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Implicit Apologetics and the Ontological Scalpel of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing: A Critique from a Psychological Perspective Inspired by Emmanuel Levinas

Abstract

Proponents of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) claim a breakthrough psychotherapy with rapid efficacy and wide ranging applications. EMDR is described as an integrative approach combining many elements of disparate forms of therapy with unorthodox techniques such as 90 minute sessions and ‘bilateral stimulation’ usually in the form of eye movements led by the therapist. Initially dismissed as pseudoscientific gimmickry it is now accepted as an evidence based practice and has gained endorsements from many authoritative organizations in psychology and the health insurance industry. The method is often favored in treatment of cases as dissimilar as post traumatic stress disorder and unwanted same sex attraction. This essay employs an existential-phenomenological investigation into what is happening when EMDR works. I advance a critique based on Emmanuel Levinas’ phenomenology of the metaphysical and ontological circumstances that constitute human psychological and intersubjective experiences. The essay concludes that EMDR jeopardizes the client-therapist relationship and the personal identity of clients. Ethical and practical implications are discussed.