

## Week 5: the Other – notes

1. **the Other in Phenomenology** - In [phenomenology](#), the terms **the Other** and **the Constitutive Other** identify the other human being, in his and her differences from the Self, as being a cumulative, constituting factor in the [self-image](#) of a person; as acknowledgement of [being real](#); hence, the Other is dissimilar to and the opposite of the Self, of Us, and of the Same.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The Constitutive Other is the relation between the [personality](#) (essential nature) and the person (body) of a human being; the relation of [essential](#) and superficial characteristics of [personal identity](#) that corresponds to the relationship between opposite, but correlative, characteristics of the Self, because the difference is inner-difference, within the Self.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

The condition and quality of **Otherness**, the characteristics of the Other, is the state of being different from and alien to the [social identity](#) of a person and to the [identity of the Self](#).<sup>[5]</sup> In the [discourse](#) of philosophy, the term Otherness identifies and refers to the characteristics of *Who?* and *What?* of the Other, which are distinct and separate from [the Symbolic](#) order of things; from [the Real](#) (the authentic and unchangeable); from the [aesthetic](#) ([art](#), [beauty](#), [taste](#)); from [political philosophy](#); from [social norms](#) and [social identity](#); and from the [Self](#). Therefore, the condition of Otherness is a person's non-conformity to and with the social norms of society; and Otherness is the condition of [disenfranchisement](#) (political exclusion), effected either by the [State](#) or by the social institutions (e.g. the [professions](#)) invested with the corresponding socio-political [power](#). Therefore, the imposition of Otherness [alienates](#) the person labelled as "the Other" from the center of society, and places him or her at the margins of society, for being the Other.<sup>[6]</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other\\_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other_(philosophy))

The term **Othering** describes the reductive action of labelling and defining a person as a [subaltern native](#), as someone who belongs to the socially subordinate category of the Other. The practice of Othering excludes persons who do not fit the norm of the [social group](#), which is a version of the Self;<sup>[7]</sup> likewise, in [human geography](#), the practice of othering persons means to exclude and displace them from the social group to the margins of society, where mainstream social norms do not apply to them, for being the Other.<sup>[8]</sup>

2. **The Other and the Same** - The Other is that dimension of another person which I cannot reduce to a concrete or categorical idea in my mind that represents what the other person 'is'. What is Other is precisely what I cannot comprehend or grasp, yet what I can somehow know intuitively (immediately and affectively) without grasping it categorically. It is thus what always remains beyond me, a stranger to my mind, so to speak, a mystery, an incomplete representation, and thus other or alien to knowledge or knowing. God, in this sense, is the Other otherwise.

What is Other does not come into the comprehension of the Same. The Same is that which is identical with itself, what has an identity; like 'me myself'; what is 'something' or somebody. To have an identity means that something remains the same somehow, identical with itself through change. But the Other is that which resists being pulled into the identity of the Same. It is different, and always differs from the same, from being the same. It remains Other.

By its very nature, the otherness of the Other seems to say: "Do not reduce me to the identity of the Same." Do not reduce me to an idea in your mind by which you think you know me, think you comprehend me or have grasped me. **Emmanuel Levinas** will interpret this resistance on the part of the Other to be reduced to categories of the Same as an ethical challenge to the Same in the form of the command: "Do not kill me!" Here would be the origin and foundation of all ethics.

3. **Jean-Paul Sartre**: "Hell is other people." "By the mere appearance of the Other," says Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, "I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other."

4. **Emmanuel Levinas** re the face of the other ... "By 'face' Levinas means the human face (or in French, visage), but not thought of or experienced as a physical or aesthetic object. Rather, the first, usual, unreflective encounter with the face is as the living presence of another person and, therefore, as something experienced socially and ethically. "Living presence," for Levinas, would imply that the other person (as someone genuinely other than myself) is exposed to me and expresses him or herself simply by being there as an undeniable reality that I cannot reduce to images or ideas in my head. This impossibility of capturing the other conceptually or otherwise indicates the other's "infinity" (i.e., irreducibility to a finite [bounded] entity over which I can have power). The other person is, of course, exposed and expressive in other ways than through the literal face (e.g., through speech, gesture, action, and bodily presence generally), but the face is the most exposed, most vulnerable, and most expressive aspect of the other's presence." <http://braungardt.trialectics.com/philosophy/20th-century/emmanuel-levinas-1906-1995/levinas-face/>

5. **Sally Kempton** from *On the Mystery of Being* – SHARED AWARENESS "A doe and two fawns often visit my back garden. They settle in under the oaks, keeping a close eye on my window. If I'm on the porch, they will engage with me in

long moments of mutual eye-gazing. It often feels as if they are beaming a kind of affectionate curiosity in my direction. At moments, it can seem as if presence in the deer is gazing at presence in me.

One of the sweetest ways I know of to recognize nondual presence is to gaze into the eyes of another being. The first spiritual group I worked with, in the 1970s, practiced left-eye gazing. If you've done that practice, you know how psychedelic it can be. You look at someone's face, and watch it morph and shift. Young faces take on sage-like qualities of wisdom, then become fierce or opaque. They can shift gender, or age fifty years in a moment. Sometimes you see ten or twenty different faces on the same person. Our group got fascinated with these phenomena for a while, but it soon became clear that something deeper, something much more interesting, was going on.

Over time, I discovered that if two people could let go of their various fears and agendas, they would both enter a space of insight, love, and connectedness that was profound and dynamic. The gaze of the other person catalyzed a connection to awareness itself. When we talked about our experience later, we'd often remark that there seemed to be no such thing as "my awareness" and "your awareness." There was only one awareness, and it was shared. When you meditate with another person, with eyes open, and the intention to allow shared awareness to reveal itself, something greater than the two of you emerges. Awareness shared is awareness squared, awareness to the nth power. In those moments, there is no other.

I believe that human intimacy is, at its core, an experiment in recognizing shared awareness in the midst of apparent difference. Think about your moments of deep intimacy. Didn't they include a feeling of entering together into the subtle and tender field of "knowing," a sense of being in touch with a shared recognition of your shared conscious depths?

Some schools of nondual wisdom say that individual humans are vehicles through which pure awareness—the transpersonal intelligence that underpins life—can experience itself. In this sense, the mind of a human being is an emergent activity of the great mind, of cosmic consciousness itself. When we sit together and focus toward awareness, the thoughts and impressions that define us as egoic selves begin to dissolve. It becomes more possible to feel the presence of the greater field that encloses us all.

Normally, when I'm with another person, their thought stream and my thought stream negotiate, each of us inwardly wondering, *Am I seen? Am I okay in this relationship? Will I get hurt? Is this person my kind of person?*

In meditative intimacy, two people can discover that when they both inhabit aware presence, they create doorways into truth and awareness that can take them far beyond the ordinary level of human communication. Sharing presence in this way is naturally therapeutic, because it lets you hold your own or someone else's suffering in a field of acceptance. It is inherently creative, because it allows ideas and solutions to surface out of the shared field. More than that, it is a doorway into the infinite.

Traditionally, if you practiced sharing awareness with another person, it was with a guru or teacher, and the transmission of consciousness only went one way. Eye-to-eye transmission of shakti has always been a technique by which a teacher transmits grace and inner states of awareness to a student. If you were the student, you tried to take in the high or enlightened or loving state of the teacher, and if you were the teacher you intended to pass on your state to the student.

Yet peer-to-peer transmission is the true heart of spiritual community. Once we realize that each of us can connect soul to soul, awareness to awareness, it becomes natural to be able to awaken each other through our gaze. Of course, the more clarity and love each of us has cultivated, the more powerful the transmission that we can offer another. But because awareness is ever-present, it is not so hard to develop the skill of opening to that space with someone else. Once you've glimpsed it, once you've felt it, there is a neurological memory of it inside your system, and then it's a matter of coming back to it again and again until you develop a real sense of what it feels like to be in presence, both alone and with someone else.

### **A Practice for Shared Awareness**

It's helpful to cultivate shared awareness with an informal protocol. I like to do it by combining an inner body awareness (dropping into my heart-center) with an awareness of three things: the heart-space in my partner, the space behind my body at the level of the heart, and the space behind the other person's heart.

As in any meditation, you notice and let go of thoughts or emotions or fears as they arise. As you develop the sense of a spatial connection that is independent of your thoughts about each other, you become able to inhabit a sense of presence that encloses and includes both of you. You can rest in your own awareness and simultaneously connect with the other person, not trying to impose any agenda on the experience or on the person you're working with.

At that point, it becomes possible not only to sit in shared spacious presence together, but also to access wisdom together. The relationship that forms in those moments is not simply empathic. You become embodiments of sacred presence for each other, in which truths can be spoken, even tough ones, in which enormous vulnerability can be accessed and healed. This happens because the consciousness-space is intrinsically healing and transformative.

To practice in this shared space of consciousness is to realize and know that human intimacy is a true portal into wholeness—a doorway into the divine.