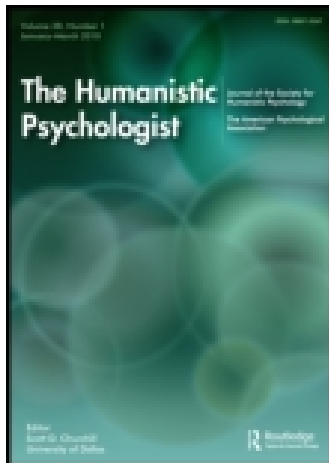


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Introduction to the Special Section: A Relational- Existential Psychology: Ethics and Embodiment

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From October 4 to October 6, 2014, the second *Psychology and the Other* conference convened in Cambridge, MA, with nearly 500 individuals hailing from over 50 countries around the world. The shared purpose of this gathering was an exploration of the languages that we bring to human suffering, identity, and healing. The articles in this special section are some of the works that were presented at this event. In our estimation, they embody a blending of sensibilities that bring together older themes derived from existential phenomenology and more recent developments in continental philosophical thought that offer rich descriptions of relational experiences that live at the edges of thought itself.

In this introduction, we lay the groundwork for these pieces by exploring some key thematic transitions—inspired by new breeds of existential, phenomenological, hermeneutical, and psychoanalytic scholarship—that are currently having an impact on psychological theory and practice. More particularly, we argue that some of these theoretical and philosophical transitions are informing a new vocabulary for relationally-oriented lived experience; one that broadens phenomenological possibilities and challenges a science too narrowly defined. As at the *Psychology and the Other* conference, this special section offers an opportunity to play with these lexicons and identify novel means for responding ever more ethically to the ineffable dimension of the relational encounter.

NEW VOCABULARIES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Although the philosophical tradition of phenomenology represents a wide diversity of approaches, its foundation began with the work of Edmund Husserl. The centerpiece of Husserl's (1900–1901/2001) work can best be captured by his imperative to go “back to the things themselves!” (p. 168). Far from being an advocacy for realism, Husserl intended to overcome entrenched dichotomies between realism and idealism, as well as subjectivity and objectivity. Returning to the things themselves entails describing objects as they *give* themselves and *open* themselves through consciousness while suspending any questions about their

ultimate existence. So the old solipsistic question of whether anything resides outside of the mind is deferred in favor of rich descriptions of what it is like to have consciousness of an object in the first place. Within the field of existential phenomenology, several other significant names deserve mention including, most notably, Heidegger and Sartre, as well as a generation of hermeneutically oriented phenomenologists such as Gadamer and Ricoeur, whose works continue to impact theoretical and clinical work within psychology (for excellent summaries of these and other relevant thinkers see Burston & Frie, 2006; Frie, 1997; Orange, 2010).

We provide this very brief background with the intent of pointing to an additional group of philosophers (also succeeding Husserl) who have emerged as a set of distinctive voices that offer significant enrichment to psychological discourse. These thinkers (some of whom will be named in the following) have contributed to the formation of a new vocabulary of experience that, although building upon some of the established themes from earlier existential thought, calls into question certain trends within the field. For example, they are concerned about preserving an awareness of, and receptivity to, phenomena that cannot be described and are opaque, ambiguous, and beyond representation. Concepts such as the idea of infinity and alterity (Levinas, 1961/1969), the trace and *différance* (Derrida, 1967/1978, 1995), and saturated phenomena (Marion, 2001/2002) all speak to a kind of deficit in our linguistic concepts and, simultaneously, to an excess in phenomena that defy our ability to render others comprehensible. The concept of *otherness* discussed by Levinas, for instance, is a term frequently used among these philosophers to refer to the experience of another that cannot be rendered familiar to oneself. For every similarity made between myself and the other, an even greater dissimilarity arises that renders all comparisons and generalizations inadequate. Hence, the other is never *experienced* as such. Rather, we experience our own incapacity to grasp the person who may stand before us. Along with the phenomenological impossibility of ever knowing the other, *an ethical imperative* also arises that one ought not to attempt to comprehend or represent the other as well. The active attitude of comprehension, completely legitimate within its own circumscribed uses, is an act of violence when applied to the other, who fundamentally cannot be assigned an adequate meaning. As such, the thought of some in this newer generation of philosophers can be characterized as placing an ethical priority on the other's irreducibility over and against their intelligibility. We see this ethical turn most notably in Levinas's (1981/1998) notion of infinite responsibility to the face of the other, the later Derrida's (Derrida, 1997/2005; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 1997/2000) emphasis on hospitality and justice, and in Jean-Luc Marion's (2003/2007) prioritizing of love before being.

What do these shifts mean for existential and humanistic orientations within psychology? One potential implication is an untethering from the individual-focused existential givens such as death, isolation, freedom and responsibility, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). An example of this shift can be seen in the distinctions between the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas. Take the case of freedom and responsibility in Sartre's analysis, where freedom is an inescapable fact of existence. As he put it, we are "condemned to be free" (Sartre, 1947/2007, p. 29). Corresponding with this analysis is the excessive anguish of our responsibility for determining who we will become. There are "no excuses," no nature or nurture, to explain away our responsibility for our decisions (p. 29). A therapeutic implication of this analysis is the importance of gaining insight into our freedom and corresponding responsibility in the face of various psychological disturbances. We must stop lying to ourselves and living in bad faith regarding our belief that genes, early parental relations, or environmental contingencies determine us.

When turning to Levinas's (1961/1969, 1963/1990) understanding of freedom and responsibility, we find similar themes but envisioned in a thoroughly different form. For Levinas, responsibility is not contingent upon our radical freedom to make ourselves into who we wish to become. Instead, our *response-ability* emerges as an ethical encounter with the other who tacitly places a demand upon me to not "kill" (i.e., not to reduce the other person to an abstract concept). My freedom is a secondary property of my responsibility to the other who is the source of my identity. Instead of a *freedom from* external constraint, there is a *freedom to* respond to the needs of the external other (Fromm, 1941/1994).

One can see the differences between Sartre and Levinas in the selective quoting from their mutually admired writer, Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Sartre (1947/2007) was fond of the line, "If God does not exist, everything is permissible" (pp. 28–29). In contrast, Levinas frequently quoted Dostoyevsky's refrain, "We are all responsible for everyone else—but I am more responsible than all the others" (Levinas & Kearney, 2004, p. 82). These quotes reveal the radically different emphasis of these philosophers. For Sartre, the stress was on freedom from constraint and permission to become whoever we wish. For Levinas, weight is placed on the uncompromising ethical burden of an infinite responsibility toward the other. One can see applications of this Levinasian line of thinking to psychology pioneered by Kunz (1998) in *The Paradox of Power and Weakness* and in more recently published works such as Marcus's (2008) *Being for the Other*, Orange's (2011) *The Suffering Stranger*, Goodman's (2012) *The Demanded Self*, and Freeman's (2013) *The Priority of the Other*.

Along with a shift toward ethics, embodiment emerges as another highly important term in this new phenomenology. Often embodiment is characterized as *flesh* by thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) and Michel Henry (1990/2008), to denote not literal physicality but, rather, the interstice of our materiality and subjectivity. The concept of flesh replaces consciousness as the privileged organ of identity. The primacy of consciousness as a concept is frequently aligned with a grasping mentality toward that world, but flesh evokes more of an ethical resonance. This shift from consciousness to flesh is important for two reasons. First, it represents a more authentically phenomenological sensibility that overcomes the divide between the objective and subjective dimensions of our existence. Second, and more important, the concept of flesh connotes receptivity or intertwining with the external world. As such, the concept of flesh and its corresponding receptivity matches well with an ethical priority toward the other who gives birth to my responsibility and identity. The other touches me with both words and looks, which awakens my flesh and gives rise to my felt sense as a responsible agent. At the same time, what I feel is not the other, but the feeling of my being touched. Hence, flesh not only connotes a receptivity toward the other who births me, but also flesh presents an irreducible barrier, or incommensurability, between the other and myself (e.g., I can never experience the other's flesh, only my own). This understanding represents a rupture in the intersubjective matrix; behind the seeming mutuality of dialogue and shared meaning is a deeper fissure between subjects that resists a true fusion of horizons or an empathic resonance that suggests that my experience of another's suffering is aligned with their experience of their own suffering. At best, empathy is always analogical and never synonymous with another's experience.

Hence, these shifts in recent phenomenology and their appropriation within psychology are giving rise to a new relational-orientation within existential psychology. Here, we do not use the word *new* to mean a replacement of what came before but, instead, an intensification of the sensibilities of those like Rollo May who, above all else, was committed to surmounting

the modern psychological tendency to reduce humans to abstract concepts. “The existential analysis movement is a protest against the tendency to see the patient in forms tailored to our own preconceptions or to make [him or her] over into the image of our own predilections” (May, 1958, p. 8). This is also not to suggest that relationality was necessarily absent from earlier existential thinkers and therapists. In fact, a certain type of relationality has been abundantly present since the inception of existential psychology. For instance, Binswanger (1946/1958) draws upon Heidegger’s notion of *Mitwelt* to indicate a mode of being-in-the-world that is relationally oriented, and Laing (1969) suggests that our sense of space is actually structured through others. However, what is distinctive in this new movement is how pervasively experience is structured by our relationships with others, and that this structuring is primarily ethical, rather than ontological (i.e., about goodness rather than being).

What are the corresponding therapeutic implications of this new emphasis on ethics, embodiment, and otherness? Several articles in this special section will address this question but one potential response likely includes a shift away from the vocabulary of self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and authenticity. The critical aim of psychotherapy informed by these thinkers will not simply be symptom reduction or even meaning-making, but an increasing hospitality toward the needs of others.

In the first article presented herein, “Levinas and the Parent–Child Relation: A Merleau-Pontyan Critique of Appropriating Levinas to Developmental Psychology,” Brock Bahler offers a developmental perspective on self–other relations, drawing primarily from the work of Emmanuel Levinas and his notions of paternity and maternity as they relate to the alterity of the other. However, Bahler argues that the work of Levinas, when understanding the child–parent relationship and the nature of alterity, may not go far enough. In this instance, he argues that the work of Merleau-Ponty completes the phenomenology of Levinas through his notions of language, gestures, and embodiment. Bahler also elucidates some of the present connections between contemporary cognitive neuroscience and continental philosophy’s insights regarding development.

In the next article, “Temporality in Psychosis: Loss of Lived Time in an Alien World,” Marina Denischik outlines the nonlinearity of temporality in psychic life. Drawing upon the work of Freud and Lacan, her thesis rests on the notion that psychic time is distinct and that at the heart of trauma integration is a necessary modification of temporality and one’s positioning within it.

In the following article, “Beholding and Being Beheld: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, and the Ethics of Attention,” Mark Freeman draws upon the works of Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil to outline an in-depth hermeneutical analysis on the ethics of attention as a prerequisite for beholding and being beheld by the Other. Freeman argues that the *process of unselfing*, as defined by Weil, is required to deepen and sharpen our powers of attention toward the world. What makes his scholarship unique is that when he speaks of others, he includes both the human and nonhuman and highlights how such phenomena as music, poetry, and art can have a kind of priority over the egoic self when one is swept up (in an unselfconscious manner) into the experience of enjoyment. Ultimately, Freeman’s analysis suggests that the notion of transcendence need not be abstract but can exist in the very quality of our attention toward the Other.

Jeff Sugarman’s artful response to Freeman’s piece in “Sex, Drugs, and Rock n’ Roll” raises some important questions about the relationship of transcendence and ethics to history, human agency, and neoliberal identities. Sugarman agrees with Freeman regarding the ethical sweet

spot of music and rock and roll, in particular, as a process to release the self from egoic captivity. However, he wonders if the ethics of attention will also map onto the *contemporary enterprising self* that Foucault originally outlined. Or does the self of late capitalism have different requirements for liberation and a different set of ethics that needs further elaboration?

Maxim Livshetz and David Goodman, in their work titled “Honoring the Sensate Bond between Disparate Subjectivities in Psychotherapy,” take the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas into the therapeutic alliance to highlight what such an encounter may look like beyond traditional psychotherapeutic or hermeneutical interpretations. The authors write, “In Levinas’s phenomenology, contact transforms the ego from a restless, isolated darkness into a darkness that is capable of elucidating for the other.” (p. 178) The article continues to explore the nature of this contact and its inherent sensibility in the lived ethical relationship. The topic of embodiment is addressed in this work from the standpoint of hunger, enjoyment, taste, and nourishment, which are perceived as a kind of passivity that also opens one to alterity.

Building off of recent scholarship on the nature of social experience in schizophrenia, Elizabeth Pienkos demonstrates that one of the most disorganizing experiences in schizophrenia is the self–other confusion and lack of *expressive unity* in reciprocal social processes. In her article, “Intersubjectivity and its Role in the Schizophrenic Experience,” she unpacks numerous theories regarding the nature of intersubjectivity in order to outline what makes the most theoretical sense when addressing the phenomenological experience of social interactions from the perspective of those who suffer from this disorder. In the conclusion of her piece she offers insights into treatment as well as suggestions for future directions for both theoretical and applied research.

In the final article, “Waves of Being: Merleau-Ponty with Bion/Meltzer Toward an Ontology of Music,” Jennfier Wang discusses how the disciplines of phenomenological psychology and philosophy have placed an emphasis on painting as the exemplar for aesthetic inspiration and epiphany. The crux of her thesis is to demonstrate that music also has the capacity to move one into new spaces of being. To make her argument, she also includes the notion of flesh, as Merleau-Ponty describes it. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, she writes, “Things are, then, effectively ‘an annex or prolongation of my body; they are incrustated in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body’” (p. 213). Ultimately, while drawing upon both continental philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, she argues for an ontology of music that is capable of facilitating therapeutic healing and self-revelation.

The themes in these articles bring together traditional phenomenological approaches and some of the more recent philosophical developments discussed earlier. These works also blend theoretical and therapeutic concerns. Rather than being a final statement, this special section should be considered a prolegomena and a call to develop these themes further. As the march of managed care and empirically validated treatments continues to solidify its status as the dominant logic in psychology, the time is ripe for a fresh infusion of contemporary philosophical thought that is ready to speak to the core ethical sensibilities of human experience.

We wish to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the many individuals, beyond our exceptional authors, who contributed to this endeavor. A special thanks to the Society for Humanistic Psychology and the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology, two foundational divisions in the American Psychological Association, for their support and participation in this conference and the generative work being done within their membership to bring the humanities into conversation with the psychological sciences. Scott Churchill, the Editor-in-Chief of this journal and active leader in both divisions, has been a pleasure to work with as we

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David M. Goodman is Interim Associate Dean at the Woods College of Advancing Studies at Boston College and a Teaching Associate at Harvard Medical School/Cambridge Hospital. Dr. Goodman has written over a dozen articles on continental philosophy, Jewish thought, social justice, and psychotherapy and his recent book, *The Demanded Self: Levinasian Ethics and Identity in Psychology* (Duquesne University Press), considers the intersection of psychology, philosophy, and theology as it pertains to narcissism, ethical phenomenology, and selfhood. Dr. Goodman also co-directs an interdisciplinary and interinstitutional Theoretical, Historical, and Philosophical Psychology Research Lab and works closely with students and colleagues on a variety of topics related to critical psychology, moral developmental theory, intersubjectivity and relational psychoanalysis, hermeneutical and dialogical psychologies, and the interfacing of religious/theological and psychological theories of selfhood. Dr. Goodman is also a licensed clinical psychologist and has a private practice in Cambridge, MA.