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In Memoriam: George Kunz (1934-2019) / Levinas Issue Introduction

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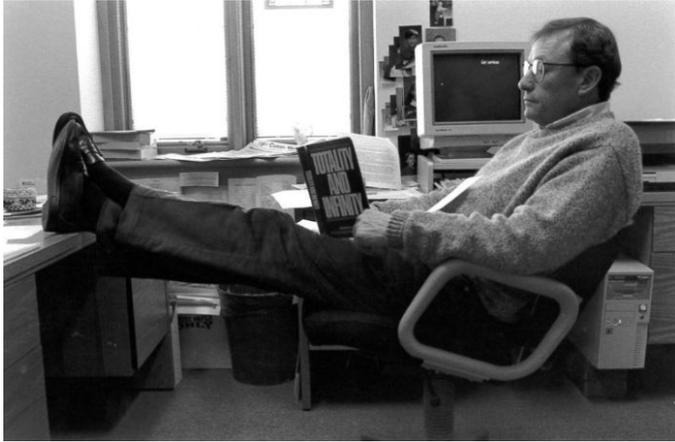
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George Dennis (Denny) Kunz (July 3rd, 1934 to April 28th, 2019)

His feet are up on the desk, legs crossed at the ankle, reclining, relaxed, and absorbed as he pours over the beloved text that had become his obsession from his first encounter with Levinas. This came about in a course at Duquesne University where he was completing his Doctorate in Psychology in the late 1960's. The now considered to be ancient computer and the pictures of his children on the whiteboard by the window gives an indication of when the photo was taken, the late 1990's, around the same time when he was finishing his book on Levinas. On his computer, the screen saver showed the ironic encapsulation of the spirit of George Kunz, "Get serious". The reason that this reminder was there really speaks to the quiet, radical, and deeply hilarious edge that delighted his family, friends, colleagues, and above all, his students. George had the gift of being simultaneously intensely passionate and earnest about his obsession with Ethics and its *absolutely necessary* Levinasian application to Psychology, while also being kind of a cut up, a non-conformist, always on the verge of making a joke, delighting in all of the silliness and glorious fallibility that human beings express constantly, a skilled practitioner of the art of Gadamerian aesthetic education, serious play. This was George's favorite picture, likely taken by his late colleague and friend, Jan Rowe, who no doubt reveled in this complete glimpse into the character of her beloved friend. George made sure that I had the original about six months before he died.

For a very brief history of how he came to be in this position of recline and serious play, George recalled that, as early as his undergraduate years as a philosophy and psychology student at Gonzaga University, he had been deeply influenced by Rollo May's *Existence* (1958) and how his existential-phenomenological insights and descriptions of pathology and therapy had brought Continental Philosophy to American psychologists. After writing to Rollo May, May recommended that he attend Duquesne University to continue his training. In 1971, while he was finishing writing his dissertation for his Ph.D. in Psychology, George began teaching at Seattle University and "almost immediately began planning for a graduate program in existential phenomenological psychology", he wrote in a short history of the MAP program and its graduates which he had been laboring over for years. In 1978 and 1979, after recruiting Steen Halling to come to Seattle University, George and Steen ran an NEH grant funded pilot study to begin the Master of Arts in Psychology (MAP) and officially began teaching the first cohort in the Fall of 1981. From the beginning of his training, George remained unwaveringly and sometimes stridently, faithful to a vision for a deeply humanistic and philosophically rich existential phenomenological focus for psychology. This focus would allow for the emergence of profoundly compassionate communities of healers. George held fast to the vision he and Steen Halling began that centered on the primacy of human experience and the priority of responsibility in the ethical relationship. Over the years, the contagion of George's passion created ripples through some of the deepest friendships and creative partnerships in the MAP program and the philosophical community. His colleagues, Drs. Steen Halling, Lane Gerber, Jan Rowe, James Risser, and Kevin Krycka were among his beloved friends and passionate collaborators and advocates for this vision.

George Kunz was the first person I met when I came to Seattle in February of 1995 as an applicant for the Master of Arts in Psychology program at Seattle University. During our interview, his warmth, deep care, and seemingly boundless energy were contagious. He was a philosopher, not a clinician, he told me, but his whole purpose in life was to bring phenomenology and ethics out of the world of the academy and into life through healing practice; his purpose was to train the healers. Over that hour, we agreed that intellect and "smarts" were only good insofar as they could be used in service to help people and the world. It was all about the application and the practice of philosophy.

During this time between 1995 and 1997 when I graduated from SU, George was finishing the writing of his opus, a work entitled, *The Paradox of Power and Weakness: Levinas and an Alternative Paradigm for Psychology* (1998). This book represented the culmination of the movement of his heart and mind throughout the previous 30 years, the labor of his love and life, not just for the love of wisdom, but infinitely further towards the wisdom of love. The central thesis of this work is that the meaning of life is to be found paradoxically not in striving for oneself but through suffering for the other person's suffering

in simplicity, patience, and humility. The paradox that vulnerability or weakness holds a stronger ethical claim than doctrines of ontological dominance and power was more than simply an intellectual claim for George, but a living philosophy and a devotional lifestyle. As he would often say, he was obsessed and haunted with the Other. In 1995, George began the inordinate task of teaching a close exegetical reading of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* (1961/1969) for a quarter system (10-week) class called Ethics and Phenomenology. The course gathered Levinas' radically decentering themes of the Ethical priority of the Other in and through its application to therapeutic practice. This premise became and remains the bedrock of a treatise on service and the foundation of the Master Program in Psychology at Seattle University.

Always hungry for more conversation and application of Levinas' ideas, in 2003, George began the first Psychology for the Other conference as a small seminar gathering of scholars, therapists, students and researchers to explore topics raised by Levinas towards the application of a Psychology *For* the Other. The emphasis on this word *For* was an important focus for training of Masters level clinicians and our ongoing work as human beings to become radically and endlessly decentered by the unforeseen and unfathomable mystery of the Other. The main emphasis of the seminar was to have a limited number of presentations, enough space for people to be in one room, around one table so that we would all be able to face and talk with each other in depth, often continuing conversations from one year to the next. Each year we would develop a deeper and broader grasp of Levinas' ideas to inspire us to ethical responsibility in our face-to-face meeting with our clients, in political and social action, and our personal lives.

For the first seven years of this annual November seminar, our gatherings remained mostly informal and active as a round-table discussion, speakers sometimes using the lectern, sometimes remaining seated, sometimes reading a paper, other times simply gathering questions and ideas into broader discussion. Always, George was there to offer enthusiastic encouragement, engaging questions and connections, and to serve his homemade limoncello.

In 2010, our gatherings started to shift towards a more formal structure of keynote addresses and conference themed paper topics. But our emphasis on intimacy in dialogue and shared group conversation remained a priority. Rather than break out rooms with many concurrent presentations, each presenter could share their work with the full audience of attendees in order to continue to build on and develop both our ideas and our relationships throughout the weekend. The richness of these discussions allowed for us to deepen our friendships and support for one another in community. Many of these earlier conversations culminated in the Duquesne University Press 2015 publication, *Psychotherapy for the Other: Levinas and the Face-to-Face Relationship*, a collection of 14 essays, edited by Kevin Krycka, George Kunz, and George Sayre, many based on the seminar participant's offerings through the years. In his preface to this book, Cohen wrote of the central premise

of the Seattle School's "nobility of responsibility" that each person is "chosen" to rise to "our utmost humanity" in responsibility for the Other (Krycka, Kunz, & Sayre, 2015, p. XIII-XIV). This Seattle School that was conceived of by Drs. Gerber, Halling and Kunz, is currently entering its 40th year, having graduated over 3,000 students and remains dedicated to preserving both the memory and the continuation of these applications in the "nobility of responsibility".

The focus of the conference on the students as co-authors and co-creators of the modern application of Levinas' thought to Psychology was a profound platform not only in the conference organization itself but also in the support from the community of scholars for the student presentations themselves. From 2010 to 2013, we held a student gathering on Friday evenings to watch a documentary, "Toi Qui Me Regardes,": Interview with Emmanuel Levinas, that George had received from Levinas's son Michaël. Many of the constant conference scholars made sure to be present for these events to start the weekend and meet the students. Beginning in 2014, our Friday evening conference kick-off dinner was devoted to presentations of student work, especially reflecting on their first exposure to Levinas's thought and how it related to their beginnings as new therapists in training. Hearing from the students, George often said and I wholeheartedly agreed, was the best part of the conference. For the rest of the weekend, we shared discussions around the conference topics and continued to move into an ever-increasing sense of awe and respect for the breadth and generosity of each other's offerings even when we disagreed vehemently. The last decade of topics and keynote speakers for the Psychology for the Other conference was very rich indeed:

In 2010, the conference theme was Levinas and Therapy, and Paul Marcus, a Seattle psychoanalyst and trainer for the National Psychology Association for Psychoanalysis and Levinas scholar gave our keynote address.

In 2011, the conference theme was Levinas and Buber, and Donna Orange, a leading psychoanalyst of the intersubjective school gave the keynote.

In 2012, the conference theme was Levinas and the Feminine, and Claire Katz was our keynote speaker, giving emphasis to feminist theory and Old-Testament references and Levinas.

In 2013, the conference theme was Levinas and Social Justice: The Face in the Midst of the Global, and Leswin Laubscher delivered the keynote on Witness, Testimony, and Research that Breaks your Heart, describing his work with the Apartheid Archive Project and the ethical focus of how we represent the voices of the dead.

In 2014, the conference theme was Sacred Interruption: The Ongoing Search for the Face in Research, Psychotherapy, and Practice, and Gilbert Garza delivered an address entitled, Standing and Falling: Exploring the

Rupture's Impact on a Phenomenological Psychological Perspective which explored how getting it wrong can also serve as a call to the Other.

In 2015, the conference theme was Peace and Proximity: Creating the Possibilities for Justice for the Other in Research, Psychotherapy, and Practice, and Alphonso Lingis' keynote, Facing Someone, Facing Something, offered a challenge to the idea of an anthropocentric Levinasian ethics and that the experience of someone facing me involves much more than the experience of being addressed and ordered.

In 2016, the conference theme was The Wisdom of Love: The Labor of Love for the Other in Research, Psychotherapy, and Practice, and Brent Dean Robbins explored in The Dignity of the Other: Re-Visioning Humanistic Psychology as a Hermeneutics of Agape Love the topic of Agapeic Love and Humanism through the lens of Ricoeur, Freud, and Levinas.

In 2017, the conference theme was The Movement and Meaning of Apology: Reaching for the Other in Research, Psychotherapy, and Practice, and James Hatley explored in "Are you not then Ashamed?": Liturgies for Living in a Time of Annihilation, the idea of Levinasian apology within a framework of cultural and ecological colonization of indigenous people and land.

In 2018, the conference theme was The Movement and Meaning of Justice: Reaching for the Other in Research, Psychotherapy, and Practice, and Richard Cohen gave our keynote address which he ultimately formed into a publication entitled Judges 19-21: The Disasters of the Community of Virtue on the topic of the endless challenges to prioritizing justice in the biblical story of Gibeah and the modern era. Religions 2020, 11, 531; doi:10.3390/rel1100531

For our 17th meeting last March of 2021, the conference theme was *Vulnerability, Humility and Social Action: The Paradox of Power in the Clinic and the Streets*, and we met virtually over Zoom due to the pandemic, and Scott Davidson offered a powerful keynote entitled *The Truth of Testimony: Testimony as Act and Narrative* addressing the power of testimony as we worked to integrate the prior year's conference themes of love, apology, and justice. This was the first time we did not meet in person or have the joy of George's ecstatic presence with us. Yet, true to the paradox, we acutely felt George's absence while also experiencing his undeniable presence in the movement and the mission of our gathering. Over the years and particularly for this last meeting, our shared tethering with Duquesne students and scholars showed once again the extent of our shared connections and the marriage of human science purpose, especially exemplified in the voices offered here in this *Middle Voices Special Edition*.

Throughout the last 18 years, the Psychology for the Other conference has adapted and changed, including calling it a conference rather than a seminar, to highlight the changing discourses and contexts of the world we live in. Always, for George, the priority was to find Ethics as a living applied philosophy, a ground for human transformation, and an offering to the future generations of students, scholars, and clinicians who seek meaning in and through the sacred surprise of the Other, who calls me to endless responsibility and therefore to myself. As one of George's students in 1997, I was one among so many who were captivated by this vision and his care for its continuance through us. What I found ever since those early years of encounter with George and with Levinas, is that I believed in it, not simply because my life was changed by my friendship with George and his compelling pursuit of the applied meaning in Levinas' work, but because it was not a mere abstract truth claim, but a real source of ongoing and infinite ethical practice, living Levinas, trying always as he did, to get serious.

For those of us who gratefully remain, the family of friends and students who were so well cared for and nurtured through these years, may we keep our Levinasian insomnia, or our state of ethical vigilance, close to heart in order to inspire others in the wakefulness to the Call. As therapists and healers, we continue to be devoted for our lifetimes to the application of this vision laid out for us by all of our teachers and mentors. The fingers and the reach of this great legacy will continue on in the lives who were touched by George's immense joy in learning from each person, each face he encountered; the expression of a living ethical psychology that elevated the human before any possibility of reduction to system or reason. And more than this, the reach of this insatiable prioritizing of the Other will live on through the fecund healing practices that continue to move into the world in each face-to-face relation of this loving and generous community. George's pride and love for us was always shared generously and he died as he lived, still striving and reaching for the infinite Other, who is more than any thought or idea we could ever have, but first and foremost calls us to be responsible.

With deepest love and gratitude,

Claire Steele LeBeau