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## The ethical dimensions of life and analytic work through a Levinasian lens

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This paper contextualizes Jung's method of amplification within the larger history of philosophical hermeneutics and most particularly within the relational ethics of the post-modern, post-phenomenological and post-Heideggerian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. While finding the epistemological assumptions (foundationalism) of subject formation guiding Jung's interpretative method incompatible with the extra-ontology perspective of Levinas, this paper underscores the necessity for revitalizing our theory and practice by bringing back the unthought in Jung's corpus so that the truly ethical dimensions of life and analytic work are in alignment with our present epoch. Finally, one enigmatic analytic moment demonstrates how the radical Levinasian primacy of ethical experience in subject formation can emerge in a contemporary clinical encounter. The Levinasian sensibility will be shown to open up new perspectives that contrast with the formulaic ways in which we tend to understand the effects of counter-transference, transcendence, time and ethics.

**Keywords:** Jung; hermeneutics; amplification; Levinas; Heidegger; ethics; epistemology; extra-ontological; phenomenology; transcendence; counter-transference; time

### Introduction

One may understand *transcendence* as deriving from a *surplus* of meaning and there are different ways to approach this surplus. Jung most often interpreted it through the lens of a secure, over-arching theoretical system, implying that the ground of human experience is something that could be ultimately known. (Brooks, 2011; Hinton, 2011; Mills, 2013).<sup>1</sup> Contrast this view with post-modern theories that portray subjectivity as 'always part of a larger linguistic-cultural process, a web of layered significations' that constantly remind us of the unfathomable enigmas of alterity (Derrida, 1999; Kearney, 2011, p. xvi; Lacan, 1992; Levinas, 2008).<sup>2</sup> The themes (if we can call them that) of post modernity continually *destabilize* our understanding of unity, subjectivity, epistemic certainty (basis of knowledge), difference, historical progress, univocity of meaning, aesthetics, politics and ethics and hence subjectivity. In contrast, Jung's foundationalist problematic generally adhered to the view that there *was* an ultimate basis for knowledge and that this basis was derived from *a priori* (universals) postulates.

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Even while Jung continually eschewed the knowability of the psyche, particularly in his alignment to Kant's idea of transcendental noumena, in other instances he theorized with an implicit certainty and permanence that repudiated singular, impermanent and provisional realities in his alliance with empirical phenomena.<sup>3</sup> This duality of purpose can be strikingly observed in his later and seminal essay, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, where he reformulated his theory of the archetype, and in the Tavistock Lectures, where he discussed his method of interpreting the archetypes in analysis (Jung, 1947, 1935), as will be seen later. Contemporary Jungian theorists have continued to challenge Jung's basic assumptions about the conditions of subject formation that are embedded in a foundationalist problematic such as the 'Self'. There has been an increasing emphasis on inter-subjective approaches and an ethos surrounding the crucial presence of 'the other' that cannot be completely understood (Austin, 2009; Gullatz, 2010; Hinton, 2009, p. 638; Horne, 2008).

In this paper, I work backwards with our predicament, beginning with the quandary in which analytical psychology seems to find itself, that of both belonging and not belonging to the era of modernity in which it was born or to the post-modernity in which we find ourselves now. I turn to the relational ethics of the post-modern, post-phenomenological and post-Heideggerian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, whose work illustrates what is lacking in analytical psychology. My use of Levinas is intended to be critical of analytical psychology in two important aspects. First, I will establish that Jung's epistemological assumptions, or 'foundationalism' regarding subject formation is generally incompatible with the hermeneutics of philosophic phenomenology exemplified by the work of Heidegger and especially the extra-ontology of Levinas. In this vein, I will critique Jung's signature interpretative method of amplification that is often referred to as hermeneutic. When Jung's hermeneutic style most noted in his method of amplification is contrasted to the hermeneutic-phenomenology of Heidegger and the extra-phenomenology of Levinas, one can clearly view the profound leap in perspective between the former and the latter. This is evident when one contrasts the epistemological presuppositions regarding subject formation that guided Jung's interpretative method with Heidegger's ontological subject and Levinas' extra-ontological account of the subject. Levinas asserted a pre-cognitive heteronymous relation towards the other person that involved a primal *unknowability* and *responsibility*. For him, this primal relationship with alterity is the nexus of ethics and of subjectivity.

Finally, I will share my struggle with *one enigmatic clinical moment* that suddenly and unexpectedly emerged after a three-year period of sitting together with a patient's terrible sorrow. It was to the ethical sensibility of Levinas that I turned to endure her boundless suffering, a suffering that could not be born in thought or understanding but through bearing pain's enigma. This sensibility is rooted in the non-reciprocal relation of responsibility that emerges in the 'face to face' encounter with the other's alterity.

The thought of Levinas particularly invigorated my belief that psychoanalysis is at root an ethical undertaking. Among other things, he opens up new perspectives that contrast with the formulaic ways in which we tend to understand the effect of counter-transference, transcendence, time and ethics. This final section will focus on exploring the nuances of this extraordinary clinical predicament through a Levinasian lens.

### Historical context in the history of ideas relevant to our study

Some developments in philosophy and psychoanalysis can put the work of Levinas into historical perspective and illustrate his relevance to contemporary analytical psychology. Though often unacknowledged, moments and extended periods of enigma are commonplace in the analytic process. This awareness underlines the radical difference between the epistemological premises of classical analytical psychology and the perspectives of Heidegger's philosophical phenomenology of Heidegger and the post-phenomenology of Levinas.

### Contemporary philosophy: a sketch

In 1927, Martin Heidegger famously completed his grand opus *Being and time*, a work that would radically recount how *being* revealed itself in the phenomena of everyday social contexts.<sup>4</sup> For Heidegger, understanding one's existence was dependent upon how it connected to everything else – an understanding that emerged from the contextualization of one's historical and contemporary ethos. This was a radical step away from the Cartesian presuppositions and the dualisms tacitly adopted in the epistemologies of both Jung and Freud, which maintained the picture of an isolated mind with its various innate structures in relation to its internal and external 'objects' (mind/matter, subject/object, conscious, unconscious, transcendent/phenomena).<sup>5</sup> While Heidegger did not totally disavow that such dualities existed, following Husserl he held that they actually abstracted theoretical notions remote from the concrete flow of everyday existence. Husserl and Heidegger both viewed subjectivity as world-constituting. For Heidegger, the phenomenology of the concrete immediacy of existence was revealed via hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the art of understanding a discourse in the light of the influences of the text in all its forms as it relates to the interpretive heuristics of the interpreter. Heidegger extended this to include existence itself as 'texts to be interpreted' or as he has famously said 'let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself' (1962, p. 34).

Heidegger combined Edmund Husserl's phenomenological research with Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of understanding 'life world' and for the first time brought a combined use of the traditions of both hermeneutics and phenomenology.<sup>6</sup> The range of the philosophical-phenomenological tradition embraces many differences about the important questions concerning method, focus and the status of the existence of a self (Zahavi, 2008, pp. 1–29)<sup>7</sup>. Scrutiny of the phenomenal complexities of the consciousness of the subject, the structures of experience, time-consciousness, intentionality, body and self-awareness, and with Heidegger the ontological placement of being-in-the-world through language and 'care' are core concepts associated with a philosophical phenomenology.

As a post-Heideggerian phenomenologist, Levinas extended the range of what human experiences could be concretely interpreted by introducing sensible *responsibility* for the other person as well as *transcendence* (alterity, otherness, that which cannot be known) into the continuum of time and being.<sup>8</sup> This, he called the ethical relation. He emphasized the ubiquitous feeling of strangeness that predominates in human experience due to the continual and shocking experience of otherness pervading everyday life. For Levinas, the very sense of selfness is shaped by the trauma of this reality (Levinas, 2008, p. 111). His *oeuvre* was devoted to an extensive exploration of the face-to-face relation that is *prior to* thought, action and

being at the affective-sensuous level. This was a crucial departure from Heidegger who privileged ontology (being) over metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Levinas inverted the relation between ethics and ontology making ethics the first philosophy (Levinas, 1969, p. 47). The Levinasian project creates a phenomenology of subjectivity that located at the precarious and pre-theoretical nexus of subjectivity *prior* to its emergence.

Levinas's most strident critique of classical psychoanalysis was in what he viewed to be Freud's reduction of subjectivity to ego consciousness as is depicted in Freud's famous maxim: '*Wo Es war Soll Ich werden*' or roughly, 'Where Id was, there shall Ego be,' (Levinas, 1996, pp. 82–83).<sup>10</sup> Jung, like Levinas considered the 'Self' to be affectively and pre-cognitively perceived and separate from ego consciousness. However, Jung's 'other' consisted of the archetypes and his foundationalism bound him to a subject that *could* be known, represented and observed, in contrast to post-modern views.<sup>11</sup> Levinas's ethical subjectivity is not unlike Jacques Lacan's relation to the real. Lacan interpreted the Freudian *Es* as the subject who is articulated in relation to the order of the 'real' or 'Where It was, I am to become' (Critchley, 2007, pp. 63–68; Žižek, 2007, p. 3). For Levinas, the 'it' is alterity located in the ethical relation and the site of subject formation, not in ego-consciousness.

Consciousness, for Levinas was a belated 'trace' (*nachträglich*) of a pre-conscious sensorial affect, an affect that is due to the traumatization of being 'held hostage' to the primal, enigmatic (transcendent) command of and responsibility towards the 'Face' of the other who is commanding me (Levinas, 2008, pp. 99–129; 1996, p.142). We do not choose to be responsible, as this responsibility to the other person's command arises before we can begin to think about it. Such a responsibility, according to Judith Butler is 'bound up with an anxiety that [always] remains open, that does not settle an ambivalence through disavowal, but rather gives rise to a certain ethical practice, itself experimental and seeks to preserve life better than it destroys it' (Butler, 2010, p. 177). For Levinas, signification including language and thought had its nascence in the transcendence that was the intersubjective quality of sensibility, or what he referred to as 'discourse' (Levinas, 1969, pp. 64–77). Discourse could only occur in what he referred to as 'an original relation with [an] exterior being' (*ibid.*).

By arguing for the priority of heteronomy (i.e. the determination of the subject by another) over autonomy (self-determination), Levinas astonishingly cuts *against* the grain of moral philosophy and Aristotelian/neo-Kantian perspectives of morality and ethics that underlies much of psychoanalysis, including their teleological world-view. By teleological, I am loosely referring to a philosophical doctrine that purports that deliberate action must always aim toward some end of what is deemed good. Individual freedom or autonomy is the highest value for a philosophy founded on these principles. Jung's theory of individuation was founded on such a world-view, as was Freud's transformation of the pleasure principle by the ego (Jung, 1928, para. 239; Wallwork, 1991, p. 122).<sup>12</sup> Moral authority becomes self-determined. Thus, the Kantian subject rationally and autonomously 'chooses' to accept responsibility for the greater moral good. In contrast the *Dasein* (being-there) of the early Heidegger was *not* determined by reason or morality but from the pre-rational realm of moods (e.g. anxiety), and his new view of the structure of ethical experience through the analysis of authenticity was an existential deepening of Kantian autonomy (Critchley, 2007, p. 36; Heidegger, 1927, p. 286; Vogel, 1994).<sup>13</sup>

For the Levinasian subject however, ethicality precedes autonomy. Freedom is predicated on the possibility of being effected by another person's suffering. It is only on the background of such experiences according to Levinas, that language and thought can emerge. Subjective autonomy is only possible through the 'surplus demand' of the other or the third party (justice) (Levinas, 2008). That is, the impossible unconditional demand, the surplus of the other person that always exceeds my ability to adequately respond because it exceeds 'the idea of the other in me.' It is only in this way that I can become so utterly dissembled and opened to the 'act' of responsibility (Levinas, 1969, p. 27). The 'thought of an act' can only be born through the violent and traumatic struggle of being overcome by the other's demand. Freedom, for Levinas is only possible through the ongoing and insoluble struggles that open the possibility for moments of apprehension of life's value. No teleological account is sufficient for this primal ethical awareness.<sup>14</sup>

### Classical Jung – hegemony of meaning

For Jung, everyday reality was grounded in an underlying *a priori*/transcendent realm he called the collective unconscious or objective psyche. The objective psyche contained the 'whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution' made known to the individual through the immanent experience of archetypal phenomena (Jung, 1927, para. 342). Jung believed that he had indeed discovered the typos (pattern) of the *archè* (primal substance) and as such the archetypes were the foundational principles or emanations of the transcendent. The transcendent feature of Jung's later formulation of the archetype-as-such was called the 'psychoid factor' and became accessible via the texture of everyday phenomenal reality *in the body* via the instincts (Jung, 1947). In other words, Jung located the psychoid factor in the gap between the archetype and instinct, which was there to be translated into meaning in the process of analysis.

Already we can begin to detect fundamental differences between Jung's epistemological assumptions regarding how subject formation *certainly* occurred and Heidegger's 'fundamental ontology', a term he used to describe his investigation into the *question* of being. For Heidegger, there was no grounding for experience, as being did not have itself as its own basis.<sup>15</sup> Instead (and contrast this to an 'objective psyche') he relied on what he referred to as the primal phenomenon of the 'clearing' (*Lichtung*; Heidegger, 2001 [1987], pp. 3, 13, 188, German original). Human beings were not separated from one another in the clearing and could only be apprehended through self-interpretation from which understanding could arise. Heidegger distinguished everyday concrete existence as separate from metaphysical conceptions of subject formation (such as Jung had via interpreting the archetypes) and focused his efforts on inquiring into the phenomenological conditions for the possibility of having any understanding of being at all. He was radically opposed to an objective realm foundational to the subject (such as Jung's objective psyche, or even the unconscious). Heidegger's philosophy can be seen as a repudiation of foundationalism, a problematic such as Jung embraced.

Some of the basic foundationalist theoretical assumptions that shaped Jung's work were contained within a thesis of historical immanentism that was founded upon an overarching meta-narrative that comprehended all things within a necessary unity, a kind of 'divine abyss' out of which the 'self' archetype emerged for our comprehension compelled towards a telos of wholeness (McGrath, 2012).



The Jungian self could be interpreted through a set of *a priori* cognitions that guided understanding of the phenomenal world. Subjectivity was thus viewed through the lens of the myth of the isolated mind with its innate structures and contained the conventions of interpretation that privilege the illusion of the analyst's epistemological authority (Brooks, 2011). Heidegger's view undermined the possibility of an external vantage point from which one could retreat to obtain an 'objective' or final view of reality. In contrast, existential phenomenology began with the emergence of everyday concrete phenomena that are interpreted hermeneutically, so that the 'hidden' significance of things could become uncovered or 'revealed' (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 6, 36, 59). Jung, proceeding in a more foundational way, viewed a world soul centered within a *unus munus* (located out there), which served as both Archimedean point and unifying ground beneath the emissarial workings of the archetypes (Hinton, 2011; Jung, 1947, paras. 439, 388, 393).

Levinas viewed the subject's *relation* to the other person as transcendent and the site of subject formation. What in part makes Levinas's phenomenology 'post' Heideggerian is his inclusion of metaphysics (*transcendent* factor) as constitutive to subject formation (Levinas, 1969, p. 35). He did not privilege ontology (as Heidegger did) over everything else, but claimed that the ethical relation with the other was the infrastructure to being (*ibid.*, pp. 42–47). Levinas viewed the question of the meaning of being as equivalent in significance to being in the world with others. Both Levinas and Jung embraced metaphysical conceptions of subjectivity but that is where the similarities end. The Jungian subject was an isolated mind whose transcendent 'other' or self (archetype) was equated with Kant's boundary concept and located in the gap between archetype and instinct.

Another important claim that Levinas made against psychoanalysis, sociology and politics was that the 'totalizing' knowledge of the conditioned nature of human beings gained from these disciplines was irrelevant to the inter-subjective relation with the other person (Levinas, 1969, p. 58; 2008, pp. 58–59). By using the term totalizing, Levinas is referring to the tendency in human beings to deny alterity by capturing something, an experience, an idea or person and reducing it to something that is not unique. Such a position does violence to the other person and Levinas devotes his later energies on the description and analysis of the phenomenology of the other from a non-totalizing hermeneutic.

As will be seen below, Jung retained a stance of epistemological authority when it came to archetypal explications of the patient's experience. If I, as analyst were to manifest the Levinasian spirit of the ethical relation into the clinical realm, it would require a surrender to the utter enigma of the patient, recognizing that I am always already held hostage to his or her suffering (or any state), and that I must therefore do my best to assume responsibility for the feeling of what is happening between us.<sup>16</sup> One can sense the anticipation of such a stance in Jung's discussion on the transference in the Tavistock lectures (1935). He stated:

Emotions are contagious because they are deeply rooted in the sympathetic system . . . any process of an emotional kind immediately arouses a similar process in others . . . I put my patients in front of me and I talk with them as one natural human being to another, and I expose myself completely and react with no restriction (1935, paras 318–319)

And later . . .

This is a phenomenon which Freud has described as counter-transference. It consists of mutual projecting into each other and being fastened together by mutual unconsciousness (ibid., para 322).

While Levinas viewed the site of the ethical relation to also be unconscious it was a relation that was facilitated not by mutuality, as Jung is stating the transference is rooted in, but by asymmetrical responsive to the other's suffering. Such responsiveness exceeded representation, intentional acts and recognition. The effect of the affect on me is decidedly non-dialectical – a 'traumatism of responsibility and not causality' (Levinas, 1996, pp. 93–94). Other parts of an analysis may contain aspects of conscious mutuality, perhaps what Jung is implying above, but the Levinasian ethical relation is decidedly asymmetrical. Later in this same discussion Jung distinguishes between personal and impersonal (collective) realms of transference, the latter being imbued with archetypal material. The epistemological authority that Jung assumed when it came to justifying his explications of a patient's experience with the emergence of archetypal material in the transference can also be found in his method of amplification with other manifestations of archetypal phenomena. In radical contrast, as an analyst holding the Levinasian sensibility, I would release the patient from my efforts to 'consign or confine' herself to my theoretical ideas of reality as I understand it (Severson, 2010).

Does interpretation of enigmatic material herald the arrival of subjectivity with such a sensibility, or can it? I will begin to address this important consideration in the clinical part of the paper, but first I will review Jung's interpretive position. We can most informatively follow Jung's clinical position of epistemological authority by tracking what he said about his method of amplification. Jung began to sketch out the bare bones of his allegorical interpretive style in 1912, a method that he would later (1935) refer to as 'amplification', and would on occasion throughout the *Collected works* refer to as 'hermeneutic' (Jung, 1912, 1916, para. 491; 1935, paras.173–174; 1955, paras. 474, 297n.).<sup>17</sup> Jung's method of amplification was conceived within a foundationalist problematic containing an essentialist perspective [reducing metaphysical objects to essences]. It also embraced a phenomenological-descriptive approach, which employed a discursive process between the patient and the analyst that expanded or opened up possibilities by following the patient's own associations to their own material. The descriptive approach was one he retained from his earlier and acclaimed research with the word association test at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Hospital in Zürich in 1901–1904 (Bair, 2003, p. 66).

The term 'amplification' was itself a misnomer, in that it implied that Jung's intent was to *expand* the signification of unconscious contents, yet this process was in fact only a precursor to a formulaic reduction of the expanded material to a presumed archetypal core. Jung's epistemology inexorably bound the psyche to a theory of the mind that held that metaphysical essences were accessible and could be intuitively known. His *discursive* approach was closer to Heidegger's method and actually foreshadowed the viewpoint of many contemporary post-modern psychoanalysts who do not accept the distinction between the foundational conceptual structures and how we live our lives in the everyday world (Frie, 2011; Green, 2010;



Lear, 2000; Stolorow, 2007). Following are some examples of how Jung's heuristic was informed by his foundational problematic.

In 1916, Jung used the term 'hermeneutics' for the first time to explicate his developing interpretative method (Jung, 1916, para. 493). This commentary acknowledged two kinds of analogies, the 'subjective' provided by the patient and the 'objective' provided by the analyst out of his general knowledge. This crucial distinction was later elaborated on in lecture II of the Tavistock lectures (1935), where Jung clarified the two classes of unconscious processes from which contents could be systematically divided and recognized. These classes corresponded to 'personal' or 'subjective' unconscious and to the collective or 'objective' unconscious. Jung's summarizing statement in the latter part of the 1916 commentary, foreshadowed his forthcoming method of amplification that ['widens and enriches'] and was grounded in essentialist theory ['elements of which can be reduced to their respective *tertia comparationis*'].]

In the Tavistock Lectures, Jung articulated a less ambiguous representation of his approach to working with transcendent contents within the personal and collective realms. Below is a sample passage that illustrates his method of following the patient's allegorical associations to his or her own material by following the principles of the word association experiments:

When patient introduced dream content for example he might simply inquire thus: How does that thing appear to you? He (the patient) will tell you something quite astonishing. For instance, somebody says 'water'. Do I know what he means by 'water'? Not at all. When I put the test word or a similar word to somebody, he will say 'green'. Another one will say 'H2O', which is something quite different. Another one will say 'quicksilver' or 'suicide'. In each case I know what tissue that word or image is embedded in (Jung, 1935, para. 174).

This passage demonstrates Jung's descriptive methodology that he utilized to amplify the associations to dream images from the patient's 'personal' unconscious. Here, he recognizes the particularity of each person and does not leap to totalizing claims but relies on the patient to reveal the 'tissue' the signifier is embedded in. However, when a symbol, motif or signifier emerged in the dream material that Jung identified as 'archetypal', his method dramatically shifted. The material from the collective unconscious was of unknown origin, unlike the personal unconscious, or 'sub-conscious mind' as he put it whose elements were simply forgotten or repressed or creative contents (*ibid.*, paras. 78–80). Jung more fully assumed a position of epistemological authority in the collective realm as is demonstrated in the following passage where he was referring to a 'crab-lizard' image that emerged in a patient's dream:

But the crab is not a personal experience, it is an archetype. When an analyst has to deal with an archetype he may begin to think. In dealing with the personal unconscious you are not allowed to think too much and to add anything to the associations of the patient. Can you add something to the personality of somebody else? You are a personality yourself. The other individual has a life of his own and a mind of his own inasmuch as he is a person. But inasmuch as he is not a person, inasmuch as he is also myself, he has the same basic structure of mind, and there I can begin to think, *I can associate for him*. I can even provide him with necessary context because he will have none, he does not know where that crab-lizard comes from and has no idea what it means, but *I know and can provide the material for him* (*ibid.*, para. 190; my italics).

In the first part of this passage, Jung was addressing the patient as a singular human being irreducible to others including himself. At the level of personality, or collective consciousness each of us is different (Jung, 1934, para. 289). Jung was distinguishing between the ontological aspects of the particular personality and the transcendent or universal realm of unifying sameness. Here, I resume my discussion regarding Jung's essentialist tendencies. When he observed the emergence of so-called archetypal phenomena he was likely to reduce these signifiers to 'essences' by applying what he deemed to be relevant cultural and historical analogies that he believed were expressed in polytheistic mythologies (or other cultural forms) that manifested in recurring motifs and themes contained in the collective unconscious. As such, Jung hypostasized the unconscious and reified enigmatic phenomena.<sup>18</sup> The patient was held hostage instead to Jung's analytical sovereignty particularly when what he recognized as archetypes emerged. For Levinas, in contrast, the ethical relation could not be thematized, or reduced to a principle, an *archè* or ontology. Inversely, the ethical relation was one that was predicated on subordinating oneself to the other's alterity.

### Contemporary psychoanalysis – a selective sketch

The contemporary psychoanalytical literature that most lends itself to or is embedded in post-modern thought was largely generated by the post-Lacanian tradition. A half-century ago, Lacan claimed he was returning to Freud's early but often-abandoned insight about the intrinsic opacity of the unconscious. The goal of analytic treatment for Lacan was not to elevate ego functions vis-à-vis the unconscious, but, on the contrary, to confront the barriers to experiencing 'the Real'. He saw these barriers as based in language (signification) that can reveal or conceal. Lacan was concerned with the 'ethics of the real' or an ethics that maintained a fidelity to the disturbing groundlessness of being. This is a post-modern view. Lacan rejected the idea of a conventional moral goal for psychoanalysis whereby a readjustment to 'reality' could be achieved through a harmonization of drive and object. Lacan's ethical stance consisted of 'putting the subject in relation to its desire, or confronting the lack of being that one is, which is always bound up with the relation to death' (Critchley, 1999, p. 202). While it is not within the scope of this paper to elaborate on Levinas' and Lacan's parallel interests in ethics at any length, both tied subject formation to the ethical problem or responsibility for the other. This fundamental alignment can be seen in relation to the traumatic 'real' for Lacan and the subject viewed *as* deriving from the trauma of ethical demand of the other, with Levinas.<sup>19</sup>

Laplanche extended Lacan's position by including the enigmatic messages that partly originate beyond language, and are passed from mother to infant or young child before he/she has the capacity to comprehend them. These messages, often sexual, cannot be totally translated by the infant both because of the difference in maturity between infant and adult and because the meanings of the message are often enigmatic to the adult 'senders' themselves (Hinton, 2009). These inadequately metabolized messages eventually form a core 'internal foreign body' – a sort of 'alien inside me, put inside me by an alien' (Laplanche, 1999, p. 65). These enigmatic elements defy final translation, but we translate them throughout our lives. Laplanche explains that this is the reason why psychoanalysis (and life) is like a spiral around a constant core of enigma (*ibid.*).

Bracha Ettinger, a contemporary and French feminist post-Lacanian psychoanalyst challenges the phallic subjectivisation (i.e. Oedipalisation and castration complex) of theory by attempting to think about subject formation as primordially feminine in the real and logically in the imaginary/ Symbolic realms. She rearticulates primal fantasies away from what she has identified in psychoanalytical literature as ‘the ready-made mother-monster’ fantasy (proto ethical). Ettinger’s work is densely poetic and often obtuse, yet I include her here because she stands out like other contemporary psychoanalytic voices as a multifaceted person whose light is fed by sources outside of psychoanalysis including the arts, cultural criticism, literature and philosophy. Most remarkable and relevant to my purposes here, are published conversations she had with Levinas in 1991–1993. This poignant discussion between feminist and philosopher is summarized in Ettinger’s acknowledgement that the Levinasian feminine ‘becomes a subjectivizing agency’ (Ettinger, 2007, p. 132).<sup>20</sup> By this, she means that the ‘deepest of the feminine infiltrates the subject as its ultimate ethical positioning’. Levinas quite poignantly stated as much in their conversation:

Woman is the category of future, the ecstasy of future. It is that human possibility which consists in saying that the life of another human being is more important than my own, that the death of the other is more important to me than my own death, that the Other comes before me, that the other counts before I do, that the value of the Other is imposed before mine is (Ettinger & Levinas, 2006, p.142).

I ask you hold this sentiment in your ‘mind’s heart’ as you continue to read my clinical reflections. The patient/protagonist – ‘Mary’, whom I will soon introduce, was not conceived or born into such hospitality. Indeed, today she is just now beginning to wonder why she was born.

### **Illustration**

Three years into treatment, Mary’s youngest daughter suddenly and unexpectedly died. Mary rarely spoke directly about the concrete circumstances of her life after her daughter’s death. A terrible sense of emptiness and desolation ensued. She did not articulate these states verbally, but I surmised the emotions from my own intense bodily responses in being with her and in the anticipatory dread I often felt before her session. At first, I would feel a hollowing draining deadness punctuated by waves of a kind of wretched inconsolable sorrow. These emotions were not obviously correlated to the overt content of the sessions. Fortuitously, she began to dream prolifically following the death and it was about her dreams that we mostly spoke and through them that her affect was vivified. These images contained landscapes of ruination (including a series of dead baby dreams) destruction and desolation and were delivered in a methodical manner. This was often interrupted by inert silences and periods of primal weeping. The scaffolding of our sessions was almost entirely centered on her dreams that seemed to maintain a kind of continuity of our relationship before the ‘shattering’ (as she came to describe it) event of her girl’s death. I began to view our conversations about her dream contents as long rope she was throwing to me from the other side of the ontological divide that her devastating loss had vividly opened up. My manner of talking with her about her dreams was much like Jung’s descriptive method, where I would inquire into phenomenological aspects such as: ‘Tell me about the molted skin of that dead infant’, or: ‘Your hands are trembling

Mary when you are describing the molted skin of this baby'. However, in no instances did I interpret what might be conceived of as archetypes, or apply mythological or historical analogies to such imagery. This quality of suspended deprecation remained in the foreground of her sessions for several long and excruciating years.

Mary was preparing to leave the office one day, and quite unexpectedly she earnestly looked into my eyes for the *first time* and intensely asked; "Do *you* know why I was born?" I was quite suddenly overcome with a sense of cognitive vertigo and speechless-ness. Then, my body felt as if it had suddenly evacuated itself from all vitality in a kind of violent whoosh. I was immediately subsumed into a shared realm that thinking could not evade. There is no plausible explanation for the effect of her question on me, then or now years later. Even the benign act of engaging in my own interior hypothetical speculations would have felt like a pathetic attempt to remove the effect of Mary's alterity and the terribly disturbing experience of receiving her summons. The effect of her question on me to this day continues haunt me as it appears to haunt her. What did she want from me? Could one ever articulate such a desire, much less an explanation?

It is here that I wish to take a brief detour to Levinas's thought about time, discourse and horror, because they are coextensive ideas relevant to the clinical moment at hand. When Philippe Nemo asked Levinas how one began to think, Levinas replied thus: 'It probably begins through traumatisms or groupings to which one does not even know how to give a verbal form: a separation, a violent scene, a sudden consciousness of the monotony of time' (Levinas, 1985, p. 21). With this in mind, we can infer that Mary's enigmatic question emerged from a similar traumatized site – a violent scene and corresponding self-state that now she quite suddenly exposed. This, I think is what Levinas is attempting to relay in his view of discourse. Discourse for Levinas is not contained to language alone but includes what is communicated and received by the other non-thematically, to including silence. He states: '...discourse relates with what remains essentially transcendent' (Levinas, 1969, p. 195) and 'Discourse is the experience of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* 'knowledge' or 'experience', a *traumatism of astonishment* (ibid., p. 73). The effect of Mary's affect expressed silently for years was now suddenly revealed in an explosive command of me through the gaze. I cannot remember what I actually said in answer to Mary's question, probably simply 'I don't know, Mary'. At least that is what I hope I said. But probably 'no' emerged from my lips in the midst of an overwhelming surplus of demand to a question that was primordially enigmatic. Within this moment was a wrenching from the ontological synchronic 'monotony' of time to what Levinas calls diachrony – through my encounter with the nakedness of Mary's face and unspoken appeal. Synchrony gave way to diachrony, a sort of timelessness born of the shock of the other's claim on me, a claim that cannot be grasped or incorporated into an intelligible history or teleological possibility. Contra Heidegger, where being could be understood on the basis of death (temporality), Levinas demonstrated that time originated with and for the other through the shock of the other's utter enigma. Levinas refers to diachrony *as* the subject, or that by which 'the uniqueness of the one has been designated' (Levinas, 2008, p. 57). In other words, Diachrony is time that arises only in relation to the other. The other's trauma and its effect in me violently interrupts the monotony of moments that are not oriented or intentional. Such a diachronic moment occurred when Mary *looked into my eyes* and *spoke*. On this Levinas stated: 'The eyes break through the mask – the language of the eyes impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks' (Levinas, 1969, p. 66). And

further in the same text he stated: ‘The nakedness of the face is destituteness’ (ibid., p. 75). In contrast to the subject of ontology or the ego, which are cast in temporal synchrony, the Levinasian subject is constituted in extra-ontological conditions – conditions that radically interrupt the ontological synchrony of my ‘ego’s world’ (Barnard, 2002, pp. 166–167). This is a world that exceeds representation, lived experience, reciprocity and is the *hither side* of temporality.

Mary spoke to me face to face from this diachronous world and in the saying – Levinasian discourse ensued. Language, for Levinas is not enacted within a consciousness but from the realm of diachronic subjectivity through the face to face, which founds such languaging (Levinas, 1969, pp. 204–207). Mary’s unilateral claim on me constitutes her as subject with the *possibility of response* – a seeming bid for the impossible labor of making what is unknown into something that can be known (Barnard, 2002, p. 176). Responding to her and to receiving her address without impeding it with psychoanalytical dogma is critical in such moments. What far exceeded the urgency of her command was for me to bear its overwhelming and intolerable enigma. In retrospect, I see this in turn as a profound challenge, a shattering that opened new levels of my own subjectivity.<sup>21</sup>

I return now to the affect of cognitive disequilibrium and the violent whoosh or evacuation of something that left in its emptying out a sense of nothing-ness. In contrast to the Heideggarian, Freudian and Jungian subject, which is known through its intelligibility, the Levinasian subject is apprehended in relation to the open void that is nothingness and the site from which transcendence arises (Levinas, 1969, pp. 190–191). Levinas approaches this indeterminate gap or nether space between being and otherwise than being as something that is revealed through affect, or mood and apprehended as such. Of this Levinas stated: ‘The silence of infinite spaces is terrifying. The invasion of the *there is* [*il y a*] does not correspond to any representation . . . We have described elsewhere its vertigo’ (ibid., my brackets). He described this passing over from being to non-being or otherwise than being in a later text thus:

Being and not-being illuminate one another and unfold a speculative dialectic, which is a determination of being. Or the negativity which attempts to repel being is immediately submerged by being. The void that hollows out is immediately filled with the mute and anonymous rustling of the *there is* as the place left vacant by one who died is filled with the murmur of the attendants . . . The *there is* fills the void left by the negation of being (Levinas, 1996, p. 110).

In this terrifying neutrality, Mary sought refuge or escape from the *there is* to something constitutive instead of simply nothing – an emergence of herself (Levinas, 2001, p. 54). Arising in the midst of encompassing horror, Mary formulated a fierce act of self-originating agency.<sup>22</sup> She posed a question into the purpose of her being – transcendence in immanence. And in the most primordial way, she depended on me to un-simply bear the effect of her unspeakable reality of non-being-ness through its various states of concealment and unveilings.

In the following session, Mary brought in a rather long and detailed dream as she had countless times before. In the dream Mary drove over the edge of a cliff with other family members and a number of events occurred in the canyon bottom. At the very end, she stated: ‘I tried then to call my mother to tell her we are safe. She saw us go down from the bluff’s edge. She cannot hear me’. In retrospect, this last passage reminded me of the earlier ontological gap I had experienced between us shortly



following the death of Mary's daughter. Following a typical phenomenological shared inquiry into the dream, I finally asked her what came to her mind about the separation from her mother. The figure of her mother had not appeared in her dreams before and prior to this dream she had relayed most contents to her grief regarding her daughter's death. Mary became strangely animated and laughed bitterly. She then coldly remarked (and again looking directly into my eyes) that it was 'typical' for them to have a misconnection. At this point, she looked down and abruptly withdrew into herself and I could almost hear the whoosh of her own evacuation. I was feeling stunned and agitated, confused by Mary's sudden withdrawal from what had been an engaging and revelatory exchange. We sat for minutes in inexplicable silence. I said something like: 'Tell me about how the misconnection with your mother is typical'. She slowly looked at me again and recounted the story of her birth for the first time. Her words flowed out of her mouth yet paradoxically in an unanimated manner. She said:

My mother was pregnant for the fourth time. She was willing to have four children and did not want any more after that. Two weeks prior to giving birth, the physician told her that she was carrying twins, which she did not know. She did not even know she was pregnant until her 7th month. I was the last to be born, the fifth child born to my mother. I always felt I was not wanted. I have always felt estranged all of my life from my brother. Because I was underweight, I was left in the hospital for three weeks. Several years ago, I asked her if she had visited me at the hospital. My mother looked at me and told me, 'I just couldn't'.

Mary, then suddenly and heart wrenchingly sobbed as she laboriously repeated her mother's words: 'I just couldn't'. I was extremely moved and as her tears waned, we had another moment of looking into each other's eyes. In that timeless moment I recall having a flash memory of the first time I had looked into the eyes of my own infant son.

When I shared this memory with psychotherapist, Franco Scabbiolla, he had an astonishing response. In our gaze, he thought I could see my own infant son in *her* eyes. I saw the live baby in her and he surmised that she saw the live baby through my eyes and was for a moment vitalized. She was inside of me and I was her living refuge (consultation 17 February 2012).<sup>23</sup> I add to this speculation that she also put her dead parts inside me seeing in me a possibility to live.

Scabbiolla is Meltzer trained and it is from this tradition that he interpreted this session, I presume, but what appeared to inform him was the feeling of what was happening between us. I felt his tenderness with me and saw the reverberations in his own body as he apprehended the impact of the tragic blows of Mary's life on her *and us* as I spoke about them. The interpretation can be viewed as a theoretical fiction that emerged while I was consulting with a third person outside of the clinical setting, who at the same time was responding to Mary's command through me. Nevertheless, while Scabbiolla was making his interpretation, he was looking into my eyes. In those diachronous moments between consultant and consultee, I was revitalized. Together, Scabbiolla and I could better bear the unfathomable horror of the feeling of what Mary's mother's command to her might have been, and so on into *time immemorial*.

### Some reflections

I want to briefly redirect this clinical post hoc philosophical progression into a more practical discussion of how the Levinasian sensibility might be employed further in



contemporary practice and how such an employment is contrasted to a so-called classical Jungian approach. Jung's method of amplification of archetypal phenomena (and I question the very epistemological premise of an archetype to begin with) is irrelevant and even destructive to the emergence of subject formation particularly in cases of pre-reflective and primal trauma. We do not need to appeal to an overarching collective psyche to *explain* phenomena. Clinical phenomena, and I include the effect of unarticulated pre-cognitive affect, *are* necessarily enigmatic, as illustrated in the clinical vignette above. The patient was suspended in an atemporal affective realm for years, during which, for the most part, I methodically followed what the patient presented phenomenologically. By this, I mean I employed aspects of Jung's descriptive method in a hermeneutic that attended to the phenomena of her dream material as it emerged, noting her affective response to and mine and the slowly emerging narrative and our relationship to it over time. With Mary, *nachträglich* traces of memory eventually did emerge over the years and the flow of temporal time continued to be restored. What the Levinasian sensibility has to offer us, in my reading of him, has more to do with bearing the affect of enigmatic primal trauma without attempting to concretize it through interpretation. The ethical relation is not a mutual enterprise as Jung simplistically suggested the analytic relation was throughout his writings, but an unconditional surrender to the suffering of the patient (Jung, 1929, para 163). It is at the site of such an asymmetrical surrender that Levinas views subject formation to occur, contra to Jung's view, which relies on translating enigmatic phenomena through the application of cultural and historical analogies into a unifying narrative with all of humankind.

### Afterword

I am not advocating for the abolishment of theory but a revitalization of a theory that was once radically conceived yet in the sensibilities of another epoch has become less relevant. Regarding the project of restoring classical thought into contemporary currency I refer to a scrap of dialogue between Philippe Nemo and Levinas. Levinas was referring to one of Heidegger's 'essential contributions' to philosophy in his new reading of the history of philosophy.

In Heidegger there is a new way, direct, of conversing with philosophers and asking for absolutely current teachings from the great classics. Of course, the philosopher of the past does not directly involve himself in the dialogue; there is an entire work of interpretation to accomplish in order to render him current. But in this hermeneutic one does not manipulate outworn things, one brings back the unthought to thought and saying (Levinas, 1985, pp. 43–44).

If we are to take Levinas seriously in the application of his thought to our predicament, then we cannot revitalize theory and practice by the manipulation of worn out ideas and methods, or *uncritically* held attempts at collating or conflating post-modern theories to an old idea that has lost its luster. Levinas directs us to the hermeneutic discourse, and for our purposes to the unthought in Jung's work and the broader psychoanalytic traditions. For Levinas, the unthought or the pre-cognitive affective disposition towards the other person (or thing, such as a body of work) *is* the nexus of subjectivity [to thought] and 'the situation of discourse' [to saying] (Levinas, 1996, p. 9). For discourse to occur (with text, self or other person) one must bring back

the unthought. The price of this encounter is some form of shattering, but only that can open the truly ethical dimensions of life and analytic work.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Ladson Hinton, MD, who first introduced me to the philosophical ethical dimensions of analytic work.

### Notes

1. Hinton and Mills decisively critique Jung's core notion of the *Unus Mundus* (one world). Jungian psychoanalyst and theorist Ladson Hinton III with his three esteemed sons in a panel presentation at the 2010 IAAP Congress in Montreal, cogently addressed the misguided longing in Jungian culture to adhere to uncritically held foundational ideas that have destructive and unforeseen ethical dangers in many cultural dimensions (Hinton 2011). In this issue of *International Journal of Jungian Studies* philosopher and psychoanalyst Jon Mills asks compellingly, '...In other words, do we need to appeal to an ancestral past [collective unconscious] in order to explain present experience? Do we currently occupy a spirit(ual) world emanating from a central ubiquitous Source that is responsible for the collective development of the human race?' (Mills, 2012).
2. Jungian theorist Christopher Hauke's (2000) *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* offers the reader a compendium of post-modern themes in an attempt to underscore the validity of classical Jungian modernity in a post-modern world. Hauke's approach does not recognize the irreducible gap between the respective ontologies of Jung and post modernity. Neither does he describe the pivotal influences of philosophical phenomenology on post modernity (people such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas), and he only mentions Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in passing.
3. Although Jung claimed epistemological allegiance with the Kantian irreducibility in division between empirical phenomena and transcendental noumena, in actuality he shows closer alignment with the dialectical unity between opposing opposites, which is rooted in German Idealism. I am grateful to Jon Mills for elucidating this important distinction (personal conversation, June 2012).
4. Roger Brooke has authored a number of papers and texts on the topic of the commonality and differences between philosophical phenomenology (primarily focusing on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) and analytical psychology, most notably 'Jung and Phenomenology' (1993). Brooke's reading of 'hermeneutics' tends to emphasize the polysemic and commensurable aspects of classical Jung and philosophical hermeneutics, emphasizing Jung's ontology, while I tend to underscore their incommensurability due to Jung's foundationalism. Jung simply, in my mind, because of his foundationalist presuppositions, did not make the 'turn' from knowledge viewed as a product of the mind to Heidegger's 'fundamental ontology', which focuses on a non-Cartesian understanding of the presencing of being in everyday social and historical contexts. There are evidences however, that Jung anticipated such a turn most noted in his phenomenological descriptive approach developed early in his career in his association test researches (see Austin, 2009; Vezzoli *et al.*, 2007) and in his *immanent* critique of such emerging phenomena from the patient. For a contemporary application of this crucial insight, see Cambray, 2006; Cambray, Gaillard, Gibeault, Gastelumendi & Kast, 2011.
5. See Heidegger, 2001 for a full and rich discussion from Heidegger's own lips regarding his objections to fundamental premises inherent in Freud's psychoanalysis.
6. Dilthey's fundamental basis for philosophy was itself, or the lived experiences of the human being embedded in its environment (*Lebenswelt*). Phenomenological research for Husserl required a careful description of the phenomena or experience without imposing one's presuppositions or judgments about the implication of the experience.
7. See Zahavi, 2008, pp. 1–29 for a fertile discussion on this topic.
8. See Jacque Derrida's early essay on 'Violence and Metaphysics', which is an essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, for an engaging deconstructive discourse of the early work of Levinas as it is contrasted to that of Heidegger and Husserl (1978). A compelling

- companion text to this work is Derrida's later text – 'Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas' written on the occasion of Levinas's death and delivered at the cemetery in Pantin on 27 December 1995. 'Adieu' is a moving 'meditation' on the work of his dead friend or 'master' and serves as a point of convergence and departure in their thought with regard to Levinas's later works into the realm of ethics and the political.
9. There are many critiques on the complex relationship between Levinas and Heidegger, not the least of which is the aforementioned essay on 'Violence and Metaphysics' by Derrida. In this paper, I will only peripherally focus on Levinas's inversion of ethics to being and later on Levinas's distinctive view of time as is contrasted to Heidegger's view of temporality. See Critchley's (1999) chapter – 'Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity' in *Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity* for a dense discussion on this topic.
  10. See Critchley's robust critique of Levinas's 'lamentable understanding of Freud' (Critchley, 1999, pp. 186–195).
  11. See Lucy Huskinson's critical reading of Jung's view of subjectivity as it is compared and contrasted to that of Levinas (Huskinson, 2004, pp. 57–58).
  12. See Lear 2000 for a thoughtful deconstruction of the teleological view in Aristotle and psychoanalysis. Also see, Wallwork (1991) and Askay and Farquhar (2006) on Kant's influences on Freud's epistemology to include a teleological perspective. See Brooks (2011), Bishop (2000) and Huskinson (2004) for further and varied in depth discussions on Jung's misappropriations of Kant's ideas as well as neo-Kantian influences on his epistemological basis for the psyche.
  13. For book length analyses of Heidegger's ethical stance see Lawrence Vogel *The Fragile "We" Ethical Implications of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (2003); and Joanna Hodge's *Heidegger and Ethics* (1995).
  14. For richly nuanced discussions on their readings of Levinas, autonomy and heteronomy, see Simon Critchley (2007), Catherine Chalier (2002) and Jacques Derrida (2000, pp. 135–155).
  15. See McGrath's rigorous discussion on Schelling's distinction between ground and existence that so interested Heidegger (McGrath, 2012).
  16. See Emmanuel Ghent's seminal paper on his analyst surrender (Ghent, 1999).
  17. See Smythe and Baydala (2012) for their reading of the early stirrings of Jung's method of amplification.
  18. Mills' assessment is similar. He elaborates: 'Here archetypes take on a hypostatized quality, to the point that they may be viewed as supernatural structures inherent in the cosmos rather than a psychic faculty that allows for experience to materialize, such as Kant's categories, Fichte's principles (*Grundsätze*) as transcendental acts of mind, or Hegel's dialectic (*Aufhebung*)' (Mills, 2013). For an alternate view arguing that the assertion that Jung was an essentialist is a mischaracterization, see Miller (2011, pp. 36–39). On another note, Schelling anticipated Jung's collective unconscious or what he referred to as the 'universal human consciousness' and the allegorical interpretation of mythology (see McGrath, 2012, pp. 163–165).
  19. I refer the interested reader to more in-depth discussion on the convergences and disparities between the thinking of Lacan and Levinas to include Barnard (2002), Critchley (1999) and Neill (2011).
  20. It is well beyond the scope of this paper to include a review of compelling feminist critique of Levinas's problematic use of the feminine. I direct the interested reader to Chatner (2001).
  21. I am grateful to Ladson Hinton for his clarifying comments about the ideas in this passage.
  22. See Frie (2011) for a contemporary perspective on psychological agency.
  23. Franco Scabbiolo is a Meltzer trained psychotherapist residing in Oxford UK. His forthcoming text presently only in Italian is titled: *Una bussola estetica-psicoanalitica interna* (2012).

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