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## **The Paradox of Narcissism: A Levinasian Analyses**

The aim of this paper is to utilize Levinasian phenomenology in order to shed light on the paradoxical nature of narcissism and thereby suggest a possible clinical approach.

In Levinasian phenomenology interpersonal discourse necessarily presupposes exteriority of the other. Discourse is characterized by a deep vulnerability and self-exposure before the other. Even the master speaks to the slave as an equal in this sense. The most violent discourse presupposes exteriority, the temptation for violence stems from the desire to negate that otherness. We are tempted to kill people, not objects.

Levinas essentially describes two types of interpersonal relations; an ethical relation in which the otherness is respected and a violent relation in which the otherness is perceived as a disturbance that must be eliminated. Another possible relation that doesn't necessarily conform to Levinasian phenomenology is an apathetic relation utterly indifferent to the face of the other who is perceived as an object.

Narcissistic behavior is characterized by both a desperate need for validation and an extreme lack of empathy. A Levinasian analysis of this kind of behavior reveals a paradox. Unlike the apathetic, anti-social relation, the narcissistic relation is needy and vulnerable and thereby inherently testifies to exteriority. Yet it is characterized by extreme indifference often perceived as total lack of awareness towards the emotions and needs of others.

A deeper understanding of this paradoxical dynamic could serve as the basis for developing a clinical treatment of narcissism by in which the patient realizes her need for validation presupposes exteriority.