The Value of Transcendental Phenomenology for Psychology: The Case of Psychosis

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Abstract

Conventional wisdom suggests that transcendental phenomenology holds little relevance for psychology, as psychology is presumed not to require performance of Husserl’s “transcendental reduction”. As an empirical science, psychology is thought to assume the existence of the natural world and to remain in this way transcendentally naïve. This chapter begins with a brief review and critique of this position and makes the argument – drawing both from Husserl’s mature works and from concrete clinical examples – that for psychology to be grounded in phenomenology it must constitute a return to naïve positivity from the transcendental rather than stop short of taking the transcendental turn. The example of psychosis is used to demonstrate the difference which makes a difference when psychologists pursue a transcendental attitude prior to taking up their properly psychological subject matter, allowing history and culture to inform the context for their individualistic focus on everyday life.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

(chosen in homage to Father Edward Murray)

In a 1927 letter to Roman Ingarden, Husserl complained that he was allowing himself to become depressed by the fact that his better students “overlook the depth dimension that I point to and instead of finishing what I started, time and again prefer to go their own way”. He noted that this was particularly true, and particularly problematic, of a young Martin Heidegger, he described as a “natural power of a genius” and whom, he bemoaned, “carries all the youth away with him” (cited in Caputo, 1977, p. 86). These insights could be described as prescient if one agrees that the approximately 80 year history of phenomenology since 1927 has been populated
primarily by Heidegger, his existentialist contemporaries, and their students – the vast majority of whom have followed Heidegger’s lead of stopping short of the transcendental turn in their phenomenological explorations. But what if there was a "depth dimension" to Husserl’s perspective which was overlooked in the process? How might phenomenology have looked different, and produced different results, especially for psychology, had Husserl’s students, and their students after them, taken “the road less traveled”?

Amedeo Giorgi is one of the few students of Husserl’s students who has grappled with this depth dimension and who has tried to see what lay down the alternative path to the one taken by Heidegger and his followers. Although heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty earlier in his career, Giorgi has remained interested in the transcendental problematic posed by Husserl and has continued the work Husserl began of trying to develop a pure phenomenology by pursuing his investigations to their own inevitable conclusions. This has meant running up against the boundaries of the transcendental, considering the possibility of the transcendental reduction, and wondering whether there are implications for psychology deriving from this otherwise (and properly) philosophical domain – all of which pertain to the "depth dimension" of which Husserl wrote above. Appearing never to fear standing apart, and at times alone, Giorgi has continued from the time of his first major work, Psychology as a Human Science: A Phenomenologically-Based Approach (1970), to hold out the most stringent of expectations for a phenomenologically-based psychology; one that does not sacrifice its foundation in consciousness in order to retain a respectable vestige of naturalism (i.e., making it more readily accessible and understandable to fellow psychologists).

In the following chapter, we consider this dimension of Giorgi’s legacy. We argue for and describe the less traveled road of a human science of psychology based in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. We appreciate that the conventional wisdom has suggested that transcendental phenomenology holds little relevance for psychology and that psychology is presumed not to require performance of Husserl’s "transcendental reduction". As an empirical science, psychology is thought to assume the existence of the natural world and to remain in this way transcendentally naïve. But we suggest that this view has overlooked the "depth dimension" to which Husserl pointed, and which we find to have significant implications even for an empirical science of psychology.

The chapter makes the argument, drawing from Husserl’s mature works, that for psychology to be based in phenomenology it must constitute a return to naïve positivity from the transcendental rather than stop short of taking the transcendental turn. The example of psychosis is then used to demonstrate the difference which makes a difference when psychologists pursue a transcendental attitude prior to taking up their properly psychological subject matter. In Husserlian terms, this difference is no less than that between pursuing a “science of life” as opposed to a “science of death” (1970), or, in the terms suggested by the Husserl scholar J. N. Mohanty (1985), a phenomenology “of respect” as opposed to a phenomenology “of suspicion” (Davidson, Staeheli, Stayner, & Sells, 2004). Given the tragic history of psychosis within clinical psychology and psychiatry, we suggest that this offers an especially useful illustration of taking the road less traveled in phenomenology.
The Transcendental

With the break with naïveté brought about by the transcendental-phenomenological reorientation there occurs a significant transformation, significant for psychology itself […] In fact, for a genuine psychology, and for the exactness that belongs essentially to it, transcendental philosophy plays the role of the a priori science to which it must have recourse in all its actually psychological knowledge, the science whose a priori structural concepts it must utilize in its mundane inquiry. (Husserl, 1970, p. 210)

The relationship between phenomenology and psychology is admittedly complex, with Husserl’s own views on the nature of this relationship evolving over the course of his career (Kockelmans, 1967). In previous articles (Davidson, 1988, 1994; Davidson & Cosgrove, 1991, 2002; Davidson, Staeheli, Stayner, & Sells, 2004), we have tracked this evolution through its various twists and turns and have argued at length for the necessity of the transcendental turn for the development of a phenomenologically-based psychology. We will not repeat those arguments here. Rather, we will assume as our primary point of departure what we take to be Husserl’s mature position as reflected in his final, unfinished, work, The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology (1970; hereafter referred to as The Crisis), and will consider the implications of the transcendental phenomenology outlined there for the science of psychology. Psychology being the first and most crucial of the "European sciences" which Husserl considers to be in a "crisis", we will explore the nature of this crisis and the way in which the turn to the transcendental offers a way out of it.

So what, after all, is the depth dimension of the "transcendental" to which Husserl refers? In his earlier works, Husserl tended to define the transcendental via negativa; that is, in terms of what it was not. The transcendental was not constituted, was not worldly or mundane, was not the psychological, the anthropological, the historical, etc. It was what remained when all of these layers of naivety were bracketed through the phenomenological reduction, described variously as the transcendental ego, transcendental subjectivity, or transcendental intersubjectivity. As an epistemological absolute, such a concept was essential to Husserl’s overcoming of psychologism and grounding knowledge in universal truths. As solely an epistemological concept, however, there was little to appeal to Heidegger or other phenomenologists interested in the intentional relation between the person and the life-world. It came across as bloodless and empty, and, apparently, was easily dismissed.

We cannot be contented with such a negative characterization of the transcendental. In order both to demonstrate the importance of the depth dimension of Husserl’s work and to distill the implications of the transcendental turn for psychology, we are challenged to characterize the transcendental in positive terms as well. Erazim Kohak, another Husserl scholar, understood the nature of this challenge also, suggesting that Husserl’s “recognition of the transcendental dimension of subjectivity may be his greatest challenge to his successors”. Kohak describes this challenge as one of transforming the “transcendental dimension from an epistemological vanishing point to a conception of the Person as a transcendental presence” (1978, pp. 182, 175). While mindful of the magnitude of the task undertaken, and straining thus against the appearance
of hubris, we shall, nevertheless, take a stab at a positive definition which we hope will allow us then to consider its implications for psychology.

We know that words such as consciousness, intentionality, subjectivity, and experience refer to the transcendental. We also know, however, that these words may be used in a parallel psychological as well as transcendental sense. They may be used to refer to worldly or objective realities as well as to the constitutive source of these realities. What may not be considered to have parallel psychological significance is the act of constituting itself. Our challenge is to come to an understanding of this act that does not objectify it; that does not falsely psychologize it. As Fink wrote in his commentary on *The Crisis*, the transcendental reduction “deobjectifies transcendental life” (1970, p. 133). We thus need to be able to characterize the transcendental in a positive fashion in other than objective terms; in a way that preserves its non-objective status. We need to come to an understanding of constituting subjectivity or consciousness as different from the psychological, historical, social, etc. How are we to understand this difference?

We know all of these objective realities to be constituted in nature. They are constituted by lived experience as the particular worldly appearances which may be taken on by lived experience. Experience may appear, that is, as psychic, as historical, as social, etc. in nature, even while it remains fundamentally transcendental. Each of these perspectives thus refers back to, or is an interpretation of, the transcendental. Each is constituted as a self-objectification of the non-objective transcendental. Perhaps, then, we can appreciate the nature of the transcendental as transcendental by viewing experience without the assistance of any of these worldly appearances or interpretations; by viewing it, in Mohanty’s words, “freed from its mundanity” (1985, p. 208). What would experience look like, we could ask, if it were seen as neither psychological nor historical, etc., in nature?

Kohak makes such an attempt in his discussion of the transcendental. Rather than asking what experience might look like without any of these self-interpretations, however, he simply defines the transcendental as being subjectivity prior to its taking any of them on. Building upon the "personalism" which Husserl offered especially in *Ideas II* (1952), Kohak equates the transcendental subject with the Person as constituting ego. He understands "Person", however, as the fundamental ontological entity, rather than as a psychological or anthropological being. It is the Person who may become the worldly focus of psychology or anthropology – or, for that matter, of biology or anatomy – but the Person itself exists prior to taking on any of these objective characteristics. Writes Kohak: “The Person is precisely the transcendental I in its full density but prior to the peculiarities of a culture or a personality” (1978, p. 185). In this sense, the transcendental is that which becomes (self-objectified as) the psychic or the historical, etc. It is that which takes on a worldly appearance, that which becomes objective. Considered in its own right, prior to the act of self-objectification, it is quite simply the "Person" as subject.

But how does such an approach, we might wonder, not make of the "Person" merely a blank slate upon which we then write any number of objective characteristics? How does it avoid making of the transcendental an epistemological "ideal limit”? Defining it solely as the "Person" prior to culture or personality would appear to be just another way of defining it negatively, in terms of what it is not (yet). Kohak himself realizes that: “The I which I am and am aware of being is emphatically not an epistemological vanishing point” (1978, p. 186). Yet how else are we to understand this "I"?
Husserl offers the following solution. He argues that the pure or transcendental I of lived experience (Kohak’s Person) is not to be equated or identified with the experience itself. The subject of experience is not a real moment or part of the experiencing act. It is to be considered to be apart from, or different from, both the objects of these experiences and the experiences themselves as objectively interpreted. In his lectures on *Phenomenological Psychology*, Husserl writes:

> From everything which is given directly as an object, reflection leads not only to constituting lived experiences in which the object is constituted as a pole, but at any time a reflection directed toward the identical I is possible: and this I is the subject of all lived experiences and the subject for all its objects as a pole of unity of its intentionalities; but it is not itself a lived experience. (1977, pp. 158-159)

We must separate the subject of experience even from experiences of reflection upon experience. When we reflect upon our own experiences we thereby constitute, or objectify, as objects ourselves as subjects. This is required by the nature of intentionality and reflection. We should not thereby, however, mistake the constituted object of reflection to be the subject reflected on. “Of course every reflection which I relate to myself”, writes Husserl, “is itself a lived experience and makes me objective – objective for me.” Yet in the very fact that I am objectified for myself there is evidence of an I for whom I have become objective. There is still the I as subject functioning behind this reflection and allowing it to be a reflection for me. “I am as subject of the reflecting a functioning I”; and “even unreflectedly”, he adds, “I am constantly a pole of identity in relation to which everything else is objective” (1977, p. 159).

It is this I functioning behind all lived experiences as their subject that Husserl equates with the transcendental. We therefore cannot understand the process of this I reflecting on, and thus objectifying, it as that of a psychological subject reflecting on him/herself. Psychological reflection takes place in the natural attitude, and we are speaking here of the transcendental perspective. To consider the pure subject to be a human being would be to lapse back into the natural attitude. While the objectified subject may become the object of history, of psychology, or of biology (etc.), the functioning I, the Person, remains neither psychological, nor historical, nor biological in nature. It remains a pole of identity in relation to which each of these objects may be considered to be objective. It is the "I" for whom I appear to be a psychic being; for whom my being a psychic being is "on hand".

Before criticizing Husserl’s notion of the "pure I" for simply constituting more of the same empty talk of ideal limits and vanishing points, we should note that Husserl was clear to point out that this "pure I" is not to be considered merely "a dead pole of identity". It is not only an epistemological concept. It is not a generic, abstract, or unreachable Ego. Rather, he writes:

> It is the I of affections and actions, the I which has its life in the stream of lived experiences only because it on the one hand exercises intentions in them as intentional lived experiences, toward and busied with their intentional objects, and because on the other hand it is stimulated by these objects, in feeling is touched by them, is attracted to them, is motivated by them to actions […] The I is constantly
there [...] not as an empty word, but as a directly exhibitable center, as a pole. (1977, pp. 159-160)

The pure I may be considered to represent more than a dead pole of identity or an empty word precisely because it is fully alive. It is not an ideal polar point, but an I who performs activities. It is a vital and vibrant I who touches and is touched in its living by the objects of its experiences. It is the primordial actor whose actions bring to life and enrich its surrounding world of objects as both constituted by previous actions and affecting and motivating future actions. This is the I of both the passive and active genesis of meaning: the I that is passively moved by a pre-given world of significance, but who also actively generates on this basis a new and original world of significance. Originality is possible, Husserl writes, “as a result of an active doing of the I on the basis of something or other given passively beforehand” (1977, pp. 160-161).

This makes of our pure I more of a substantive concept than a mere vanishing point or empty ideal polar point. In the recognition of its being both affected and active, it does perhaps make more sense to use Kohak’s term of the "Person". This carries with it the connotation of vitality and affect that Husserl here attributes to the I. In doing so, however, we must keep in mind that we are speaking of a transcendental concept. We must remember that this Person is not the psychological ego or human being per se, but is a Person equally present in its self-interpretations as psychological, historical, biological, etc. It is a Person equally as social as it is individual, equally as temporal and historical as it is spatial and material-physical. But it is also a Person whose life is not exhausted by the sum total of these varying perspectives on it. It is the living Person who takes on this number of varying modes of objective appearance, who provides the conditions for the very possibility of appearing in these ways, but who also is preserved as the source of constituting, of life, itself. It is, perhaps most accurately stated, the life of the Person who lives in certain objectively definable ways.

This last point might give us some cause to be dissatisfied with Kohak’s formulation of the transcendental I as Person. To the extent that the I is pure subjectivity, pure life, we should acknowledge that it does not stand alone, it is not ontologically self-sufficient. Use of the term Person, no matter how de-objectified or de-anthropologized we may intend, would appear to imply an absolutizing of the individualized subject, an autonomy of the individual actor. Husserl, however, makes it clear that the transcendental is an intersubjective domain and that the pure I does not represent a self-contained or solipsistic world. Subjectivity is not "fragmentary" and split off into personally relative spheres; it is not autonomous and arbitrary, not relative to the whimsy of individual subjects, but is universally structured as teleological (1970, pp. 269-299).

We may thus only continue to refer to the transcendental as the Person if we are willing to consider the Person in its activity as relative to or subordinate to absolute subjectivity. Such a view would entail humility with respect to the Person’s activity in the face of a more overarching domain of subjective life. This kind of humility is no different in principle, however, from the operative sense of humility presently entailed in naturalism: the humility we experience that is, in the face of Nature (e.g., in natural disasters and medicine, as well as in the awe of a beautiful landscape). As it is apparently acceptable to view the human body as subordinate to the overarching causal nexus of Nature, of which it is but a part, Giorgi has suggested that there is no obvious reason to reject a parallel subordination of the Person as individual subject to an overarching motivational nexus of transcendental subjectivity of which it is also but a member.
Transcendental subjectivity may be considered as universally structured within phenomenology as is nature within naturalism. The basis of this structure is, of course, different, in that subjectivity has as its fundamental law, motivation, or teleology rather than naturalistic causality. Still, it would appear to be just as arguable that a subjective realm of motivation and teleology is the necessarily given context for individual Persons as it is that a natural world of causality is the necessarily given context for individual bodies.

With this understanding of the transcendental, we are now in a position to appreciate more fully Husserl’s rejection of all forms of ism’s, including particularly Dilthey’s historicism. Any position that sought to elevate a constituted region of reality to the role of (transcendental) source or origin for reality would necessarily overlook the truly crucial and all-important role of living, affected and active, subjectivity in the constitution of this and all other worldly regions. It would replace the life of the subject with a lifeless region of constituted sense which, deprived of its life-giving relation to subjectivity, would be converted into a meaningless accumulation of facts. Kohak illustrates this point with respect to the example of sociologism, but it would apply equally well to all forms of psychologism as well; he writes:

When sociologists explain delinquent behavior as a product of underprivileged environment, they leave society helpless in dealing with the delinquent. What we need is not to explain what "made" him do it but rather to understand what, as he understood his own acts, he chose to do. In our terminology, we need to understand what kind of [...] world he constituted about himself so that his behavior appeared appropriate to him. We have to understand his choice. Assigning human acts to material causes is a dubious procedure, since objects function as motives not qua material entities but as presented in consciousness [...] It is also not overtly helpful, for it leaves society no recourse other than behavioral conditioning, which may assure tranquility but contributes little to the growth of free moral persons. (1978, p. 137)

This example demonstrates clearly how an explanation of subjective activity grounded in deterministic understandings of history, sociology, psychology, etc., would miss the fundamental role of intentionality. It is the foundational importance of the life of the Person, the constituting activity of consciousness, which must be preserved in psychology and all forms of science. We have had to inquire back to the transcendental source of the horizons of our subject’s experience and the experience itself in order to reach this dimension explicitly. Our account of our subject’s experience will have to be situated explicitly upon its ground.

Kohak’s phrasing, as well as his example in general, raises a problematic issue, however. He speaks of his young "delinquent" as "choosing" and as constituting his world. Are these not psychologistic appeals to constitution? Is this not precisely the view of behavior and experience that Husserl rejected under the label of "transcendental psychologism"? Such an example raises the question of how we are to get back to our psychological subject now that we have acquired our transcendental context. Now that we have situated experience within its varying horizons, what is left for us, as psychologists, to do? How do we understand the nature of the psychic within our newly won transcendental framework? What sense of the psychic remains following
the turn to the transcendental? How do we return from this philosophical excursion to our task and interest as psychologists?

**The Return**

Pure psychology is and can be nothing other than what was sought earlier from the philosophical point of view as absolutely grounded philosophy, which can fulfill itself only as phenomenological transcendental philosophy. But I as a pure psychologist or transcendental philosopher have not thereby ceased being a human being; no more has the actual being of the world and of all men and other beings in the world changed in the least. And I have also not ceased having this particular worldly interest which bears the title: universal science of human beings in respect to their psychic being, both individual-psychic and social; I thus return to the natural attitude, changing my vocation: I take up my work as a psychologist on the ground of the world. (Husserl, 1970, pp.259-260)

We have reached behind the appearance of psychological subjects to their constituting source of the transcendental I or Person. How are we now to get back to concrete psychological presence in the life-world? What light does this newly gained transcendental knowledge shed on the particular experiences of psychological subjects who are the product of a process of self-objectification? How does a psychology which comes after the transcendental reduction differ from one conducted before it?

Husserl referred to this issue as “the problem of flowing in” (1970, p. 208). Prior to the performance of the transcendental reduction the psychic was either understood as a material property of the human organism (in naturalism) or as a transcendental function of the human being (in transcendental psychologism). Following the performance of the transcendental reduction the psychic is now understood to be a self-objectification of transcendental intersubjectivity. The problem is one of how the transcendental “flows into” this self-objectification and “becomes apperceived as its newly revealed intentional background of constitutive accomplishments” (1970, p. 210). How does viewing the psychic in this way, in its relation to the transcendental, change our understanding of it? And, other than by becoming formally the first discipline to be taken up within transcendental phenomenological philosophy, how does the science of psychology differ as a result of it as well? What is the significance of this “flowing in” for our work as psychologists?

Viewing the psychic as a self-objectification of subjectivity means viewing it, along with the world in which it is situated, as a transcendental achievement. The psychic is no longer to be understood as a given, but rather as a region of sense constituted, and in the process of continuing to be constituted, by subjectivity. It is the correlate of certain experience-patterns, of the coherence of specific and definite structures of experiencing life. Paci writes concerning this transcendental understanding of the psychic:

Mundane psychological life is now characterized in a particular way whereby the transcendental ego operates in it [...] Psychological life is revealed in its structure and thus allows for psychology as the science of a special region of transcendental
life. The vast transcendental horizon comes to be determined as psychological life and thus constitutes psychology as a science to the extent that it establishes the essential region of those essential typical operations of transcendental consciousness which we can call psychological. (1972, p. 147)

The psychic is taken to refer to one region of transcendental life, the study of which constitutes one regional ontology. As a region unto itself, the psychic has its own particular, definable character, its own “internal structure” (Paci, 1972, p. 147). We are to describe and investigate a person’s experiences as one instance of the typical way in which life comes to be internally structured as psychological. Were we historians rather than psychologists, we would find ourselves interested analogously in a different regional ontology: in describing and investigating the typical way in which life comes to be internally structured as historical. We have, then, but to characterize what is essential to the psychic as a region of constituted sense, as one typical way in which life comes to be internally structured.

We know that for Husserl psychology in all of its forms situates the psychic upon the pre-given ground of the life-world. Regardless of whether we view the life-world as an objective given or as an achievement of transcendental constitution, the psychic is given as existing within its horizon. This insight sheds initial light on the essence of the psychological. The life-world is pre-given to the psychic, and the psychic is experienced as taking in this reality existing outside of and independently of itself. The psychic is constituted, then, as a worldly and mundane reality that is essentially passively receptive in the face of the life-world. As described by Fink: “Psychology moves from the start within the self-explication of human experience as being only receptive and impotent” (Fink, 1970, pp. 118-9; cf., also, de Boer, 1978, p. 168). The psychic is constituted as that region of sense characterized by a passive receptiveness and impotence in the face of the larger world in which it is situated and of which it is but a part.

Before one objects that people can experience themselves as active and potent in the face of the world as well as passive and impotent we must stress that this insight applies to the level of the ontological, not to the level of the ontic, in defining the essence of the psychic. The ways in which consciousness is passive, receptive, and impotent in the face of the world have to do, that is, with the transcendental constitution of the world in the first place, and not with specific responses to a specific world as experienced by a specific person. Phenomenology has taught us that there are both passively and actively generated strata of sense involved in any act of constitution. Transcendental subjectivity objectifies itself as embodied psychological subjectivity by objectifying its pre-given strata of passively generated sense as the defining characteristic of psychic being. The condition for the possibility of my having psychic being is the presence of the realm of passively generated sense pre-given to me in my active constituting life. Were the transcendental not to involve the passive generation of meaning, then it could not take on a worldly and mundane appearance. Were the sedimentation of previously generated sense as passively pre-given not possible, then neither would be self-objectification of the transcendental as psychic. It is thus the possibility and nature of this appearance, the possibility and content of the horizons of sedimented meaning, which constitute the psychic. Psychic being is determined on the basis of the characteristics of this (transcendentally) pre-given sense. I do not experience myself as free to "choose" to constitute any kind of world I wish to live in, but rather experience myself as having been born into a particular world that existed prior to me and as finding myself
within particular concrete conditions not of my own making. How I then experience and am motivated by that particular context is the stuff of a psychological science.

We now are in a position to understand how the psychological ego parallels for Husserl the transcendental ego. The psychological ego is the manner in which the transcendental is able to appear in the world as a mundane reality. It is the Person, but now as constituted by all of the particularities of culture, history, personality, etc. It is the particular individuated and embodied way in which subjective life has come to exist here in this space and at this time. Psychic being thus includes all of the various horizons of sedimented meaning that have gone into constituting me to be the particular Person that I am right here and now. It includes all that I am passively receptive to and impotent in the face of, all that is pre-given to me as the ground upon which my activity may take place. As Paci writes: “The specific field of psychology is the field of conditionings, of what conditions me in relations with others, my motivations, and my projects” (1972, p. 186). It is the field of constituted sense in which the Person has objectified itself to be situated in order to become a part of the life-world. It is for Husserl thus the "first" self-objectification of the transcendental, the first appearance of subjectivity in, and as part of, the life-world (1970, p. 262). Other social sciences will build precisely upon this base.

Before proceeding on, it may be useful to point out that it is this parallelism between the transcendental and the psychological which is, according to Husserl, misunderstood in the case of a "phenomenological psychology", resulting in transcendental psychologism. The problem with phenomenological psychology was its (mis)understanding of the essential nature of the passivity and impotence described above. Rather than accepting an ontological sense of passivity and impotence in the face of the world as pre-given as a fundamental aspect of the transcendental constitution (self-objectification) of itself as psychological, phenomenological psychology is left to struggle with an ontic sense of passivity and impotence which it then mistakenly attributes to the psychological subject as the product of an act of "self-deception". Instead of acknowledging that we simply do not experience ourselves as constituting the world in which we live (in which, more accurately, we find ourselves), phenomenological psychologists insisted that psychological subjects did in fact constitute their personal worlds but then deceived themselves about this very act of constitution. The passivity and impotence which are, in fact, essential aspects of any act of transcendental constitution became personal fictions of which (certain) psychological subjects tried to convince themselves, but only as acts of pathological self-deception. In reality, however, neither convincing nor self-deception are required. What is required, we argue here, is understanding that constitution remains a transcendental act and that the psychological is but one self-objectification of the transcendental as a worldly being.

In a previous report, we used the example of a young woman with anorexia to illustrate this misattribution of transcendental subjectivity to psychological subjects in phenomenological psychology (Davidson & Cosgrove, 2002). We argued that from the perspective of phenomenological psychology, this woman would be described as viewing herself as a passive victim of the meanings she had herself constituted and as having constituted herself as powerless in the face of them. The structures of passivity and impotence were thus prominent in this proposed psychological understanding of her experience and world. In the view of phenomenological psychology, however, this was the result of our young woman deceiving herself about the origins of the meanings in terms of which she was living her life. She was deceiving herself about the fact that she had actually chosen these meanings, deceiving herself
about the fact that she was the one actively constituting herself and the others around her to have the meanings that they did.

Having taken the transcendental turn, we now know, however, that our young woman did not constitute these meanings as a psychological subject, nor did she choose in any sense to have them pre-given to her. She did not choose, for example, to be born into a society in which women are valued for their physical attractiveness, and in which being physically attractive requires being thin. Nor would it make sense to say that as a teenager she knew "ontologically" that possibilities other than these really existed in the world; that she need not have taken for granted these implicit and sedimented meanings as valid for her as well. She did not choose nor did she actively generate the passively generated meanings which were pre-given to her. Having taken the transcendental turn, we now know that there are ways in which even transcendental subjectivity is passive and ways in which meanings are given to consciousness prior to and as the precondition for its own activity. Phenomenological psychology was psychologistic in attributing what were for our subject passively generated meanings to her personal psychological activity. In returning from the transcendental to the psychological we will not want to repeat this mistake. We will not want to hold psychological subjects responsible for the pre-given horizons in which they themselves come to be constituted as such.

How do we understand these pre-given horizons differently? We understand these pre-given horizons, along with the psychological subject him or herself, to be factical achievements of transcendental constitution. It is important that we not return to a pre-transcendental naïveté and attribute these structures to Nature nor to our psychological subject him or herself. However, it is not therefore necessary for us to become historians or political scientists rather than psychologists. As psychologists we are interested specifically in the ways these constituted structures have passively contributed to the constitution of this particular Person’s experiences. Our focus is on the impact of these pre-given structures on individuals’ experiences, not on the pre-givenness of the structures themselves. We may limit ourselves therefore to what we shall call the "motivational horizon" of our subject’s experience: to that immediate environment of pre-given sense that directly informs his or her experience (Davidson, 1988). We pursue the transcendental origins of these structures to the extent necessary to come to an understanding of how this subject’s experience has been structured by them. We return from the transcendental once we have a grasp on the character of the particular horizon in which this experience has arisen. While the psychic may be the first self-objectification of the transcendental, it is not the only one. The other forms of objectification may, however, be left to other disciplines to explore.

**Psychology as a Science of Life**

Today, psychologists have a favorite word, and that word is maladjusted. I tell you today that there are some things in our social system to which I am proud to be maladjusted. I shall never be adjusted to lynch mobs, segregation, economic inequalities, "the madness of militarism", and self-defeating physical violence. The salvation of the world lies in the maladjusted […]. (Martin Luther King, 1981, p. 23)

We remember that, in our return from the transcendental to positivity, we are not to return thereby to our pre-transcendental naïveté. As we are not to forget what we have learned
transcendently, we thus remain aware that subjective life is the only absolute given; that all else, including the psychic, derives its sense from this sole life-giving source. We therefore cannot consider the transcendental act of constitution to be one property of the psychological subject. Rather, we recognize that the psychic is only one (constituted) aspect of the transcendental Person. This Person we know to be as much historical, political, ethical, economic, etc., as it is psychological.

Psychology is the study of the ways in which individual subjects may be motivated to act. A significant portion of its subject matter consists of the meaningful ways in which prior acts of a subject motivate his or her future activity. But these acts themselves, the active generation of what later will become a part of the actor’s motivational horizon as pre-given meaning, cannot be captured within psychology. Psychology can only study these acts retrospectively, as having played a role in the constitution of the subject’s present motivational horizon (cf. Paci, 1972, p. 146). It can only study a constituted region of sense, not the acts of constitution themselves. The acts themselves transcend the boundaries of psychology, just as they transcend the boundaries of the psychological ego. They do not lie within the scope of the psychologist.

In restricting psychology to the study of the motivational horizon for individual activity we have therefore, however, limited significantly its competence as well as its scope. The implications of such a limitation for our new science may be considered fairly profound. It is obvious, for instance, that a transcendently grounded psychology could not consider itself to be predictive in nature. It could not presume to explain in a deterministic manner each new action of the Person as simply being an effect of the operation of previous experiences acting as causes. While it would be able to delineate clearly the horizon for a given action, including its pre-existing possibilities, it would not be able to guarantee that this action would actualize any of the already given possibilities as opposed to creating a new one. Nor would it be able to explain how the creation of a new possibility came about, nor why it came about in this instance as opposed to that one, etc. While able, perhaps, to delineate "typical" patterns of experiencing (cf. Giorgi, 1979), it would not be able to know in advance how a given subject will act in a given situation.

Further, while the origins of our motivational horizon may not themselves be the proper object of study for the psychologist, they remain important for psychology nonetheless. Their impact on its subject matter cannot be overlooked, as they essentially constitute it to be what it is. They are present in the passive generation of the motivational horizon in which we do take an explicit interest. As we are no longer transcendentally naive, we may no longer allow ourselves the false comfort of naturalism or psychologism, in which the horizon of experience is viewed as an objective given. Rather than being an objective given, we understand the horizon to be the product of historical, political, social, cultural, and economic forces. All of these aspects we also know to contribute directly to the constitution of the psychic as psychic. In limiting the scope of psychology explicitly to this circumscribed segment of the whole, we thus also acknowledge explicitly the importance of the remainder of the landscape that we have left to our colleagues in other disciplines to explore. We recognize that we require the assistance of these disciplines in shedding light on the other aspects of the phenomena we take to be of psychological interest.

Following the return to positivity, the psychic, even within psychology, thus comes to be seen as only one segment of a much larger landscape. As Scanlon eloquently suggested:
One gets the impression that even the most astute psychological description and analysis amounts, relatively speaking, to a brilliant flash of lightning which illumines momentarily a small segment of a vast landscape shrouded in darkness and extending to unknown depths. (1982, p. 198)

Psychology as a science becomes only a small part of a much larger interdisciplinary whole. It becomes situated as only one well-circumscribed avenue of access to the Person in his or her transcendental identity. But we remember that the Person is not to be exhausted by the sum total of these worldly perspectives either. It is not merely the psychological taken together with the historical, political, ethical, social, etc. that is to be appreciated. Rather, it is to be understood as a whole which is more than the sum of parts. It is the very presence of life which provides the condition for their possibility. In this sense, psychology is not one discipline that can simply be added to other disciplines to create an aggregate all-encompassing science. The sense of interdisciplinary used here is not that of independent sciences coming together externally. Rather, psychology, like all other positive sciences, is to be subordinated to the transcendental perspective in which it is situated. Each discipline is taken to be only one beam of light shone on what is to be considered an essentially trans-perspectival subject matter. It is the transcendental presence of the Person that always remains primary; the presence of the Person as non-psychological of which psychology only provides one glimpse.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for our present purposes, this subordination of the psychic to the transcendental implies that it is activity itself that is primary and passivity and receptivity secondary, even within psychology itself. While psychology is to be the study of passivity, it is to view passivity as only one moment of an active process. It is to be the study of the role of the motivational horizon in the on-going life of the subject, as opposed to the study of the motivational horizon as the cause or source of this life. Rather than being given as a motivational horizon which then causes or brings about the subject’s activity, it is the activity of the subject him or herself, the intentional life of the Person, which brings to life the motivational horizon as that which motivated the activity to take on the particular form that it did.

To appreciate the far-reaching implications of this point one must in essence reverse one’s ordinary ("natural") way of thinking. For Husserl, all meaning is to be understood only as playing a role in the intentional life of the Person, whether as product or as pre-given horizon. This constitutes, however, a Copernican reversal of the natural attitude view, in which the life of the Person is attributed to some constituted region of sense, whether it be that of the psychic, the biological, etc. According to Paci: “the meaning of the problem of the reabsorption” of the transcendental – what we have called the problem of “flowing in” – is captured in the development whereby “all the sciences become sciences of life” (1972, p. 155). The result of the transcendental’s flowing into the psychic is that passivity, while remaining an essential moment of experiencing life, comes to be seen as playing a role in the service of activity, rather than as its source. Sciences thus become sciences of the on-going life of subjectivity, rather than remaining sciences of the constituted (lifeless) products of this life. They also move from being passive, receptive, and impotent, to being active, creative, and powerful (Paci, 1972, p. 152).

With this step we have stumbled onto what Husserl was referring to in the title of The Crisis as being the crisis of European sciences in the 1920’s and 1930’s. From the perspective of a German intellectual of Jewish heritage, Husserl was witnessing what he considered to be a tragic
misuse of science, in which the methods and presumed results of science were being placed in the service of fascism. "Science" was being used to promote and justify the ascendancy, even fetishization, of one constituted region of sense over all others. Science was passive, receptive, and impotent in the face of political authority, and ceded its epistemological autonomy too readily in the service of promoting and preserving an emerging status quo. Furthermore, this emerging status quo was oriented to the destruction and death of any signs of life which diverged from its own fetishized ideal. For science not to be complicit with such meaningless destruction of life, it would have to be fundamentally transformed, re-oriented to a meaningful affirmation of life instead. This, according with Husserl, could be achieved through an appeal to transcendental phenomenology.

The transcendental turn has placed passivity and receptivity in the service of activity and creativity, constituted regions of sense in the service of the act of transcendental constitution. As applied to science, this means that the world can no longer be understood as an objective and independent reality which provides the source and foundation for the emergence of life. Rather, from a transcendental perspective this objective, independent world is to be understood as a pre-given constituted correlate of subjective activity. It is what it is only as a particular instance of the passive generation of meaning pre-given to active constitution. As such, it is simply the product of previous acts of constitution and the precondition for further such acts. It might be thought of as one frame abstracted from the movie that is the on-going process of the constituting of the world by subjectivity. The world is thus not itself the source of life, not itself an objective given. Rather, it is the ever changing and life-less product of transcendental subjective life. It is a realm of previously constituted, and now "dead", sense. It is only the realm of subjectivity itself which is absolute; the world follows after as its intentional achievement.

From this perspective, it makes little sense for science, or any other human pursuit, to insist on adapting a Person’s activity to the world as it currently is. Of what value could it possibly be to adjust a Person’s actions to a previously constituted stratum of sense? What would be the point of actively accepting that this realm of meaning has been passively generated to be pre-given to me, rather than using this realm of meaning as the point of departure for further active constitution? Life is to be found in the creation of the possible rather than in capitulation to the previous. It is only when science views subjectivity as arising out of, owing its origins to, a certain objectively existing state of affairs that it values adaptation to the status quo. It thus places activity and life in the service of what is in actuality a passively generated stratum of sense, a dead layer of previously constituted meaning. Given the nature of the world to which science was attempting to adapt people in the 1920’s and 1930’s, one can well appreciate Husserl’s fear and distrust of this kind of science. One can understand his proclamation that not only society but its science as well was in a state of crisis.

What alternative is there? The transcendentally-grounded alternative is not to view the world as an objective given, as a complete and independent reality that is unchanging in the face of subjective life. It is rather to view the passivity, receptivity, and impotence characteristic of the psychic as playing a secondary, if nonetheless essential, role in the on-going and creative life of transcendental subjectivity. Psychology transcendentally-grounded would thus not view the Person as subject as solely passive and impotent in the face of the world, as it would also not view the world as given in advance. Rather, it would know the world to be contingent upon the activity of Persons and ever-changing as a result of this activity. It would view the world as
playing a passive role as the stage upon which the teleological movement of subjective life takes place. The psychic *per se* would be one segment of the backdrop for this drama. Subjective life, however, would be elsewhere – it would be in the temporal unfolding of the drama itself.

Husserl writes that for the world as an intentional accomplishment of subjectivity its “being-in-advance is an absurdity” (1970, p. 265). Viewing the world as constantly in the process of being constituted, and thus constantly changing, our psychology has no objective world at its disposal to which it might attempt to adapt or adjust its patients. Any thought that there might be an objective world to which one might try to adapt would be the result of a psychologistic attribution of necessity to what is actually a contingent structure. As long as we remain within a transcendental framework there is no world that might be passively accepted by our subject or against which her or his experience might be compared and judged deficient. As a result of the transcendental turn, writes Husserl: “there now arises a humanistic science which does not have the world in advance and does not constantly hold onto the world” (1970, p. 326).

Rather than holding onto the world as the source of life and as that to which life must be adapted, transcendental phenomenology views the world only as that which has been constituted thus far. While existential phenomenology might have appeared to agree in principle with this sense of the world as "incomplete", it also seemed to view this incompleteness as something that one was passively to accept. The incompleteness of the world is not so much something one may accept, however, as it is something that one may confirm as it were by accident in the active process of the generation of new meanings. The incompleteness of the world is proven each time a new and different world is created. Transcendently, we may thus view the world as providing the Person only with the precondition for the active generation of new meanings, with the tools or building blocks for further activity and further change. Transcendently, the world is to be seen as a resource for life’s on-going teleological activity, as part of its equipment, rather than as its source or origin.

Also, rather than viewing the subject as deficient and therefore needing to be changed by treatment, transcendental phenomenology views the subject as chang-*er* (cf. Kohak, 1978). It views the Person as a socio-cultural, historico-political, psychological, ethical, biological, etc., *actor* (cf. Paci, 1972) whose activity brings about substantive and meaningful changes in the world as constituted correlate of this activity. The function of psychology thus becomes to help patients as Persons understand the myriad ways in which their lives have been previously constituted, previously conditioned, in order to enable them to utilize this passively pre-given sense in their own activity. Psychology joins with the Person’s on-going teleological life by viewing the world in which the Person lives as providing him or her with the tools or resources for further activity and change. It is thus not the *Person* who is seen as deficient. The Person is seen instead as having been inadequately *equipped* – whether through impoverishment, poor parenting or education, "bad" genes, etc. – for his or her present life tasks. It is by viewing the psychic in this way as a more or less adequate tool for life that psychology preserves its transcendental grounding even as it returns to positivity. It is in this way that it preserves the primacy of activity and life over passivity and death.

Transcendental phenomenology promotes a basic conviction in the responsibility of subjectivity for the nature of the world in which it situates itself. As one transcendentally grounded science, psychology provides some knowledge of how this on-going process has been conducted thus far. In providing Persons with a self-understanding of the ways in which their
activity has been passively constituted, in providing them with an understanding of the ways in which the world has been pre-given to them, it calls them to participate actively and responsibly in the further constituting and changing of both themselves and their world (Husserl, 1970, pp. 340-341, 400). Husserl sees the resolution of the cultural crisis of his day to reside in the active pursuit of this kind of transformative science; a science that encourages Persons to take active responsibility for themselves and the world in which they live. Viewing the world simply as an accumulation of meaningless and dead facts, already determined in advance, leaves one powerless to change it. Viewing it as meaningful and contingent upon one’s intentional constitution motivates one to be responsible for it and to take an active role in trying to change it. Grounding psychology in a transcendental framework thus not only brings value and meaning back into science (through the re-appropriation of the life-world), but, just as importantly, brings science back into the on-going life of the culture.

**The Case of Psychosis**

In psychology the natural, naïve attitude has the result that the human self-objectifications of transcendental intersubjectivity, which belong with essential necessity to the makeup of the constituted world regimen to me and to us, inevitably have a horizon of transcendentally functioning intentionalities which are not accessible to reflection, not even psychological-scientific reflection. "I, this man", and likewise "other men" – these signify, respectively, a self-apperception and apperception of others which are transcendental acquisitions involving everything psychic that belongs to them, acquisitions which flowingly change in their particularity through transcendental functions which are hidden from the naïve attitude. We can inquire back into the transcendental historical dimension, from which the meaning and validity accomplishment of these apperceptions ultimately stems, only by breaking with naiveté through the method of transcendental reduction. (Husserl, 1970, pp.208-209)

So our job as psychologists is not to help persons with psychosis to adapt or adjust to the world as it currently is, but rather to help prepare them and/or assist them in taking an active role in further constituting and changing both themselves and the world. They, like everyone else who functions in the natural or naïve attitude, will not necessarily be aware of the role of their own subjectivity in constituting the constituted world; these transcendental functions may very well be "hidden", as Husserl suggests above. And it is not our job as psychologists to insist that people seeking help take the transcendental turn, as we ourselves had to do. It does appear to be our job, though, to come to understand and to identify for them the constituted horizon of pre-given meanings within which they live and which motivates them to act. It will then be up to them, to the degree to which they function as autonomous Persons within the motivational nexus of transcendental intersubjective life, to decide how they want to move forward in creating new meanings and a new world.

But are we not talking about people with psychotic disorders? Are we not talking about people whose very capacities for understanding and making informed decisions are lacking? Only if viewed from the perspective of a science of passivity and death. Viewing people as
lacking in anything only makes sense when people are viewed as objects, when they are viewed against the backdrop of some constituted stratum of (dead) sense, in comparison to some static sense of "normality" to which everyone is presumed to aspire. And once we accept the view that they are lacking in some substance without which they cannot be whole, then our options for intervention are limited: either we attempt to fill them up from the outside with whatever they are presumed to be lacking (whether it be neurotransmitters or social skills) or we consign them to an empty or less-than-human life (whether it be in distant state hospitals or in under-funded and segregated community programs).

But what if what is most important is the action of constituting meaning (i.e., life) rather than any particular meaning that has been constituted (i.e., death)? From such a life-affirming perspective, persons with psychosis are viewed as already making decisions everyday and as making these decisions based on their own understandings of the circumstances and their roles within those circumstances. While well-meaning others might heartily disagree with some of those decisions, and the understandings upon which they are based, they would be hard-pressed to deny that the person continues to make such decisions, even if, in the Sartrean style, he or she decides not to decide (Sartre, 1956). Psychosis, in this sense, is not a disturbed or alternative mode of being-in-the-world, as suggested by the early phenomenological psychopathologists; it does not result in a fundamental distortion of the person’s being or nature (Davidson, Staeheli, Stayner, & Sells, 2004). The person with psychosis, in Kohak’s terms, is no less a Person.

What then is psychosis? Early phenomenological psychopathologists, as well as some contemporary theorists (e.g., Stanghellini, 2004), suggest that people with psychosis have lost or lack “common sense”. As a technical term, “common sense” was used to refer “to the implicit assumptions, attitudes, and activities which underlie the person’s experiences of a shared social world” and was purported “to account for their difficulty in establishing and maintaining social relationships” and otherwise participating in a consensual social reality (Davidson, 2007). For whatever reason, people with psychosis did not share the same sedimented stratum of sense that was pre-given to others in their social environment. They also appeared to lack the capacity to acquire it in the future. Finally, as insight into or awareness of the illness was thought to be an inherent part of the illness itself (part of what makes psychosis seem so alien), people were also assumed not to be aware of their own lack of common sense. Not only did they lack common sense, but they also lacked the common sense to know that what they lacked was common sense. No wonder psychosis was thought to be so intractable to intervention.

Fortunately, this has not been our experience. Not only do many, if not most, people with psychosis recover over time – with or without treatment – but we also have found people with psychosis to be the most knowledgeable reporters of their own experiences, needs, and interests (Davidson, 2003a; Davidson, Hoge, Godleski, Rakfeldt, & Griffith, 1996; Davidson, Stayner, Lambert, Smith, & Sledge, 1997; Flanagan, Davidson, & Strauss, 2007). They have insight not only into their own subjective life and processes, but also are acutely aware of how others perceive them as well. This awareness has had dire consequences, as people have believed the pronouncements of mental health professionals that they would never work again, never marry or have children, never live independently, etc., and have internalized the social stigma that has been associated with psychosis for the last several hundred years. For many people over many years, a major aspect of their pre-given horizon of meaning involved extremely negative, at times non-human, stereotypes of "psycho killers", "maniacs", and "mental patients". Acutely aware that
others viewed, or may view, them in these terms, many people have withdrawn from society, refused to acknowledge having a mental illness, or otherwise rebelled against this destiny. The sciences of clinical psychology and psychiatry have done little to help them overcome this fate.

Much of this has been changing over the last thirty or so years, with the emergence of the "mental health recovery movement". This movement emerged in the gap created by de-institutionalization, when hundreds of thousands of people with serious mental illnesses were discharged from state institutions to communities where they were very few services or other resources for them. As a result, they began to band together to help each other out and to advocate for changes to mental health policies and programs, arguing that they maintained their civil rights and responsibilities and should be treated accordingly. This mental health consumer/survivor movement converged with longitudinal clinical research that showed that people living outside of hospitals often improved over time, and the mental health recovery movement was born.

We have learned many things from this recovery movement in mental health, despite the fact that it is still in its infancy. Of the many things we have learned, the most relevant to the present discussion is the fact that while people with psychosis may appear to have lost "common sense" – just as they may appear to have lost a sense of self and their élan vital (two additional important insights generated from phenomenological investigation) – they also are capable of re-acquiring these capacities or aspects of "normal" everyday life. Any such losses should be considered partial and temporary rather than absolute and permanent. We will describe how this is so in the remaining portion of this chapter, beginning with the issue of common sense. That this is so, however, is a reflection of the value of the transcendental for psychology. Common sense, a functional sense of self as an agent, and a sense of vital energy are all constituted products of transcendental intersubjectivity. They are products of experience rather than its source. As such, they can be lost but also found; they can be compromised or deteriorate but also be promoted or regenerated. Until the Person dies, however, they should never be denied.

To return to the concept of common sense, for example, we noted above that people with psychosis were thought to lack the common sense required to realize that what they were lacking (among other things) was common sense. This also has not been our experience. In fact, the following passage from a narrative-phenomenological interview with a person diagnosed with schizophrenia represents precisely the opposite position, which we have found consistently in the hundreds of interviews we have conducted over the past twenty years. Seth, a participant in one of our earlier studies, described to the interviewer how: "People take for granted that you just do things. A person with mental illness, it’s sometimes hard [...] it’s like you’re distracted, you can’t get involved because you’re not sort of all there” (quoted in Davidson, Haglund, Stayner, Rakfeldt, Chinman & Tebes, 2001, p. 282).

With this one passage, Seth has offered us an alternative explanation of the issue of common sense in psychosis. It is not that people with psychosis lack common sense, and therefore are doomed to a life of disability and dependence. Rather, it is that they have difficulty participating in the mundane, trivial, and everyday activities that others are fortunate to be able to take for granted – and this because they are distracted by other aspects of their experience. What is "common sense" if it is not precisely that domain of the "taken for granted" in everyday life? People appear to lack common sense when they do not take for granted the same things that others do. This does not mean, however, that they cannot take these things for granted; it is just
that they do not do so. Their attention, and perhaps effort, lies elsewhere. As Seth explains, having a serious mental illness may sometimes be experienced as posing distractions that make it difficult for the person to be "all there". Wherever else he or she may be, others – who are expecting the person to be attending to the same things they are – are likely to view the person as missing, as vacant or empty, or, as the clinical language suggests, as responding to internal stimulation.

But people with psychosis are not always "not all there". And many people have learned ways to manage these internal distractions so that they can “be there” more often than not over time. Granted, these successes may at first be achieved at a fairly concrete level, such as the woman we have called Betty who described how for her learning that she could regulate her own radio represented a turning point in her eventual recovery. As she said:

It is being active, and I take pride and I’m independent to a certain extent […] like in my jazz music, like I’ll turn on my jazz radio, and I’ll love it […] it’s my interest. I turn the radio on myself, no one had it going to nourish them-selves, to entertain them-selves, like parents would at a house. I turn it on, I’m responsible, I enjoy the music, I make notes and draw while I’m hearing it […] Then I turn it off, then I have some evidence, I’ve got something done, I’ve been productive, I have the drawings to look at […] It was for me and by me, my own nurturing. So I’m proud of this effort (quoted in Davidson & Strauss, 1992, p. 138; emphasis in the original).

Most people take for granted that they can turn on and off a radio, and then listen to the channel of their choosing. But for Betty, who had been a promising music student before the onset of schizophrenia, this represented an accomplishment, and perhaps a hard won one as well. This is an interesting finding and worthy of further exploration. As it turns out, what was particularly difficult for Betty, as she described elsewhere in her interview, was first regaining a sense that she was a person at all; that she was an agent in her own life who could make decisions and act on those decisions on her own behalf. This is why she accentuated the words “I”, “me”, and “them” in the quote above. The achievement was not realizing that the radio could be turned on and off, or that it could be turned to the jazz station. “Parents” do it all the time. The achievement was that it was Betty herself who could do so, and do so for herself. For people disabled to this degree, this apparently is a formidable first achievement – but it is a possible achievement nonetheless.

In addition to rebuilding a sense of self that they can then eventually take for granted – just as everyone else does – people with psychosis have described becoming re-grounded in the present as another important challenge that contributes to their gradual re-acquisition of common sense. Minkowski (1970) and other phenomenological psychopathologists described what they saw as a loss of the élan vital in individuals with serious mental illnesses, considering the appearance of the person being not "all there" as an indication of his or her fundamental loss of vital energy. What they apparently did not consider as much was that people might be able to regain the vital contact with life that they had (temporarily) lost (Davidson, 2003b). Vital contact with life is another thing that we ordinarily take for granted in our everyday lives; it also is something that people with psychosis may need to work hard to regain. In terms very similar to those used above by Betty, Erica, a participant from Sweden, described this as follows:
Before [...] everything was in the long term [...] Instead, having to hang on, to find strength, I live small moments more intensely. Now we’re here, you and I, and my whole life is all here, only here. It doesn’t matter what else happens [...] This moment here is more important than anything that might happen tomorrow [...] This was definitely decisive for me, this fact of living intensely what I’m doing instead of worrying about the future or other things was a real support, a cornerstone for everything [...] a very difficult awareness, a difficult position to take, but living intensely whatever I’m doing, being very concentrated, for me personally [...] I did this and no one told me to do it. I did it on my own and it works. (quoted in Davidson, 2007)

In order to take this position, people have to achieve some degree of awareness of or mastery over the more distracting symptoms of the illness; what we have described as "taming" the illness (adopting this use of the term from Le Petit Prince by Saint-Exupery, 1943). But perhaps equally important, they also have to experience a sense of interest, pleasure, or success in what they are doing or it will remain externally imposed and of no use in re-building their sense of self or reconnecting them vitally to life. Once people begin to appreciate these rich and personal experiences (i.e., experiences which are not yet taken for granted) and their positive repercussions, and once they begin to have a sense of self as agent, they can begin to plan for and pursue such experiences more intentionally. As Annica, another Swedish participant, described:

My way is to simply see to it that I have something to do, to take a walk, light a cigarette, drink a cup of coffee, eat an apple, watch TV and be on the go. Like, I can’t just sit around or lie down and sleep all day, I can’t do that. It’s just not something I can do [...] I feel well enough now that I want to do something, I want to be active, creative, have some company around me. I want to make something positive of the day, meet people, I want to talk. I’m pretty keen on having company and I don’t just lie in bed and sleep all day [...] I can’t understand how you could waste your days when you only have one life. And so you have to make something of it. (quoted in Marin, Mezzina, Borg, Topor, Lawless, Sells, & Davidson, 2005, p 228)

We are not suggesting that these experiences and accomplishments cure psychosis. What we are suggesting is that these experiences and accomplishments begin to lay the foundations for the person to take on active role in combating the illness and eventually either learning how to live effectively with it or, in many cases, to overcome it. There is a tremendous amount of diversity in what those roles look like and the ways that people find to do battle with the illness. Undergirding all of these efforts, though, appears to be a gradual process of relearning how to manage life, and oneself, on a day-to-day basis, the illness and its symptoms being only one of the many aspects of life that one has to manage. To appreciate the intricate and subtle steps that a person takes in order to lay this foundation, one might need to imagine what life would be like on a day-to-day basis if one could no longer take many of the basic givens of everyday life for granted. Erica, the Swedish participant we quoted from above, described the incremental nature of this process in the following passage:

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So I take it step by step. I have learned to hurry slowly and do it in stages and set partial goals when I have discovered that it makes sense [...] doing it by partial goals and making it manageable, then you get positive feedback that it’s going okay and then you don’t hit the wall. That’s my strategy, the strategy for success: partial goals and sensible goals and attainable goals, and that’s something I’ve learned to do in order to achieve things. When I have been able to deal with something that’s been a struggle and feel secure, I move on. Step by step, put things behind me. (Marin, Mezzina, Borg, et al., 2005, p. 236)

Conclusion

Erica described the process above as “hurry[ing] slowly” both because it addresses an immediate and urgent need, without which one cannot function effectively (thus the need to hurry), and also because it requires painstakingly small steps, taken repetitively, over time (and thus the need to go slowly). It is as if a person did not feel confident that the floor below him or her was solid and would not give way each time he or she took a step forward. In this case, it would be understandable that each step would be taken slowly, cautiously, and with care so that the person would be able to spring back to the solid ground that was still there in case the floor in front of him or her were to dissolve before his or her eyes (as it does in some cartoons and video games). This is the challenge the person with psychosis faces in reconstructing his or her sense of self, reconnecting vitally to the world, and regaining a useful body of "common sense" – all objects being constituted products of transcendental intersubjectivity. They must, as it were, be constituted anew in the wake of the illness, incorporating what the person has come to learn about the illness, its effects, and his or her most effective ways of dealing with it. The more people do so, and the more visible role models of the possibility of recovery become through the mental health recovery movement, the more people with psychosis will contribute not only to recreating themselves but also to recreating the world. They will contribute to the creation of a world in which serious mental illness is no longer considered a death sentence, in which it is no longer shameful to be diagnosed with it or to seek help for a mental illness, and a world in which the pursuit of a normal life in the community is truly rendered possible for all.

References


Notes

1 Lesley Anne Solomon is a student who is in the process of formulating her graduate studies program in psychology.