I don’t say he’s a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention finally must be paid to such a person.

_Death of a Salesman_ (Arthur Miller)

Upon the death of Arthur Miller May 2005, this haunting refrain from the second act of _Death of a Salesman_ re-entered our cultural orbit. It was never far away; at least not for phenomenologists. For attention is the essence of the science of phenomenology: attention both to the objects which present themselves to our consciousness, and to that consciousness itself. In this paper, I would like to pay attention to attention itself, as an event of consciousness and as an ethical phenomenon, an event which is also a demand, a blessing, and a delivery, in a dual sense.

Attention to consciousness is the hallmark of the phenomenological method. The event of the _epoche_ is the phenomenological event _par excellence_: that movement by which human consciousness accomplishes its self-transcendence and reaches simultaneously into its own essence and into the essence of the object of its attention. For too long, I think, we have looked upon the _epoche_ as a matter of epistemological, rather than moral significance.

Yet certainly Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka has been pushing us in this direction for quite some time, especially with her re-valuation of the _epoche_ as part of the critique of reason that she has termed “a new Copernican revolution.” By looking at the creative imagination not merely as a matter of interpretation of perceptions but rather as the means by which we become fully human, Tymieniecka brings our focus back onto ethical agency. For it is a central tenet of her philosophy that it is the moral sense which establishes the human individual in his or her life-world, in two ways. First, ethical action is seen as “the origin and nature of the uniquely human meaningfulness of … human existence and the world.”¹ Second, she sees ethical action as “the specific meaning-bestowing function of the person as the subject/agent

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within the social world.” Simply put, in her philosophical system it is ethical action which establishes the world as real to the individual, and simultaneously establishes the individual as real within a social context. Ethical action defines the person, both within the self and in the community of others. Ethical action is the means by which the individual becomes real (to itself and others), makes the world real to itself and others, and the means by which meaning is bestowed, both on the individual and on the world.

The process of human “self-interpretative individualization,” as Tymieniecka calls it, has been discussed elsewhere. Briefly recapitulated, Tymieniecka outlines a fivefold process of development of the individual, as s/he moves through experience of the world into action upon the world, and then into full engagement with the world as a meaning-bestowing subject inscribing itself into history through ethical articulations of individuality, through which s/he distinguishes him/herself from the circumambient world. As this process unfolds, automatic or primal processes are gradually replaced by conscious processes, and the person moves forward from generic responses to its environment and basic needs to an increasingly specific satisfaction of meaningful desires and intentions. In this way, all of the potentialities of human being can be explored, and the human person is able to express him/herself in creative self-articulation in the context of the lifeworld.

This activity cannot be undertaken in a vacuum. If the individual is to emerge into full-fledged consciousness, Tymieniecka avers, this must occur by means of the impetus of that context which stimulates “me” to move into an exploration of how I can expand meaning. In this schema, otherness (of the lifeworld, of other persons) is necessary to my development in and of meaning. It is not enough for me to bestow meanings on my actions, to articulate (to myself) a sense of significance. Meaning must also be ratified by the recognition of what is not-me. What is felt is experienced and given significance within the context of that otherness. Otherwise, the event would have no transcendent quality, and no possibility of founding meaning; I would merely spin in concentric, solipsistic circles of the same. Tymieniecka has expressed this well:

Full consciousness means not only the instinctive sharing of self-interest with other individuals, but also the propensity to expand one’s own individual meaningfulness into transactions with other individuals. The dominant limitation by the universal scheme of life … is broken down and recedes before the inventive function by which the individual devises his own way of existential self-expansion. This expansion may be accomplished only in transaction with others.

This intersubjective schema has been well traced in Western philosophy, from Fichte to Hegel to Levinas. Tymieniecka is not even the first woman