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Phenomenology, Theology and Psychosis:

Towards Compassion

My aim in this article is to initiate reflection upon psychosis by way of phenomenology and theology. From the basis of phenomenology and theology, I wish to present a new perspective that may help to understand the nature and experience of psychosis. My approach will be especially, but not wholly, influenced by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995), whose writings in recent times have been of great interest for Christian theologians.[1] Particularly, I have set out to develop several ideas of his earlier work, *Existence and Existents*, and of his latter work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.[2] Accordingly, whilst there will be similarities between my writing and Levinas', there will also be a necessary departure as my own thought becomes evident. But, for the purpose of clarity, let us look briefly at Levinas' post-phenomenology and its possible connection to the study of mental health.

Levinas' development of metaphysics beyond the thought of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Franz Rosenzweig has proved to be of special interest, especially in the domains of ethics and theology.[3] But I believe this can be extended to mental health. After all, Levinas' thought goes beyond the intentionalilty of consciousness to a non-intentionality, that is, to a pre-reflective consciousness. Hence, the act of consciousness must not be objectified within reality and existence. He will thus focus

upon two extremes: (i) an anonymous and depersonalised consciousness (in his earlier works)[4] and (ii) a passive consciousness that takes a variety of forms: fearing for the Other; a moral conscience; and as ethical transcendence (especially in his latter works).[5]

In a later writing, he will indicate that there will be times where a 'possible confusion' might exist between the two, namely between alterity (ethical responsibility for the Other) and a depersonalised existence (the 'stirring of the *there is* [il y a]').[6] But the idea here is to evoke both a sense of comedy and tragedy. On the one hand, the point is this: behind the present comic dimension where the moral self puts his or her conscience into question is the absent (in the sense of being absent from consciousness) tragic dimension that shocks the human soul and inverts it from self-interest to disinterestedness (alterity/otherness). As a result, the subject is frightened out of its spectatorial attitude, producing a course of action in union with the Absolute Good. Such responsibility is not the product of theoretical consciousness, but is due to an extreme passivity of responsibility. On the other hand, the confusion also indicates the overwhelming presence of a depersonalised existence. Here, there is no logical thought: the depersonalised existence is confused as an absence of evil and hence, as an illusion of the good. And it is this last point from which I want to begin my description and analysis of psychosis.

My aim is to pierce open the experience of psychosis. I will speak of death, horror, the emotions, existence and reality (qualities of Being), states of altered existence and of

grief, persecution, humiliation, exposure, mercy and compassion. My focus will appear very phenomenological, but as the article progresses, I will introduce some theology to emphasise the face of the suffering Other is the place and time of the encounter with the word of God. But firstly, we will approach psychosis as an existence cut off from reality. In such horror, fear is the dominant emotion and becomes so suffocating that it takes the form of an idol. As a result, the self is turned inside out by being removed of subjectivity. It exists in an anonymous vigilance towards the idol or 'thing'.[7] In this regard, death seems impossible. Furthermore, in the everyday world delusions and fears take on the role of hiding the possibility of death. In a sense, the self exists as a trace of a (effaced) past, that is, a past devoid of hope and life.

Following on from our analysis of existence and reality, we will look at three states of altered existence, namely, idolisation, ethical escapism, and terrifying and enthralling transcendence. John Caruana, in his analysis of 'Lévinas' Critique of the Sacred', has pointed to these 'states of mind'.[8] While his aim is more to explain, prove and bring out Levinas' understanding of the sacred, I will try to show that the world of psychosis is one that parallels the Levinasian criticisms of the language of ontology and its associated categories of objectivity, presence and Being. We do not merely want to use ontology to describe psychosis. Rather, the argument is this: the character of the language of ontology itself holds insights into the experience of psychosis.

Levinas has challenged both the quest for the meaning of Being and the primacy of lived experience. This is to say that his philosophy puts into question the attempt to use ontological language with the categories of objectivity, presence and Being. However, the very way in which he speaks of the contamination of ontology particularly in theology signifies that ontological language itself can offer some insight into psychosis. For Levinas, the idea of 'Being' contaminates the mystery of God.[9] The experience of Being is perhaps a catastrophe for the encounter of God. It is a catastrophe because Being's truth reflects more a servitude to self-interest rather than the quality of God 'as such'. Even though Levinasian thought advocates a language of otherness, his criticisms of ontology should not be neglected as they contain starting points in themselves for reflection.

Levinas' thought directs our attention to the person and in particular to the face rather than ontological theories and problems. This suggests that the language of alterity (otherness) could also be very useful to understand psychosis. However, we should not understand such a language as an answer or a cure for psychosis, but more as a response that can bring about a space and a time for compassion, understanding and having a heart. In a Levinasian sense, alterity or otherness identifies the personal encounter with the Other rather than one's own personal experience and objectivity as what truly defines consciousness. As a result, the self is obliged to sacrifice for the Other to the point of expiation.

In order to appreciate and utilise Levinas' thought, we cannot ignore what he means when speaking of responsibility for the Other beyond the categories of objectivity, presence and Being. Let us look briefly at Levinas' conception of these categories. Levinas defines objectivity as 'Being's essence [the event of Being] revealed in truth'.[10] In short, objectivity is knowledge[11] without being the fruit of any relational personhood. Accordingly, as Being is tied to an egoistical, all-knowing and all-consuming consciousness, let us call this the totality of objectivity. Levinas argues that such objectivity in consciousness distorts truth.[12] The distortion occurs when consciousness is reduced to a totalising presence - perhaps like an ideological or utopian economic model for society that obscures the event of God's self-communication to us. As a result, the objectivity (totality) of Being absorbs, encloses and depersonalises the subject's dreams, hopes and even desire to serve the neighbour.[13] In a sense, the reality of knowledge, whether it is imagined, delusional or even logical, is so overwhelming and commanding that it suppresses an other-centred existence. This suggests that subjectivity, the personhood of relating with others, is subordinated to objective propositions of experience which we find in egoisms struggling with others in the search for intelligibility.[14] This gives subjectivity a transcendental status rather than a substantive one; subjectivity is subordinated to totality of the event of Being/care for oneself. Furthermore, such totality results in a dark presence, 'the fact-of-Being', in which the ego reduces its subjectivity with others to its own cold world of judgments, experiences and representations.[15] In this context, presence is that which encompasses, absorbs and encloses things and consciousness.[16] It is not surprising that Levinas can speak of this as 'the horror of the night'.[17]

We can note that the categories of objectivity, presence and Being play an integral part in the language of ontology. Objectivity can indicate the dominating power of deluding knowledge. Presence draws upon such knowledge to the illusion of determining the meaning of Being or one's reality in the world. This seems to suggest the light of Being is in fact a dark horror in which fear and anxiety are the dominant emotions. Ontology gives us no way out of delusions and the horror that grips a contaminated and catastrophic reality. But the character of the language nevertheless serves to parallel the three states of existence, idolisation, ethical escapism, and terrifying and enthralling transcendence. After considering these states, we will come to the final task of suggesting that the poor one in our midst should not just be objectified as 'psychotic'. For example, to merely give objective interpretations that he or she is "schizophrenic' will not help. But we want to argue that the face rather than the interpretation is the locus for a compassionate encounter, above all an encounter in which the word of God might be heard. Accordingly, I will suggest a radical, compassionate and expiating way of responding to the fears, outrage and pain of the suffering Other. But let us first begin with a look at existence and reality as a means to first pierce open the experience of psychosis.

EXISTENCE AND REALITY

In the world of communication, we are often taken over by language. We use discourse and reason to make sense of the world. We desire to discover truth whilst indeed trying to escape from it. We search to understand reality through language, meaning and

reason. However, there are times when a word of reason is too present and too overwhelming. This is because we can never totally conceive the meaning of our own existence and reality; we remain at most a partial and momentary presence to ourselves. In our attempts to search for meaning and truth, our articulations may become distorted, unreal and imaginary. None the less, whether or not language or thinking is insightful or illusionary, it is a way in which we express our consciousness and its associated emotions.

In our search for reason, language might also become impersonal and objectified. As a result, it takes a destructive and depersonalising turn to the extent of becoming lost in a cold horror of objectivity. We often might touch upon this experience when the horror of life is so much that we dare not enter into our own selves. There is something in us that leads to fear of being personal or subjective. This fear is an anonymous and depersonalising presence of objective reality, knowledge and reason. Such fear or presence is anonymous because it is too horrible. It is also depersonalising in so far as it destroys subjectivity and the ability to relate with others. Hence, it is not surprising that the self, fearful of the world, might become lost in darkness and chaos. This is a presence dividing the self from reason, and truth from human becoming and relational personhood.

For the most part, the objective world is a partial presence in consciousness; there is so much that we do not know about. Such unknowing produces fear. In other words, the world is not only present by way of knowledge, ideas and imagination, but also through fear. We know that the self is both in relation to itself and the world. Yet, the extent to

which the relation is governed by being conscious 'of something' is the extent to which the self remains caught in its own possibilities and fears (the Heideggerian care for Being). This suggests four points. First, every act of consciousness is a search for the presence of meaning. Second, every act of consciousness is also a relation and response to Being, that is, the presence of things in the world (real or imaginary). Third, the act of consciousness signifies the fears of nothingness and anxiety. Fourth, granted the self is usually centred on its own possibilities, fears and desires, the act of consciousness grounds experience as objective in the sense of making it 'mine'. We can begin to see a pattern in which the conscious self responds to the presence of other things in the world by objectifying them in a possessive and egoistic way. Accordingly, it seems that the self is caught up in an ontological world of knowledge, relation, fear and egoism.

The meaning of things in the world is caught up in a world of experience, knowledge and fear. It may seem that the self is caught in a chaotic whirlwind in which there is a hunger to search for truth. But in this hunger, the self is often swayed by the temptation not to uncover the hidden truth of things. There are constant temptations not to think and to hide behind the relative opinions and values of society as a whole. We fear a menacing presence in the world: something unknown, awake and asleep, that disturbs, seeks us out and aims at us.[18] We might experience this as fear in the form of anxiety and uncertainty. If the fear is too consuming, existence becomes shattered; we lose a sense of our personal self. We are left with a consuming darkness that leaves the self unable to engage normally with others.

When fear becomes so overwhelming, we face a 'horror of the night': an inability to ascertain the presence or absence of anything. In this horrible eternity, there is darkness in and around the self that calls into question any attempt to derive meaning and truth. The darkness creates illusion. In such an existential state of being cut off from itself, the self undergoes a threefold altered state of existence: (i) idolisation, (ii) ethical escapism, and (iii) terrifying and enthralling transcendence. Let us look at these states of altered existence.

IDOLISATION

Idolisation is an illusional state that results in the depersonalisation of the self. The idol in this case is the self's experience: all its ideas, thoughts, imagination and fears. In this state of being separated from reality (truth, meaning and relationship), a suffocating type of existence takes hold. It is suffocating because any resemblance of reality 'as such' (as it truly is) is rejected and blocked. In fact, existence is so suffocating that the idol (the experience itself) shreds the self of any value. No amount of suffering and haemorrhaging of wounds will rupture the state of such depersonalising existence. The self's experience of suffering bleeds fear to such a degree that the self becomes lost, numb and divided from reality. Furthermore, the fears (delusions and illusions) depersonalise the self to such a degree that the self takes an anonymous form; it becomes 'a nothing' in the horror of existence. What is left is the idol, the cold and heartless experience of fear itself.

In the darkness of existence, the self is both idol and fear. Accordingly, all ideas, thoughts and imagination must partake in fear and idolisation; they are like servants of the idol-experience. Here, there is no role of the self. In fact, the self is but a trace to itself, lost in darkness. Nevertheless, the idol commands a response, an overshadowing experience that must always negate the self: its fusion with the idol. This response cannot be heard, or seen or sensed in any way. Taking a non-personal form, we discover traces of the response in delusions and illusions pouring into reality. These traces of horror seek to evade ethical responsibility. The idol, having reduced the self to anonymity and anxiety, can now aim at the good, seek it out and corrupt it with the heart of evil. Taking on a closed and suffocating existence, idolisation is the first movement and experience of delusion. Once it is formed like a haunting ghost in consciousness, the self is now tied to modify the good to its delusional state of fear and horror.

ETHICAL ESCAPISM

I have tried to suggest that experience by itself is so embracing that it suffocates the reality of the self. Accordingly, the self loses control of its ideas, thoughts and the imagination to the idol. The idol emerges as a trace in reality as it seeks to give itself meaning and significance by seeking out the good. But its attachment to the good is destructive. Moving through fear and anxiety, the idol or 'thing' expresses itself in relation to the good because it must hide its difference from it. Furthermore, by seeking to relate to what is good, the-self-as-idol confuses itself with the good, and thus has found a way paradoxically to escape the ethical life. This is because the idol dwells in the totality of Being; it can never embrace a life of transcendence as it cannot divest itself of

the anonymous and depersonalising nature of Being and pass over beyond towards ethical subjectivity.

The self, consumed by the idol, not only sets out to escape the good. It also seeks to strike at reality with its totalising presence. This is to say, for example, that delusional thoughts and behaviours are naturally attracted to the good. But not being able to subjectively approach the good, the idol objectifies it as an experience. The experience is so all-consuming and overwhelming that it leaves no room for the good. As a result, believing itself to be in the realm of the good, the idol reduces the good to its presence of fear and delusions. We can name this a state of ethical escapism because whilst the idol seeks to merge with the good, its escapes from it by way of its hidden intent to negate (reduce) the good to experience, namely its experience and existence of fear, horror and alienation. Such experience necessarily finds its expression through language, behaviour and even in the realm of transcendence.

TRANSCENDENCE

The idol that has consumed the self with fear, aimed at the good to remove itself from it, is now ready to participate in the sacred. The experience of the sacred, as Caruana has pointed out, can be both terrifying and enthralling.[19] Yet, it is surprising that he did not introduce the idea of death in his analysis, a theme so prevalent in Levinas' writings.[20] Moving beyond Caruana's analysis of the sacred, we can suggest that by approaching the sacred, the anonymous 'thing' (or the idol of presence and fear) seeks an enthralling and terrifying experience above all experiences, namely the impossibility of death. This is the

final consummation for the idol to strip subjectivity inside out. In the guise of emotional and mystical experience, the idol is both fear and horror. In other words, the act of participating in such a false sense of sacred transcendence – such as experiencing awe, enthusiasm, mystery, rapture and mystical ecstasy – is an illusional state that results in the depersonalisation of the self.[21] But in saying this, I do not wish to deny a true sense of transcendence that might also bear the effects of awe, enthusiasm, mystery, rapture and mystical ecstasy. Given such personal encounters of the divine that animate the mind, heart, soul and body through prayer, liturgy or having a heart for the other, I would regard these encounters as signs of transcendence, or let us say, sacred feelings, that lead us beyond the everyday experience of our senses towards peace, mercy and justice. Nevertheless, to distinguish between false and true transcendence is daunting, as the word of God penetrates our existence and reality into realms beyond knowledge, experience and presence. Perhaps, by way of exploring the very idea of death, we might discern whether a feeling of awe, for example, is an idol experience or the very word of God.

For the idol, nothing is more enthralling and more terrifying than the impossibility of death. This is because death is the greatest fear that ends all fears. Death is made impossible because the idol must negate its reality and mystery. In other words, the idol must divide the 'experience of death' from death itself. Granted that the idol denies the event of death to the self, the self nevertheless experiences a death turned inside out, namely a terrible horror of being abandoned to a solitude without end; a shadowy life of anonymous personhood. In this sense, we can suggest that the idol is also the self turned

inside out. Its relation to the self is one that denies the possibility for the self to die and thus to be in a world of well-being.

We now come to realise that by seeking a terrifying state of transcendence, the idol can more powerfully divide itself from the true self and allow its being to approach the world with the language of fear and horror. Having no face – as the ghostly self is anonymous – there is the impossibility of death. Whilst the self is depersonalised, the idol is free to transforms ideas, emotions and the imagination into behaviours of fear and horror that ultimately might become also enthralling.

The three states of altered existence emphasise that the self is vulnerable to experience in everyday life. Any experience could overwhelm the self with trauma. We have desires in life in which we seek to gain importance, make them good and even treat them as sacred. But there are times when consciousness cannot always deal with experiences and emotions. They can become exaggerated, an unwelcome excess or even an ache of woe. Accordingly, such traumas can consume the reality of the self, turn it inside out and throw it into an impersonal vigilance of fear and horror. To maintain such a state, the idol of fear must not only deceive the good, but transcend the possibility of death and thus ever deny its reality and mystery to the self. In effect, the idol prevents the self from engaging in meaning, insight and personhood.

RESPONDING TO FEAR AND DEATH: TOWARDS COMPASSION

I have suggested that when the self is locked in servitude to its idol-experience, it is surrounded by fear and is denied the possibility of death. Just as the overwhelming experiences of the self have denied the self of personhood, so we need something of equal or even greater force that can allow the sense of self to be renewed. So far, I have set out to describe how an all-consuming presence of experience turns the self inside out leaving only the sheer anonymity of existence. In this eternal darkness, everything seems lost and forsaken. A nocturnal vigilance takes hold in which the self allows its (ontological) lostness to ever deepen its fears. A new 'thing', namely the idol takes the place of the self and commands traces of the self to evolve its imagination, reason and consciousness into fear.

Seeking the good, the idol will never allow the self to be touched by well-being and truth. As a result, delusions of reality create space and time for the good to be aimed at and contaminated. But the powerful presence of the idol (experience and fear) will nevertheless forsake the good as it must search for a terrifying and enthralling transcendence. The idol must convince the self that death is impossible. Only then might it have a chance in Being to outlast the good. Towards this delusion, the idol-in-the-self must show that the self has been divested of its personhood, leaving only traces. More deeply, delusions and illusions of reality must continue so that experience might be truly divided from everyday reality and a nurturing existence.

If at best we can only respond to traces of the self and moreover traces that continue to efface the memory of the self, how then are we to respond? The idol, by its very

depersonalising nature, seeks to make the self faceless, beyond memory and eternally fearful. I suggest that an ethical response is to allow for a graced space and time for the face to emerge. We need to allow ourselves not only to be faced by the fear and misery of a poor one, but to be there for them in their loneliness, outrage and fear of the experience of death. The idea of the face of the Other signifies exposure and evokes the biblical themes of the love of neighbour and being made in the image of God.[22]

In the epiphany of the face of the Other, Levinas discerns three aspects, namely, destitution, facing and demand. He brings them together in the following condensed statement:

> The first thing which is evident in the face of the other is this rectitude of exposure and defenselessness. In his face, the human being is most naked, destitution itself. And at the same time, he faces. It is a manner in which he is completely alone in his facing us that we measure the violence perpetrated in death. Third moment of the epiphany of the face: it makes a demand on me. The face looks at me and calls me. It lays claim to me.[23]

The first aspect of the moment of the face is the poverty of the Other. The face reveals the nakedness and neediness of the human being. But paradoxically, the face is also non-phenomenal. This is strange because it is the naked phenomenon. To understand this ambiguity, Levinas points out in the second moment that from within the face is the command to be responsible, which can never be represented in consciousness. This

suggests that the self encounters a messianic and immemorial dimension of time in which the Other's destitution is exposed. In a third aspect of the epiphany of the face, the self is confronted with a demand to be responsible to and for this Other, in a particularity that transcends the abstractions of Being and the more routine experience of the Other. These three aspects of the face of the Other define a sense of love for our neighbour, with the fear for the Other's death and solitude.

Looking at Levinas' analysis, the face of one overwhelmed by the suffocating embrace of presence (such as fear and anxiety turning meaning and truth into a catastrophe) seems to me like a trace of a past. It is like a past because it has never been present to everyday consciousness. As a trace, the face resists the presence of our judgments, experience and critical analysis. Moreover, as trace of a past, the face signifies an ethical relation beyond the categories of knowledge, experience and presence. We might encounter the face of the suffering others where there is hope, that is a moment in which we can give room for ourselves to be exposed to their fear and suffering. If obligation and responsibility arouses inside of us, there is the possibility that we might have heard the word of God. The face (perhaps the very word of God) is a trace of hunger for reality and a thirst for life. Accordingly it must accuse, even traumatise and command us into responsibility. It accuses us because we have been too late to listen to their cries and haemorrhaging of life. It traumatises because we have never heard their cry. Finally, the face commands us from an immemorial past of peace and mercy. In this regard, the face is the very space and time for which the word of God to come to mind. The face demands a difficult

freedom and a future world: a liturgy of responsibility in which no eye has seen nor ear heard nor heart conceived (Isa. 64:4; 1 Cor 2:9).

We can begin to appreciate that the face of the poor one awakes within us, like a great and terrible wind, graces of exposure and maternity (mercy). The Levinasian idea of 'exposure' depicts a state of consciousness deeply affected by the Other's wounds, outrage and insult. In this sense, it implies a hyperbolic passivity or vulnerability to the Other. As Levinas explains it, 'Here exposure has a sense radically different from thematisation. The one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it as a cheek is offered to the smiter'.[24] Such exposure is the cause and result of an acute responsibility. Levinas graphically describes it as a haemorrhaging for the Other.[25] Ethical consciousness bleeds for the suffering Other. This kind of exposure also has erotic overtones. Though Levinas disassociates love from eros,[26] he nonetheless employs a number of erotic ideas and images in his elaboration of the meaning of 'exposure'. 'Maternity' is one such example. Here we read, 'Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor'.[27] Levinas' ethically modulated idea of exposure to the Other is not above using a wide range of physical, erotic and affected-laden images.

Levinas makes a linguistic and theological connection of his notion of 'maternity' to the Hebrew terms mercy (*Rakhamim*) and uterus (*Rekhem*) respectively. He recognises that *Rekhem* is the origin of the word *Rakhamim*. It is therefore not surprising, then, that he goes on to suggest, '*Rakhamim* is the relation of the uterus to the *other*, whose gestation

takes place within it. *Rakhamim* is maternity itself. God as merciful is God defined by maternity.'[28] Here we can detect a Talmudic influence on Levinas' philosophical discourse. He brings together the ideas and images of mercy and maternity, but paradoxically in a context that stresses love as distinct from eros. He clarifies this by observing that, 'For the encounter with the face I still reserve another word: *miséricorde*, mercy, when one assumes responsibility for the suffering of the other. This appears naturally as the phenomenon of love.'[29] The encounter with the Other remains throughout a painful and difficult condition. When love is related to such all-exacting alterity, there is little room for imaging love as an experience of erotic joy.

Both the terms, exposure and maternity, signify the extreme alterity of a life of genuine otherness. When eros is made to surrender so completely to ethical intersubjectivity, an outer limit of self-renunciation is presumed: the personal experiences of joy, desire and personal taste or disposition cannot be primary in the face of the gravity of the suffering, hunger and loneliness of the Other.[30] Such an exposure to the Other's destitution and the necessity of bearing of the Other's faults results in a divine comedy, a grave drama whereby, '… the laughter sticks to one's throat when the neighbour approaches – that is, when his face, or his forsakenness, draws near'.[31] In this ironic role-reversing plot of ethical existence, God's transcendence is shown forth in the self's responsibility for the Other. The ethical self can no longer refer to God through objectivity, presence and Being, but through the self's passivity towards the Other.[32] We will now try to take our understanding of the graces of exposure and maternity (mercy) a step further.

Beyond the possibility of treating this Other as an experience or a theoretical idea, we are exposed to them and, moreover, to their faces. Through exposure, our ethical consciousness maternally bleeds for the suffering Other; we become deeply affected by his/her wounds, outrage and insult. What is actually taking place is first not an activity of responsibility, but one of acute passivity and mercy. The uncaring ego in ourselves begins to contract in which our sense of the Other moves from one of pity or even heartlessness to compassion, having a heart and even friendship. A certain fusion occurs between myself and the suffering reality of the Other. In this new identity of openness, our own imperialistic ego is broken up. As a result, the Other's fear opens a sense responsibility. We find ourselves entering a new discourse that effaces the stigma of the Other's delusions and suffering. Bearing forth a language of openness, compassion and friendship, the responsible self takes an expiatory stance.

This is no doubt a great shock or an overwhelming surprise for the self to move from a state of objectivity to a state of passivity, that is, for the self to become a gift to the Other.[33] The objective self in its experience of the suffering Other will always seek to treat this Other as an object, a presence in consciousness or a fact of knowledge. But the Other is a person whose face we cannot truly know by the lens of objectivity and theory. In contrast, the Other's face is more an enigma exposing one to his/her suffering, wounds and outrage. Furthermore, as an enigma, the Other's face identifies the trace of God as the inspiration that commands us to be responsible. Even though there will never be enough responsibility to answer for the pain and destitution of the suffering Other, the enigma of the face inspires a sense of expiation. We become faced by the Other's fear of

loneliness and death to such an extent that we begin also to bleed with them and take responsibility for their wounds with a heart and as a friend. In this sense, we can begin to imagine that alterity is compassion and friendship; a very donation of oneself for the other that renews a sense of personhood.

Compassion helps us to understand that the face of the suffering Other speaks of fear and death. Everyday experience will try to hide this reality. But, when we are exposed to the face and its very enigma, we becomes exposed to a persecuted truth, namely that the poor one is haemorrhaging – suffering the outrage of persecution and humiliation. Whether or not the wound is real or delusional, any attempt to objectify it with the presence of knowledge and experience will perhaps deepen the wound. If we are to hear the word of God in the face of suffering others with compassion, we must develop a sense (of transcendence) in which we listen to their fears of loneliness and death and be attentive to them in humility even to the point of taking responsibility for their pain and those who have grieved them. This is indeed a great burden. But what type of responsibility is (im)possible?[34] Could we not name this friendship in the sense of truly having encountered and heard the Father's Word in the face of the Other (Jn 15:15)?

However, as a starting point for responsibility (as friendship would be the very fruit of a relational personhood with the other), I would suggest a compassionate discourse that allows grief to unhold. Experiences of paranoia, delusions, disorganised thoughts and behaviours and fear are in some ways responses to overwhelming experiences of existing in the world. The suffering Other is a person in whom the word of God can be testified.

But if our testimony is to be heard beyond empathy, then the Other's pain and suffering must also be heard. No amount of explanations ('objectified empathy') may help to assuage their suffering. However, if the suffering ones know that we, perhaps like God, are personal and with them in their pain, then there is hope that they truly might feel free to voice their fear, pain and outrage.

The fear of death, the very fear in which the self-as-idol tries to conceal, is one which needs to have a sacred time and space to be heard. If the suffering Other trusts and believes that we have a heart, then there is a chance – albeit at a risk of falling into objectifying them even with empathy – to resuscitate their lives from their world of darkness and chaos. In the Gospels, it is not for nothing that there is silence in regards to the experience of Holy Saturday, namely, of Christ going to the lost and God-forsaken and of expiating for them. Likewise, Christ's salvific action and possession of hell teaches us to be faced by the silent fear of death. We are called and moreover commanded to witness to such silence with compassion and a heart. Perhaps then in such silence and witness, we might see the beginnings of grief, a crooked path to well-being, unfolding 'with passion' (compassion) for the Other.

Throughout the article I have specifically set out to suggest a phenomenological and theological perspective that may in fact be very relevant to understanding the world of psychosis. My major argument is that everyday experience of the world can be overwhelming. At times, such experience becomes an idol within itself that consumes the self, strips it of subjectivity and moreover hides the reality of death. Hence, the idol

or 'anonymous thing' exists without the self, leaving only traces of the self. As the self has become depersonalised (capitulated to the catastrophe of no-death), its traces reflect horror and fear. Death seems impossible as the self lives out an impersonal vigilance of darkness. But, if we believe that they are people with faces and in whom the word of God is heard, there is hope.

At the very moment where everything seems lost, everything is possible if we can have a heart and a sense of otherness for our suffering neighbours. Their delusions, pain and suffering is not useless and for nothing if there is humility and a willingness to bleed and grieve with them. This is no doubt asking too much. But when we allow for a sacred space and time for the fear of death to express itself, we might find ourselves within a horizon of transcendence beyond experience and objectivity. The Other's face is an enigma, but if we make it our desire, we can discover our heart and soul encountering the Other's grief and fear of death. Then perhaps, like the passivity and powerlessenss of Christ in solidarity with the dead during Holy Saturday, we might be able to enter into the 'nontime' of psychosis and respond compassionately to the mystery of death and life: *Mors et vita duello*.[35] The mystery of Holy Saturday, especially when enhanced by the language of alterity, offers a hope that the gift and love of compassion is possible when all seems lost.

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[1] Among other disciplines besides theology, there have been several attempts to enhance psychology through a Levinasian lens. Examples include: C. Fred Alford, ed., *Levinas, the Frankfurt School and Psychoanalysis* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyean University Press, 2002; Stevan Gans, 'Levinas and Freud: Talmudic Inflections in Ethics

and Psychoanalysis' in Seán Hand, ed., *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996); Edwin E. Gantt and Richard N. Williams, eds., *Psychology For the Other: Levinas, Ethics and The Practice of Psychology* (Pittsburgh PA, 2002); Sarah Harasym, ed., *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); and George Kunz, *The Paradox of Power and Weakness: Levinas and an Alternative Paradigm for Psychology* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1998). Interestingly, these studies indicate that there has not been a direct attempt to bring together Levinas' ethical metaphysics, Christian theology and either psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis or psychotherapy.

[2] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, translated by A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978); and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1999).

[3] For an understanding of Levinas' Origins, see my article, "Understanding Levinas' Origins: Husserl, Heidegger and Rosenzweig", *The Heythrop Journal* XLVI (January, 2005), pp. 41-59.

[4] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, translated by A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 22-3; and Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 20, pp. 57-58.

[5] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous, Thinking-Of-The-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 175; Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes To Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford

CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 172-173; and Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 146-7.

[6] See "God and Philosophy" (1975) in Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), pp. 165-6.

[7] When working with one young man with Tourettes Syndrome who also was diagnosed with Autism, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Anorexia and an intellectual disability, he would frequently come out with the phrase, 'The *Thing* would not let me!'. It seemed to me that some*Thing* was acting in him in such a depersonalising way that it took the form of a controlling, consuming and horrible idol.

[8] I am particularly grateful to John Caruana's analysis of transcendence and of the Levinasian concept of the *il ya a* (*there is*). He writes, "The state of mind, or more precisely, the destructed or unravelled mind that the *il y a* – the invisible forces that grip the self – effects can be simultaneously terrifying and enthralling. … Lévinas suspects that the sacred entails a *confusion* of the absolute or divine with the elementary powers of the *il y a*". It is in regard to such confusion that I suggest a sense of ethical escapism which leads on to an experience of 'terrifying and enthralling' transcendence.

Caruana also points to Levinas' analysis of idols: 'Rather than having to face up to the consequences of the profound ambiguity of existence – indeterminate being provides us with no signposts that might help us to lead a purposeful life – our fear, Lévinas contends, can drive us to establish idols that we imagine can arrest the incessant ambiguity of being. We associate idols primarily with human-made objects of veneration, such as totems or natural objects like the sun. But idolization is not restricted

to physical objects; it also encompasses complex psychological states of mind like those that Freud aptly characterizes as magical thinking or "omnipotence of thought".'

Caruana argues that, for Levinas, what is most dangerous about the sacred is that 'both physical and psychological idolization constitutes ethical evasion'. However, what is surprising is that Caruana describes the sacred as a 'problem' and hence risks reducing his analysis to ontological language, proof and objectivity. Levinas' language is more an ethical discourse than a problem-solving exercise of thought. Nevertheless, Caruana has brought out some very significant ideas that can aid the theology-psychiatry/psychoanalysis/psychotherapy conversation. See John Caruana, 'Lévinas's Critique of the Sacred', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 42:4 (December, 2002), pp. 525, 530.

[9] See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. xlviii.

[10] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 3, p. 131.

[11] See Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift. Marion, Derrida, and the limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 56.

[12] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 98-100.

[13] Levinas writes: 'Being signifies on the basis of the one-for-the-other, of substitution of the same for the other'. See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 26. For a detailed Levinasian critique of ontology see 'Chapter I. Essence and Disinterest' in *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 3-20.

[14] See Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 99 and Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 3-4.

[15] See Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 151 and Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 157.

[16] See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 133-4 and Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*, p. 58.

[17] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 62.

[18] I am making use here of Levinas' reflection on Philippe Nemo's book, *Job and the Excess of Evil*. Levinas writes, '… evil reaches me as though it sought me out; evil strikes me as though there were an aim behind the ill lot that pursues me, as though someone were set against me, as though there were malice, as though there were someone. Evil, of itself, would be an "aiming at me."' See Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 181.

[19] See Caruana, 'Lévinas's Critique of the Sacred,' p. 525.

[20] See, for example, Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[21] Caruana writes, "For Lévinas, the participation, or transient existence, of the sacred is a lie because nothing that stems from within impersonal being can fulfil the promise to transport the self out of ordinary time and space. The sacred – and its associated experiences of rapture, ecstasy, enthusiasm, and mystery – sustains a powerful illusion of transcendence". See Caruana, 'Lévinas's Critique of the Sacred,' p. 525.

[22] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes To Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 148-9, 172-3.

[23] Emmauel Levinas, *Is It Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 127.

[24] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 49.

[25] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 74.

[26] See Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p. 113.

[27] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 75.

[28] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, translated and with an introduction by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 183.

[29] See Levinas, *Is It Righteous To Be?*, pp. 145-6.

[30] See Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 136.

[31] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 166.

[32] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 165.

[33] Levinas writes: 'Hospitality, the on-for-the-other in the ego, delivers it more passively than any passivity from links in a causal chain. Being torn from oneself for another in giving to the other the bread from one's mouth is being able to give up one's soul for another'. See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 79,147, 151.

[34] Responsibility might be seen as impossible as it demands sacrifice and venturing beyond the egoism of the self.

[35] Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: 'But, on Holy Saturday there is the descent of the dead Jesus to hell, that is (put very simply) his solidarity in the period of nontime with those who have lost their way from God. … Into this finality (of death) the dead Son descends,

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no longer acting in any way, but stripped by the cross of every power and initiative of his own, as one purely to be used, debased to mere matter, with a fully indifferent (corpse) obedience, incapable of any active act of solidarity – only thus is he right for any "sermon" to the dead. He is (out of an ultimate love however) dead together with them. And exactly in that way he disturbs the absolute loneliness striven for by the sinner: the sinner, who wants to be 'damned' apart from God, finds God again in his loneliness, but God in the absolute weakness of love who unfathomably in the period of nontime enters into solidarity with those damning themselves. … Only in absolute weakness does God will to mediate to the freedom created by him the gift of love that breaks from every prison and every constraint: in his solidarity from within with those who reject all solidarity: *Mores et vita duello*'. See Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, *The von Balthasar Reader* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1982), p. 153.