

Lévinas and the Disruptive Face of the Other

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Editor's note: The concept of the *other* has been a central issue in recent philosophy and philosophical psychology. In this article, Steven Bindeman explores the contribution of French philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas, to the ongoing dialogue in a way that invites Hakomi therapists to, once again, embrace radical mindful openness to the *other*, and to hold lightly various conceptions of character development when with a unique individual. The article is based on three separate papers Bindeman presented at American Psychological Association conventions: "Lévinas's Engagement with the Face of the *Other*," "Lévinas, Language, and the Disruptive Infinite *Other*," and "Lévinas: The Face of *Otherness* and the Ethics of Therapy." The third essay was published in the Japanese *Journal of Interdisciplinary Phenomenology*, Vol. 3, in 2006.

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ABSTRACT

Lévinas's concept of *otherness* is the foundation for his ethical philosophy. The play of forces on the face of the *other* demands that we place the needs of the *other* before our own. This demand disrupts our sense of order. It changes what we value, from things that we measure (wealth, beauty, intelligence) to things that can't be measured (care, justice, love). We learn to remove our mask of social identity and discover in its place an embodied vulnerability that is attentive to the call of the *other*. This article explores the ramifications of this call, especially with regards to how language, truth, and justice are intertwined.

Key words: Lévinas, psychotherapy, philosophical foundations, concept of the "other," ethics, values, embodied vulnerability

In his play *Marat/Sade*, Peter Weiss has one of his characters say: "You must pull yourself up by your own hair, and turn yourself inside out, so that you may see the world with new eyes." For Emmanuel Lévinas, confrontation with the face of the *other* has the capacity to turn us inside out in just the same way.

Lévinas challenges us with the question: what does the face of the *other* ask of us? When we are within the affect of its gaze we recognize the infinite play of complexities on its surface. The transcendence of this experience drives us to act in an ethically responsible way. We learn to substitute ourselves for the *other*, and his or her needs become of paramount importance to us—even replacing our own in terms of priority. What we give value to changes as well. The things we measure, like beauty, wealth, intelligence, and status, either recede into the background or disappear completely. What takes their place are the things that can't be measured, including friendship, care, devotion, spirituality, justice, and love. This article addresses some of the disruptive aspects of the ethical demands Lévinas places on his readers.

According to Lévinas in a fundamental distinction he develops near the beginning of his first great work, *Totality and Infinity*, those who follow the agenda of measurement are the totalizers. They follow the metaphysics of ontology and develop egocentric systems of sameness around themselves. They violate their surroundings by their acts of measurement, which, he claims, are also acts of violence. This is so because conceptuality as a kind

of measurement violates the alterity—the unknowable difference—of the *other*. By reducing difference to sameness, conceptuality leads to understanding, then control, and finally violence. The horrors of war, especially those of the twentieth century, can be seen as a consequence of this process. Those who follow the *other* path, the infinitizers, are the proponents of subjectivity. They pass through the experiences of infinity and transcendence. Their universe is decentered, rooted in a heightened awareness of the radical difference of *otherness*. The *other* is not there for me, but rather the other way around. For Lévinas, I am here for the *other*. My personal belief is that this stance is one of the most shocking, disorienting, and far-reaching ethical commitments in the entire history of philosophy. Its implications can be felt in the way we relate to community, language, politics, justice, and divinity.

This disorientation is grounded in the experience of the face-to-face relation. When the self meets the *other*, face-to-face, what is the nature of this confrontation? Does it entail a special kind of listening, of hearing what the *other* has to say, perhaps through a privileged kind of dialogue? Or does it require instead a heightened kind of seeing, of looking at the *other* in a certain way, differently from how one might view, for example, an inanimate object? The answer of course is both. Lévinas asserts that seeing the face of the *other* is not a matter of simple perception. To understand his point, we should recognize that perception belongs to the philosophical tradition of representation, part of what he calls “the said,” with its tendency to possess, appropriate, reify, and totalize, which he is trying to avoid. Instead, he is pointing to a deeper kind of experience of the face of the *other*, part of what he calls “the saying.” (We will return to Lévinas’s distinction between *the said* and *the saying* later on in this paper.) The face, then, should not be reduced to its physical aspects alone. However, it is not merely a metaphor for something else, either. The face of the *other* is real. In fact, the face-to-face relation starts with an awareness of the physical incarnation of the face. What Lévinas is asking of us is a profound reconsideration of our perception of this face. When we recognize someone, when we go even further and say we know him or her, we have fallen into the habit of seeing as a kind of understanding. We need to learn how to see *otherwise*, in order to respect, morally speaking, the singularity and *otherness* of the *other*. We need to let the absolute foreign nature of the *other* astonish us.

This confrontation with the *other* becomes, therefore, both an occasion and an opportunity. It is an occasion to the degree we are passively affected by the encounter. In this

context the face operates symbolically, uniting a feeling with an image. The feeling it evokes is responsibility, and the image it presents is of infinite variability. The experience of the face of the *other* therefore is an epiphany, a revelatory appearance of God through this contact with infinity. “I approach the infinite,” Lévinas says, “insofar as I forget myself for my neighbor who looks at me. . . . A you is inserted between the I and the absolute He” (Lévinas, 1987, pp. 72-73).

The consequences of this experience are far-reaching, affecting both the proper subject matter of philosophy and the language it uses. The face, however, is also an opportunity for intentionally discovering the nonrepresentational consciousness of affectivity. The face in this context *means* responsibility. “Meaning” here, though, is a kind of “felt meaning.” For Lévinas, to intend affectively is to mean through feeling. We “feel” responsible for the *other* when we find ourselves face-to-face with him or her. Because of this feeling of responsibility, confrontation with the face of the *other* discourages intellectual categorization. The specific uniqueness of the face calls instead for an ethical commitment to preserving the very qualities such categorization eliminates.

Lévinas’s ethics, grounded in the originary experience of the face as a living presence, is therefore an embodied ethics. The call of the *other*—to feel responsibility for him or her—takes hold of our flesh. It not only affects our gestures, the ways by which we comport ourselves in our social relations to others, but our listening, looking, and seeing as well. This call is not to be understood through an intellectual or cognitive act; rather it is something to be felt. We feel the presence of the *other* through the experience of the face-to-face, and this felt experience has real meaning for us. The ethical subject is not determined by its freedom and autonomy (as it is in liberal humanism, for example) but by being subjected to and attentive to this call.

Freedom is consequently to be understood not for oneself, but for the *other*. As Lévinas writes: “The Good is not presented to freedom; it has chosen me before I have chosen it. No one is good voluntarily” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 15). His ethics is not, therefore, based on the rights and responsibilities of a person with free will using rational principles, but on an embodied dimension that is prior to this. It is a response to a call that it is not yet heard by the ego. Although incomprehensible, befalling us from “beyond essence,” this call is still real. Lévinas is referring, in fact, to “a reason before the beginning, before any present, because my responsibility for the *other* commands me before any

decision, before any deliberation” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 166).

The ego is not yet able to hear the call of the *other* because the ego is attached to a mask. “Prior to the play of being,” says Lévinas, “before the present, older than the time of consciousness that is accessible in memory . . . the oneself is exposed as hypostasis, of which the being it is as an entity is but a mask” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 106). The “I,” he continues, is at first a “no one, clothed with purely borrowed being, which masks its nameless singularity by conferring on it a role” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 106). We discover our true moral self only by tearing off this mask and exposing our face to the face of the *other*. The mask we tear off is our socialized, artificially constructed identity, which gave us our name and protected us from disorientation and loss of self. However, it is only in this state of embodied vulnerability, beyond ego, that we are attentive to the *other’s* call.

The call of the *other* is disruptive. It disintegrates egological identity and leaves it with nothing more than a nameless ipseity. It calls into question the intentionality and primacy of consciousness. It uproots the self from history and undermines its sense of freedom. It leaves the self within an ethically grounded universe of obligation that is unending in its demands and asymmetrical in character. This means that the ethical demand to be good and just is not contingent on the *other’s* reciprocity. Yet for Lévinas, only this disinterested selflessness is “what is better than being, that is, the Good” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 19).

Lévinas’s work is disruptive in another sense, too. It disrupts the movement towards certainty of the modern European philosophical tradition. This movement gives precedence to the atemporal mode of presence, since presence is what enables knowledge to take shape through the process of philosophical analysis. This quest for knowledge assumes that everything that is *other* (object, thing, or being) is in principle accessible or reducible to theoretical contemplation. (Heidegger, in making a similar point, uses the term “presencing” to call attention to the need to emphasize the key role temporality plays in consciousness. With this term he refers to the event of appropriation whereby truth as unconcealment comes into the clearing opened up by the experience of authenticity. Authenticity in turn is discovered either through the exploration of certain artworks or from the increased awareness of one’s own mortality. Within authenticity, one’s personal time slows down. Presencing is being as time, or temporal coming-about—like in the unfolding of a cubist portrait where the identity of the subject is refracted and hidden—but presencing almost unnoticeably becomes “something present” when it is named or represented. The modernist reification and totalization

of presencing, which transforms it into something present, is found most noticeably in modern technology, and is violent, anxiety driven, and defensive. Lévinas, through his reading of Heidegger, learned from him that the modernist search for scientific clarity transformed language into a mere tool for the accumulation of knowledge. As Lévinas puts it, knowledge is what reduces the *other* to the same (see Lévinas, 1966, p. 151). That which is both agent and container for this transmutation (or what could also be called the shift from difference to identity) is variously called by the tradition ego, self, consciousness, mind, or Dasein. Its end result is nothing more than the reiteration of what one already knows, where nothing new, nor *other*, nor strange, nor transcendent, can appear or affect someone. Lévinas attempts in its stead to develop a kind of alternative phenomenology based on the experience of transcendence, which, as a trace of the infinite, is discovered through the infinite variability on the face of the *other* within the face-to-face relation.

In order to articulate the experience of transcendence, Lévinas makes a key distinction between two modes of confronting the face of the *other*. They echo the two rhetorical modes whereby Lévinas addresses his readers. He makes what is for him a fundamental distinction in his later work otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence between categorical thinking, which he calls *the said*, and the authentic awareness that is a consequence of affective confrontation with the face of the *other*, which he calls *the saying*. As his language oscillates between phenomenological description and moral exhortation, he seems to want us to respond at a deep, bodily felt level, to what is morally good in what he has to say.

In search of a truly ethical language, Lévinas turns his critical attention to the normative and egological aspects of our linguistic framings of the world. These framings are shown to do untoward violence to the *other*, necessitating numerous attempts by Lévinas to say things about the experience of *otherness* in a different way. The problem is essentially this: Although we live and experience the world within time from moment to moment, the language we use persists in a timeless present and consists of words that identify (in Lévinas’s words) “this as that” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 35). In this way *the said* coagulates the lived experience in the flow of time into a defined something, ascribes it a specific meaning, and fixes it in the present moment. The challenge is to rescue *saying* from *the said*, to see what *saying* signifies *otherwise*. And further, if *saying* signifies responsibility for another, how is it to be found, beyond the influence of *the said*?

By the time he wrote *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lévinas had begun to recognize the ethical importance of the need to overcome the ontological assumptions inherent in the terminology of his earlier work. His central occupation subsequently concerned the possibility of constructing an ethical *saying*, one that would rupture the ontological language of *the said*. *The said* for him designates the structured totality of language that is both a system of nouns designating entities and an order founded on the law of identity. Identity, in turn, works through a system of crossreferences with *other* identities, coexisting with them in the universe of discourse. In the linguistic universe of *the said*, identities are all different from each other in significant ways, each completely distinct from the others. Language in this limited context represents reality in such a way that thought and being are understood to be one and the same, coexisting simultaneously. This synchronic organization of that which is spatially and temporally dispersed, Lévinas calls *thematization*. He then characterizes it in a negative way as a system of power and control, which reaches its apotheosis in the authoritarian state and in war, both of which reduce individuals to bearers of someone else's will.

Against this ontological *said*, Lévinas posits a *saying* that is primary to it, a pre-original anarchy that remains unnamable but not unsayable. Saying dethematizes or desynchronizes the rational integrity of the system by recalling an anarchy that remains unassimilable. Since this dethematization requires the very language that it attempts to call into question, the unsaying of *the said* can take place only through *the said* itself, and *saying* thus betrays itself. Philosophical discourse as a consequence of this remains mired in the ontological, identity-oriented synchronic order of *the said*. Such discourse must find a way to transcend itself in order to find its moorings, which it discovers in the felt meaning of the ethical language of responsibility that is grounded in the nonrepresentational alterity of *otherness*.

For Lévinas, the essential pathway to *otherness* is through the intentionality of the nonrepresentational consciousness of affectivity. To intend affectively is to mean through feeling. To say that the face "means" responsibility means that in the face-to-face relation, one feels responsible for the *other*. One also is affected by the *other's* face-to-face proximity. Affectivity thus presents itself in two ways. First is its intentional aspect, which as an activity of the ego presupposes one's ability or intention to respond to its demand. It is a kind of ethical choice. Second is its non-intentional aspect, which one neither chooses for oneself nor reaches as

a kind of conclusion from a series of judgments. It is a kind of passivity; whereby one simply is affected. Affectively, this occurs most powerfully in the face-to-face encounter.

When the face of the *other* awakens us to the alterity of the *other*, we are obligated somehow to avoid the reifying and totalizing habits of ordinary discourse. We accomplish this through a re-orientation, a re-prioritizing of the center—away from the ego and towards the *other*. Although Lévinas speaks of an egological "I" looking and seeing the face of the *other*, he insists that this is not merely a matter of perception (Lévinas, 1985, pp. 85-87). The face, then, is not merely a "phenomenon," a thing that discloses itself through its gradual and unfolding appearance over time. Nor is it something that can be reduced to the physical. We already know how to see; the problem is to learn how to see "*otherwise*." Indeed, we already know how to see the face; the problem is to learn how to see it *otherwise*. "The absolute experience," says Lévinas, "is not disclosure but revelation . . . the manifestation of a face over and beyond form" (Lévinas, 1969, pp. 65-66). The face cannot actually itself be seen; nor can it be known. It is beyond essence; it is invisible. As the manifestation of a living presence, though, it is the play of infinity. It undoes every form I may attempt to impose on it. It is also beyond the authority of the gaze, the "panoramic look" (Lévinas, 1969, p. 289) that is inherently blind to the play of infinity. Allied with the forces of totality, the gaze "totalizes the multiple" (Lévinas, 1969, p. 292) and imposes the categories of objectivity on its field of vision.

In fact, seeing for Lévinas is highly problematic. For example, the authority of the gaze is the violent application of theoretical consciousness onto the plane of the *other*. As David Michael Levin writes in his recent book *The Philosopher's Gaze*, "Seeing the *other* person as something, inevitably subjects the *other* to the violence of classification" (Levin, 1999, p. 247). For Lévinas, we do not "see" the face since the face cannot be an object of knowledge. The face, rather, is a commandment to feel responsibility. The experience of the face of the *other* is also an opportunity for transcendence into infinity. Infinity, though, is forever outside the grasp of seeing. How to liberate philosophy from the domination of vision and reason may be Lévinas's central dilemma. In his words, "what is needed is a thought for which the very metaphor of vision and aim is no longer legitimate" (Lévinas, 1969, p. 155). Since reason demands lucidity, transparency, and visibility, it is a natural ally of light. Truth for Lévinas must be located elsewhere.

For Lévinas, however, language, truth, and justice are

intertwined. "Truth," he writes in his early major work *Totality and Infinity*, in a section entitled "Rhetoric and Injustice," "is produced only in veritable conversation or in justice" (Tal 71). He emphasizes in the same passage that "We call justice this face to face approach, in conversation." Injustice, in turn, starts with rhetoric, the kind of discourse that violates the freedom of the *other*. Rhetoric itself cannot be the problem, however, since Lévinas uses it himself, as a way of breaking through the boundaries of reason. The problem rather is in the way that rhetoric is used. The wrong way is found especially, he says, in "pedagogy, demagoguery, and psychagogy" (Lévinas, 1969, p. 70), which are all systems of measurement and control. When ethics thus moves into the domain of politics and becomes morality, the possibility of violence appears because of the threat of the application of such absolutist forms of thought. Although the moral agent must remain free in order to avoid the totalizing domination of the state, morality must still be grounded in the ethical relation of the face-to-face. For Lévinas, justice is not an abstract notion but is found in the expression of duty and obligation discovered in the face of the *other*. When ethical discourse is grounded in the face-to-face relation so that the freedom of the *other* is respected and preserved, absolutist systems are thereby renounced.

Justice for Lévinas is still more complicated, though. Although every face is invisible to me even when facing me, it bespeaks its kinship with all other human beings however distant from me. With this insight Lévinas passes from his development of an ethics between singular persons to a theory of justice related to the idea of kinship. Present to all face-to-face relations is the addition of what he points to as a kind of "third party," a condition that he calls "illeity" (Lévinas, 1998, pp. 12-13). This third party acts as a witness to the proceedings. This addition brings up the issue of social standards, and along with it another serious problem for Lévinas. He somehow has to pass over from the ethically grounded specificity of the face-to-face relation to the universality of the institution of justice. Can justice be fair and impartial on the one hand, yet on the other hand still be connected to the transcendence discovered on the face of the *other*?

The challenge that Lévinas provides his readers regarding justice is this: how can one maintain an ethically necessary respect for the unique specificity (or ipseity) of another person, while simultaneously working within the confines of a language that employs universal concepts? For example, I identify the person with whom I am engaged in a specific social activity as belonging to the category of hu-

man beings. But no person is merely a being, a thing, or an entity. As an open-ended set of possibilities, s/he presents rather more than that. As an *other*, this person like me is a subject, someone who projects his/her own sense of the world onto his/her experience of it. Furthermore, within that individual's frame of reference, I am the *other*. But the words by which I choose to refer to this *other* person will still tend to represent him/her as a thing, since in language, only the word "I" can be the subject.

The problem is not merely one of becoming sensitive to how language objectifies experience, however. The post-structuralist call to subvert and demystify the covert effects of objectifying language, which made us more aware of the relations between knowledge and power, is not enough. The egoism and narcissism of consciousness must be overcome as well. Furthermore, this calling into question of the ontological assumptions of language when referring to *otherness* should not be seen as part of a search for moral self-justification. It is intended rather as a calling to account of one's own responsibility for the *other*. In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lévinas identified this call as substitution, or as "me for the *other*" (Lévinas, 1998, p. 11), saying further that "Toward another culminates in a for another, a suffering for his suffering" (Lévinas, 1985, p. 18). It is by this move that Lévinas attempted to evade the Husserlian claim that subjectivity is transcendental. Since first philosophy is no longer ontology for Lévinas but ethics, subjectivity is then a kind of radical passivity; a being subject to the *other* that is prior to freedom, consciousness, and identity.

There is consequently a sense of distance and even of absence in the questioning glance of the *other*, which comes at me from inside his/her own interior world. However, the only medium within which I can coexist with this *other* and still leave his/her *otherness* intact is language. When an "I" learns to pay serious attention to an *other* and to the strange world s/he inhabits, this kind of communication is an example for Lévinas of *speaking*. Through my response to the *other* in this way, I am able to transcend the limitations of myself. I can even discover that the transcendent face of the *other* can reflect a "trace" (meaning that which has passed by but is no longer there and therefore cannot be captured) of God. Furthermore, for my communication to be ethically responsible and for it to go beyond the egoism of casual discourse, an act of generosity is necessary, one that offers a giving of my world to the *other*. On the other hand, when I choose to pay attention to the *other*, taking account of the strange world s/he inhabits, I become aware of the arbitrariness of my own views and of the attitudes to which my uncritical egocentric freedom has led

me. I become aware of the need to justify or overcome my egocentric attitudes, and of the possibility of doing justice to the *other* in my thoughts and actions. Through this enlightened response to the *other* I am able to transcend the limitations of myself.

The lived experience of such an ethically charged situation demonstrates that reason has many voices and many centers. This *other*-oriented mode of speaking and of thinking pays less attention to things as they appear to the separated self, and more to their radical *otherness*, to their "alterity." From this guise, the aim of philosophy is not to acquire knowledge with the aim of knowing and then acting, but to demonstrate a readiness to listen and a capacity to learn from experience. This readiness leads to the kind of action that constructs systems of justice and peace that are recognized by Lévinas as prior to speaking and thinking. Furthermore, it is the *other* who gives the self the opportunity for transcendence, for going beyond the thoughts and feelings that trap it in the subjectivism of its own system. If, for example, I am able to learn to fight against the need to fit all my experiences into a system, and instead discover the desire to know the other person as she is for herself or he is for himself, I become free. I then discover the possibility of becoming infinitely responsible for the *other*. This desire to know and to be responsible for the *other* (and not just for some selected *others* but for all sorts of extreme types) enables me to transcend my self-centered categories. It also enables the alterity of that which is radically *other* than myself to appear to me in an ethically grounded way.

This taking account of the *other* can take place most notably in the face-to-face encounter. The face, as the realm of the pre-conceptual and non-intentional, opens up into a play of different forces, such as between concealment and un-concealment or between closure and dis-closure. Although these forces are beyond the control of the individual will, what is revealed is the experience of infinity, of never being able to reach the depths of oneself or of an *other*. The face is where the bottom drops off, where the surface opens up, where the abyss appears. Ethically, the face of the *other* has the power to command me not to kill him/her (if and when I might otherwise wish to do so), due to the difficulty of carrying out this action face-to-face. Moreover, what gains my respect here is the mystery of the *other*, the realization of unfathomable depths. What goes on then in a face-to-face encounter is an intimation of the beyond.

The face also operates as a symbol, though one that unites a feeling with an image. The feeling it evokes is responsibility, and the image it presents is of infinite variability. A trace

of God may be found in this infinite variability on the face of the *other*. But a trace of God is not itself God. This is similar to the idea of the infinite itself not being infinite. Lévinas attempts to escape such ontological assumptions by developing a unique sense of the term "trace." Ordinarily, a trace is a kind of residual phenomenon. The examples Lévinas gives of this way of understanding the term are the fingerprints left by a criminal, the footsteps of an animal, or the vestiges of ancient civilizations (Lévinas, 1996, p. 61). In all these cases, though, the trace is the mark of something absent that was previously present. Lévinas's conception of the trace is more radical than this. For him, the trace of the *other* is itself otherwise. It has no connection to a being that is or was present in this world. The *other* leaves a trace only by effacing its traces. Furthermore, my responsible relation to the *other* avoids the presence/absence dyad. In this way the *other* can be neither denied nor enclosed. If the trace of God were to be found in the trace of the *other*, as Lévinas repeatedly says, it would be a God not contaminated by being, a God whose very name is unpronounceable.

By stretching language beyond its categorical limits, Lévinas lays the foundation for a philosophy of alterity, one that preserves and respects the *other* and everything that makes him/her unique. This preservation, in turn, is part of an ethical concern that for Lévinas is prior to all other themes. By focusing his attention on the repercussions that take place because of the felt experience of face-to-face proximity to an *other*, Lévinas is able to establish ethics as first philosophy. This prioritizing of the ethical over all other ways of thinking and being serves to provide his philosophy with a transformative character that is far-reaching in its effects. Since for Lévinas justice is not reciprocal, the *other* is not responsible to me like I am to him/her. If there is in consequence a surplus of duties over rights, then it needs to be allowed that this is not fair and balanced. It does however seem that the alternatives lead to ever-expanding systems of control and dominance.

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Hakomi and the Ambiguous Nature of Research

Greg Johanson

Editor's note: After entering Hakomi therapy or trainings, many people inquire about research and the Hakomi method. This article explores how Hakomi authors and researchers relate to many aspects of research.

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Abstract

In this article, the relationship between Hakomi therapy, science in general, and psychotherapy research in particular is explored. It outlines how the Hakomi Institute as a provider of psychotherapy trainings functions as both a consumer and generator of research. Issues explored include how Hakomi therapists have pioneered aspects of psychotherapy—such as the use of mindfulness—in advance of collaborating research findings; how findings are engaged critically in light of clinical experience, and how findings beyond psychotherapy in cognate fields such as neuroscience, developmental studies, multicultural and spiritual areas are necessarily integrated into the research base of Hakomi therapy.

Key words: psychotherapy research, Hakomi Therapy, AQAL integral theory

Science and Research

As previously chronicled (Johanson, 2012), Hakomi was born in the post-1960s in a period of relative discontent and dissatisfaction with the psychological theory and research of the period. The efficacy of psychotherapy was not high. Ron Kurtz, the founder of Hakomi Therapy, generated a lot of excitement in those who gathered around him in the 1970s by approaching psychotherapy through means other than those used by the standard well-worn schools of psychology. Rather, he evaluated and incorporated various therapeutic modalities and sub-processes—through the lens of his background in the sciences of complexity and non-linear living organic systems—as these informed what it meant to be human. Thus, those involved with Hakomi have had a long-standing, continuous interest in scientific research and the philosophy of science broadly conceived (Johanson, 2009b, 2009c).

This unique background foundation in non-linear systems has served the Hakomi Institute well in its primary functioning as a training institute as opposed to a research institute. Hakomi of Europe, headquartered in Germany, led the way in getting Hakomi approved as a scientifically validated modality within the European Association of Psychology in the European Union. As such, the Hakomi Institute is an approved psychotherapy training provider in the European Union. Credits in doctoral programs for studying Hakomi have been obtained through a number of educational institutions worldwide. Likewise, the Hakomi curriculum was approved as an official national training for psychotherapists in New Zealand through the Eastern Institute of Technology in Napier. Subsequently, chapters on Hakomi Therapy have been included in standard textbooks on theories of