Cultural Humility and the Apology: Linking the Therapeutic Ethical with Levinas’ Ethics

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The therapeutic relationship is a deep bond of trust, care, and negotiation between client and therapist. Knowing how to hold space for the infinite Other while being human ourselves requires intimate understanding of the use of apology on the therapist’s part. Learning to move away from self and toward the Other as a daily practice of humility and care is our greatest work as therapists. In this paper, the use of the tenet of Cultural Humility will be linked to Levinas’ ethics as a grounding place for clinicians. Cultural Humility calls for clinicians to commit to lifelong learning and discovery, as well as leveling the power imbalances in the therapeutic relationship. Clinicians “do violence” or micro-aggress against clients often, and the concept of the apology, as laid out by Levinas, is imperative in the process of repair and in knowing when a client is calling for the clinician to respond. The concept that the “personal is political” is one to hold as a place to explore how moments of violence occur inside and outside of the therapy room.