort of rendition from Levinasian-English into Richard-English:

At the moment of caress, only the transparent skin separates me from the Other. Yet, in this very moment I must be without aim, without focused consciousness, for that will throw me back into my self — egology, again — and defeat the Infinite with Sameness. So caresses assault time itself, and are without (egological) pleasure or pain. Nearness is to know joy and suffering in and through the Other. Yet, I can only do this when I am primarily for-the-Other, more available to her than myself. At this moment, I know the skin to be an aspect of face (visage), and so in being available I know my deep, almost obsessive responsibility for the other. This is deeply ethical but also pre-ethical because it is prior to any conscious return to self. And in my obsession, I am the birth of meaning for her, and she for me. When I return, I will be changed.

As I read this moment again and again, I am thrown back to a client, Sarah. We are working together on a case study of our three years' work (Worsley & Joseph, in preparation). This work has been about Sarah's movement from seeing her depression as disease towards seeing it as having existential meaning, and thus being a source of growth, whether or not all of the symptoms subside. I intuit that Levinas is crucial here, because he insists that my and Sarah's Otherness are sources of signification — meaning — for each other. Can we glimpse the depths of what he opens up?

LEVINAS AND THE CORE CONDITIONS

The paradox to which Levinas summons us is that we find our thirst satisfied in the very otherness (*altérité*) of the one we accompany. We meet others without guile. To fail in this is to run the risk of true relating foundering on a collapse into egology, a reduction of the Other to the Same. Otherness (*altérité*) is a word in French used, amongst other purposes, in cultural studies to mean the discovering of that which is of true value in the differences between

people and cultures. When I meet you, I strive to meet an enigma who profoundly feeds me but whom I must preserve from my self-centricity. The ordinary qualities of meeting are deeply challenged by Levinas' definition that to be human is in the seeking (*désir*) of the Infinite, and thus in a radical being-for-others. This in turn will deepen our grasp of the core conditions. It is a strength of Rogers' conceptualization of psychotherapy that such a radical challenge as this can be accommodated.

For most of the time, empathy remains as it ever was. It is a reaching after the meaning and the quality of texture of the client's experience, a persistent and warm exploration of exactly how it is for the client. Yet, behind this day-to-day listening I become aware of the Infinite, the enigma. I am listening for that which is wholly unexpected, and that which the client does not expect or yet know. Dialogue will often leave the client saying that it is good to be heard: That is just how it is for me! More rarely, but at treasured times, each of us will be astonished at what we can hear. As I listen, I need to know the *altérité* of the client. She is wholly and radically not like me. This is the very opposite of my normal and insecure presupposition, which is that people are like me until I am forced to recognize otherwise. I have to let go of that aspect of ego that assimilates others' experience to my own, and take the risk of facing the Infinite in the Other. I recall hearing of a colleague who ceased to work as a counselor because she said that she had 'heard it all before'. This sounds like more than mere burnout. She had given up on the utter uniqueness of the other person behind the presenting case.

In listening for the surprising, for the otherness of the Other — that which, in Levinas' words, ruptures the Same — I have to be on guard. This sort of listening involves a subtle shift towards my own frame of reference: Who is this person for me, whom I hear? I can be seduced into a fantasy of the client. I can hope for her, but this hope is mere rescue, a denial of who she says she is. Yet, I can also find in the 'between' of dialogue a truth about her beginning to manifest itself which she does not yet know nor recognize. I must take care to wait long enough for the truth of the Other to overwhelm me. These last words sound rather dramatic, but I think they mean the same as Levinas' observation that in encounter the immediacy is such that the What-is is incontrovertible. This is certainly not a cognitive certainty. It is nearer to a nagging doubt that the surface will not do. The Same must be ruptured.

With Sarah, I spent much time being with her overwhelming guilt. It was all she could see, all she could show me. I needed to be — and was — worried to a frazzle that I could hear more of her than her guilt. She had self-pride, principles, a defiance of compliance, and I liked this. What would I have to do for this part of me to be heard?

In listening within encounter, I am of necessity always open to surprise. This fact is Martin Buber's definition of true dialogue (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990, p. 60). I am also reminded of Buber's desire in his dialogue with Carl Rogers to expand upon Rogers' understanding of acceptance. Buber offers the term 'confirmation':

Confirming means, first of all, accepting the whole potentiality of the other and making even a decisive difference in his potentiality, and of course we can be mistaken again and again in this, but it's just a chance between human beings. (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990, p. 60)

Levinas proposes the word 'infinite'. It means to stretch out for the Infinite in relating to others or the self. When in our empathy we extend our listening to possibilities in confirming the client, there is the chance that the client will recognize new aspects of their life. There is also the risk of moving away from the client. Some may balk at this risk. I believe it is indispensable.

If I can hear the client as Infinite, as full of possibility, then there are three effects to this, at least, which speak of unconditional positive regard. Firstly, Purton (1998) has argued that if we practice acceptance 'from below' it eventually runs out of steam and collapses. It must be practiced 'from above'. He means that acceptance must be a principled, philosophical stance. I accept you not because of how you are, but because you are human. Levinas' metaphysics offers a secular and religious/spiritual basis for this. To see the client through Levinasian spectacles enables a regard which is also infinite, however much our practice of it may hit limits.

Secondly, because the Infinite may not be plumbed, estimated, measured or limited, then neither may my regard, my hope for the client. This is good news. Thirdly, however, Levinas sees the Infinite as that towards which we transcend much that is 'fallen'. There is the Same, with its oppression. There is the dark and brooding *il-y-a* which consumes. There is *jouissance* which distracts us from the transcendent. There are many possibilities of the client which are non-creative. That which is actualized is sometimes a poor version of the best. As Rollo May argued (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990, pp. 239–250) the daimonic is the actualization of a twisted form of the good. There is enough in Levinas to remind me that I need at times to stand out against/over against aspects of the client. The paradox is that I must be acceptant of — but not collusive with — the very aspects I stand over against, if I am to be heard by the client.

I have continually found Levinas stretching what I intend by congruence. It is not a matter of definition but of range. Congruence, in its everyday sense, is about saying what I think and feel, as is therapeutically appropriate. There is an increasing amount of practical research into the effects of therapist self-disclosure. Levinas points me beyond this. Let us return to his image of the caress. There must be about the caress, he says, 'a non-intentionality, a non-teleology'. In other words, I must not intend anything, in any sense of the word. It is spontaneous. If this is possible of a caress, it is possible of a therapeutic relationship. I do not disclose a false, constructed version of myself. I disclose who I am. I leak myself around the edges of my conscious being. With this in mind, in the face of the Infinite of us both, I enter a relationship as a human being who is principled, moral, concerned with values, able to offer from within myself, altruistic, and in some sense spiritual. (I do not mean I 'do' this well!) Congruence then points to me as disclosing the person who I am, but whom I do not know fully. In fact, the Infinite.

Levinas suggests that encounter is a meeting in which it is a necessary condition of the wholeness of the Other that we each stretch out for the Infinite, the beyond within us. Each in the other strives to overcome the Same. I cannot possibly define nor control what I bring to the other person. I must bring myself in absolute trust. Yet, this is not a license for violating common sense. I must also know who I am and work with the destructive configurations of myself if I am to be a safe-enough therapist. This bringing of my self in trust, albeit with critical awareness, is about the therapist's fundamental attitude to the personhood of the client.

THERAPIST ATTITUDE

The existence of *I* and the speaking of *I* are one and the same thing.
(Buber, 1958, p. 16)

How does the hard-won wisdom of Levinas' thought get into the room with the client? I have pointed to the common enough notion that therapist attitude is crucial. How is the attitude effected? In answering this question, Martin Buber is helpful. He distinguishes between the I-Thou and the I-It relationship. The former is fully personal, while the latter reduces the other person to a mere object, a tool. In the sentence cited above, he says that what we are and what we speak amount to the same thing. He does not mean that we are literally the sum total of our speech. He means, I think, this: Once I grasp the difference between Thou and It, then in word, act and thought I speak Thou to another. It is about attitude. When I feel that I am falling away from the truly personal, I can address within me, silently, the other person as Thou. From time to time I do this within me in therapy. It works for me.

The Oxford philosopher, J. L. Austin, has made a similar observation in a very different context. He observes (Austin, 1961) that much of our speech is performative. That is to say, we perform action through speech itself. Performative utterance is often exemplified as wording such as 'With this ring I thee wed'. That is to say the contract of marriage is performed in the words themselves. This sort of contractual performative speech is by its very nature interpersonal. I contend that there are also intrapersonal performative speech acts. That it to say, when we speak to ourselves we change ourselves, our fundamental attitude.

I want to suggest briefly that, in the same way that I might say to the client, inwardly and unheard by her: Thou! then I can similarly address her within myself as Infinite! What changes? I experience that my attitude to the client is stretched, turned around. I liken it to a shift of felt-meaning, or perhaps felt-valuing. Often, with Sarah, I drag myself from the mire of her continual self-deprecation to a new freedom. With the uttered word Infinite! I see her afresh.

There is little more that I can do than invite others to experiment in making the same commitment to utter the word: Infinite!

CONCLUSION

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas is difficult. To discover what he means requires persistence, immersion in the text of his words and thinking, and above all an act of the imagination and a becoming perplexed for a while. Peter Schmid's work is of immense importance in summoning us to the ethical encounter. However, a reading of Levinas that takes seriously his metaphysical commitment which precedes the ethical casts a taxing but rewarding new light upon person-centered therapy, stretching our view of the core conditions of therapy and of the therapist's attitudinal stance. Levinas is a testing but rewarding undiscovered resource.

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*The English rendering in the text is the author's.

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