

13th Annual Psychology for the Other Seminar
Peace and Proximity: Creating the Possibilities for Justice for the Other

Author's name: Erica Schiller Freeman, M.A.

Working title: Levinas and Derrida on eating well and loving others

Institutional affiliations:

- Doctoral student, Clinical Psychology, Duquesne University
- Alumna (2014) of Seattle University Master of Arts in Psychology (MAP) Program
- Alumna (2012) of University of Notre Dame, Graduate Program in History and Philosophy of Science

Contact information: (206) 445-8839; erica.s.freeman@gmail.com

Abstract: In a 1986 interview entitled, “There is no *one* narcissism,” Jacques Derrida, student of Emmanuel Levinas, made a remarkable claim about narcissism in our relationship to others. “Narcissism!” he declared,

There is not narcissism and non-narcissism; there are narcissisms that are more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended. What is called non-narcissism is in general but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other. I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance. The relation to the other - even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation - must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to be possible, for example. Love is narcissistic. Beyond that, there are little narcissisms, there are big narcissisms, and there is death in the end, which is the limit. Even in the experience - if there is one - of death, narcissism does not absolutely abdicate its power.

Derrida makes a further link between relationality and the act of eating in another interview, “Eating well, or the calculation of the subject.” Here we discover that, for Derrida, “eating thus thematizes questions of what is excluded from the subject, what sustains the subject, and what undoes the subject” (Klein, p. 187). My aim in this presentation is twofold: First, I intend to clarify and elaborate Derrida’s understanding of the intertwining of narcissism, eating, and our relationship to others with particular focus on the implications that this intertwining has for ethics. Second, I will compare Derrida’s position with that of his teacher, Emmanuel Levinas, for whom “only a subject that eats can be for-the-other, or can signify” (1974/1981, p. 74). In what ways do Derrida and Levinas differ on these themes? What shall we make of these differences? And what common ground can we find? This comparative analysis will conclude with reflections on what these themes reveal about the conditions necessary for achieving justice for the other.