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Book Review: John Russon, *Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis and the Elements of Everyday Life*, State University of New York, 2003

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Book Review – Glenn Morrison, *The Heythrop Journal* 49:3 (May, 2008), 535-536.

Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis and the Elements of Everyday Life. By John Russon, Pp. viii, 162, State University of New York Press, 2003.

Traversing the meaning of being and reflecting upon the world of everyday human experience, John Russon has introduced a heartening perspective of neurosis. Providing a rational argument and logic to tear down the cold-hearted and stereotypical view of neurosis (and psychosis), Russon brings to light the normalcy of our neurotic ways. He uncovers the core of identity in the core of our embodiment – family and social life and activities such as walking, eating, sleeping, urinating and defecating. Taking up a Heideggerian and even at times, a Freudian posture, he prioritises the body and its intersubjective relation to the world as the lens to examine neurotic experiences and tensions. In other words, our everyday bodily practices reveal who we are.

Even though Russon's study does not engage ethical metaphysics and its sense of otherness and sacrifice for others as central to the identity of the human person, I want to suggest that his work is a programmatic and creative masterpiece of philosophical reflection and psychological analysis. I do not mean to be obsequious at all, but to acknowledge the insightful contribution that Russon has made to provide an extension of Heidegger's *Being and Time* in a post-modern context. It is not an easy thing to bring together neurosis and philosophy given the everyday inability inherent in professions to think beyond its own domain and experience. Russon has put together many thought-provoking ideas, and among these, I want to isolate his sense of the 'I can', an obvious reconstruction of the Heideggerian *Dasein*.

Russon's sense of the 'I can' represents an existential, phenomenological and ontological development of existence, consciousness and being. Like Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* which moves beyond Husserl's emphasis on objective evidence towards an interpretation of human nature's corruption and its possibilities for discovering authentic existence, Russon's construction of the 'I can', articulates consciousness as the possibilities of embodied experiences beyond knowledge. These experiences are beyond knowledge because they are future-oriented and open to a veiled array of possibilities. This suggests that the innermost core of our human identity contains our unknown, awaiting and embodied possibilities of interaction with others. Here we have a programmatic reconstruction of *Dasein* as a means to uncover the elements of everyday life and experience in neurotic behaviours. 'I can' signifies the very possibilities for our embodied subjectivity in the world. Yet, lacking an ethical metaphysical idea of otherness, the sense of 'I can' becomes restricted to its own-most or self-transformative potential through, for example, the noble pursuits of education and therapy.

In sum, Russon provides an insightful analysis of human experience, interpretation, emotions, embodiment, memory, the relation to others (family and society), neurosis and philosophy. However, the priority of the other and his/her demands for justice and mercy, hospitality and for spiritual expression, remain absent. Russon acknowledges that he is a philosopher and not a scientist or theologian. None the less, a philosopher's work and writing does involve something spiritual, that is, the very search for meaning. However, Russon does take up this task by articulating the wonder of the self's embodiment and openness. In search for truth, he remarkably decodes our neurotic compulsions, provides them with meaning and with the possibilities for self-transcendence through therapy and education. Perhaps, the most

evocative and humbling emphasis of Russon's engaging, creative and thought-provoking work is that 'being neurotic' marks our essential human condition.