

## *Editorial: Everything that is Real Actively Gives Itself*

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The heading is a quote from the prelude to Alphonso Lingis's picture book *Contact* (2010). He illustrates his words by recalling a simple, radiant experience: "The sun casts forth its light and heat," he writes, "receiving nothing in return." In much the same way, he continues, the people photographed in this book "—however unknowingly—actively give of the vision in their eyes and the trembling of their hearts to you" (p. 5). Givenness and reality are inseparable in human experience.

Now Alphonso Lingis has passed away. He died on May 8, 2025. We miss him — I miss him. He was a man who gave you his friendship and continued to give it until his last day. His life was a continuous enrichment of our lives, and he gave everything freely, without measure or condition. Like the sunlight he described, his presence was a gift that required nothing in return.

This direct and immediate givenness is also the pulse of what we might call the search for "imaginary truth" in a novel or poem. The Norwegian novelist Per Petterson, in a newspaper interview, reflects on the difference between "writing something" and "writing about something." To write something, he says, is to experience it again; to write about something is to compose non-fiction — a professional text or a report. In his new book *Kaspar*, the young protagonist hits and kills a roe deer with his car. How, Petterson wonders, does a novelist write such an event? "If I am him," he says, "what happens to me then? I might sit down beside the roe deer and speak to it." If the real is to have the chance to give itself, "I must be the eye that sees, the heart that clatters."

To a phenomenologist, what Lingis and Petterson express speaks directly to our practice. Finding nearness to the real, in life and in writing, takes time, patience, and openness. But that is what phenomenologists continuously attempt. Phenomenology, like photography or fiction, seeks the truth of experience, the presence and immediacy of what is given to us by the world. In Lingis's writing, this search becomes luminous: his words bring the world close enough to touch.

What the world has given and continues to give is the condition upon which we entirely depend as living beings. Lingis (2010, p. 146) writes, "We see in the sky the sovereign realm of chance. The sky is also a bond uniting us to all who breathe under its expanse, uniting us to all who are born and shall be born under the sky." He reminds us of the generosity of life — a unilaterality that sustains both the human and the more-than-human. The sky, the oceans, the rocks, and the air are solemn existential vows that have kept what they promise. Yet what comes with no price attached can so easily be

disregarded. Lingis and Petterson remind us that experience comes first, though it may speak with a quiet voice.

Lingis often asked whether there is not something catastrophic in the nature of thought. “Thought,” he wrote, “is driven by an excessive compulsion and is itself an excess over and beyond perception” (p. 60). Seeing, listening, sensing one’s heartbeat, sweating or cooling, blushing or turning pale—these are immediate experiences; thinking arrives later, always afterward. The human sciences have long known this, even if the natural sciences, stronger and more assertive, orient themselves toward manipulation and use of what is given. Lingis turned us back toward what is received, not taken: to the radiant contingency of the world.

In ancient Greece, nature and the gods were immortal; only humans were mortal, fleeting, with beginnings and ends. Mortality marked the human being. Yet the mortal could be remembered in words and deeds. Arendt writes:

The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things, works and deeds and words—which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their space in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves (1958, p. 19).

Alphonso Lingis’s words and deeds have found their place among what endures beyond our mortal lives. He will be remembered not only as a singular and daring philosopher, but as an especially life-affirming and loveable human being. In “Cause, Choice, Chance” (2018), published in this journal, Lingis celebrated the sheer improbability of existence — the fragile coincidence that each of us is here at all. For him, chance was not chaos but grace; happiness was gratitude; and gratitude was active, radiant, given away freely, “not asking anything in return, not even thanks.” His philosophy was a practice of wonder.

Despite the endurance of his words, our experience of eternity is still tinged with loss, for the one who spoke them no longer walks among us. He ceases to act, to gesture, to speak. This is what it means to lose a human being. And yet, through the generosity of his work, we are gathered once again under the same sky he described—united with all who breathe, all who have been, and all who will come. We must continue our lives sharing his words and deeds with one another, allowing them, as he would say, to give themselves.

## **References**

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