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Editor

Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics

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LEVINAS IN JERUSALEM: PHENOMENOLOGY, ETHICS, POLITICS, AESTHETICS

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FOREWORD[*]

Joëlle Hansel

Set out in his seminal work *Totality and Infinity* (1961), the thought of Emmanuel Levinas has elicited a plurality of interpretations for more than half a century. The impressive number of works—books, articles, dissertations—devoted to him in an unusually wide range of languages testifies to his impact.[1] Levinas studies are thus one of the most productive areas of modern philosophical research.

Today Levinas' works have received international acclaim. Their "ethical core"[2] has clearly played a major role. Topics such as the Other, the face, or for-the-other interjected a new vision of interpersonal relations into the landscape of contemporary philosophy. By defining ethics as "first philosophy" Levinas completely recast the classical concepts in the western philosophical tradition such as conscience, language, time, freedom, and, in his last works, God. An "inopportune" thinker, he went counter dominant intellectual trends, criticizing structuralism and psychoanalysis, and rehabilitating words such as "humanism", "peace", "goodness", "justice" and even "love". At the risk of being—erroneously—labeled a "religious thinker", he restored the texts of the Talmud to their rightful place among the greatest writings the human

[*] Translated from the French by Esther Singer.

[1] See the 200-page bibliography drawn up by the Center for Metaphysics and Philosophy of God (Catholic University of Louvain) under the supervision of Prof. Roger Burggraeve, and including works by or on Levinas published between 1929 and 1989.

[2] This is the title of the first part of a recent book by Jean-Michel Salanskis: *Levinas vivant*, Paris, 2006.

mind has ever produced. Ethics is that locus where the "philosophical eros"[3] of Levinasian thought emerges at its fullest.

Over the years, new research directions have emerged, as the studies presented in this volume so amply demonstrate. They were originally delivered as lectures at two international conferences that we organized at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Entitled "Levinas in Jerusalem: Philosophical Interpretations and Religious Perspectives" the conference that was held in 2002 attracted more than forty Israeli, French, Belgian, Dutch, German, Italian, English, Belarusian and American scholars. During the four-day conference, Levinas' works were discussed from different perspectives: phenomenology and the history of philosophy, moral and political philosophy, Jewish philosophy and Talmudic hermeneutics, Christian philosophy and theology, literature, and aesthetics. Levinas' relationship to such figures as Husserl and Heidegger were analyzed, as were his ties with contemporary French philosophers (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida) as well as with Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Yishayahu Leibovitz.

An evening entitled "Levinas, the Man" attracted an audience of more than 1000 to the main auditorium of the University. Prominent political and cultural figures delivered tributes, including Knesset member Colette Avital, and the French Ambassador to Israel at the time, the Honorable Jacques Huntzinger. Shalom Rosenberg, co-organizer of the conference, painted a portrait of Mr. Chouchani, the brilliant, mysterious mentor who introduced Levinas to the world of the Talmud. Georges Hansel retraced Levinas' personal and intellectual itinerary. Marie-Anne Lescourret, his biographer, situated the philosopher at the intersection of four cultures—Jewish, Russian, German and French.[4]

[3] Term used by Levinas' friend Jacob Gordin, who in 1934 referred to the "philosophical eros" of Maimonidean thought. See "L'actualité de Maïmonide" in J. Gordin, *Ecrits. Le renouveau de la pensée juive en France*, ed. M. Goldmann, Paris, 1995.

[4] Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris, 1994, 2006.

This conference—the first ever devoted exclusively to Levinas in Israel—highlighted the extent to which Levinasian studies have blossomed in this country. It also reflected the specificity of the way his work has been received in Israel, where it has taken on the all the features of a true sociological phenomenon. In a country characterized by its ethnic, cultural and religious plurality, the work of this European thinker has emerged as a unifying factor, championed by readers across the spectrum and from all ways of life. His vision of Judaism as rooted in traditional sources and open to the modern world resonates with many Israelis.

The second conference, which dealt with the relationship between ethics and politics, took place in June 2003. Devoted to one of the most promising areas in the field of Levinasian studies, it explored the key topics of the Third party, charity and justice, and law, as well as less well known areas such as the relationship of Levinas to Zionism and to the State of Israel.

In the spirit that so characterized the Jerusalem conferences, the texts we present here highlight the internal dynamics of Levinas' thought by taking its evolutions and transformations over more than sixty years of philosophical activity into account. From this angle, ethics is no longer a given, but rather the outcome of a trajectory which led Levinas from an initial solipsism to sociality, or from "Being" to "the Other".[5] By contrast to approaches that encapsulate him in one category—either "phenomenologist" or "Jewish thinker"—the authors here gave themselves a dual objective: to deal with Levinas as a philosopher without ever

[5] This is the subtitle Levinas gave to his study on Paul Celan that appeared in *Noms propres*. Also "from existence to existent" and "from existent to the Other", in Levinas' terminology (see "Signature", in *Difficult Freedom*). On the topic of the internal dynamics of Levinas' work, see my introduction in: Joelle Hansel (ed.), *Levinas. De l'Etre à l'Autre*, Paris, 2006.

denying his Jewish singularity[6] and to deal with his Jewishness without ever neglecting the philosophical dimension, in other words the universality of his thought.

The articles in this volume draw on the full range of Levinas' works: philosophical writings, "essays on Judaism",[7] Talmudic readings, commentaries on literary and poetic works, reflections on current events, polemical stances with respect to contemporary ideologies (structuralism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, ethnology, science of religions…). Alongside works that have become classics such as *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, texts less frequently explored by readers and commentators of Levinas also attracted the attention of the authors of this volume. This is the case for his early writings dating to 1930-1940, when the topics of ethics and Alterity had not yet emerged.

Aside from issues concerning ethics, the authors also deal with his political thought and his vision of history, as well as his often critical attitude towards art and aesthetics.

This volume has three parts: Philosophy and phenomenology, Ethics, politics and justice, Aesthetics and Eros. Key issues serve to bridge between the texts in each part: the relationship of Levinas to Husserl and Heidegger, the problem of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and alterity, the Third party, justice and the state, Zionism and the State of Israel, theology and religion, Levinas' Talmudic hermeneutics, his concept of Judaism.

[6] Levinas himself ascribed a specific meaning to this "Jewish singularity" by linking it to the category of being "chosen", interpreted not as a privilege, but rather as additional responsibility. See in particular "Assimilation and New Culture" in *L'Au-delà du verset* [*Beyond the Verse*], Paris, 1982.

[7] This is the subtitle of *Difficult Freedom*.

A simplistic interpretation which is still sometimes put forward is that Levinas wanted to bring Western metaphysics to an end. To those who claimed this was his intention, he responded with a touch of humor "it's like questioning the height of the Himalayas."[8] He then clarified, saying: "this philosophical teaching is so important, so essential. It demands so much that one must pass through it before starting another way." Even when shaking the pillars of western philosophical thought, Levinas never placed himself outside of it. His writings testify to his continual dialogue with Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger.

As of the beginning of his philosophical itinerary, Levinas adhered to the school of phenomenology, the topic of the first part of this book. In 1987, in the Preface to the German edition of *Totality and Infinity*, he specified further: "This book, which wishes and has the feel of phenomenological inspiration, comes from a lengthy frequentation of Husserl's texts and ceaseless attention to *Sein und Zeit*."[9] When discussing "the Presence of *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*," Jacques Taminiaux identifies the mark of Levinas' "ceaseless attention", but also his "critical resistance" to Heidegger's work. Going back to Levinas' early works, he shows how his "first retort to fundamental ontology"[10] which is hinted at in *L'Ontologie dans le temporel* (1940), is strengthened in the two key works he published just after the war: *Existence and Existents*, and *Time and the Other*. He also shows how *Totality and Infinity* stands opposed to *Sein und Zeit*, even in its structure and fundamental concepts.

Levinas' relationship to the theoretical was always ambivalent. In *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (1930) his very first book, he openly takes a Heideggerian stance by challenging

[8] "L'asymétrie du visage", Interview with France Guwy for Dutch television (1986), published in "Emmanuel Levinas, un philosophie de l'évasion", Yves Charles Zarka and Guy Petitdemange (ed.), *Cités*, 25, January, 2006, 117.

[9] Translated by Jacques Taminiaux.

[10] See the title of Taminiaux's article: "La première réplique à l'ontologie fondamentale", *Emmanuel Levinas*, L'Herne, Paris, 1991.

the primacy that Husserl assigns to the theoretical over the ontological. Ten years later, in "The Work of Edmund Husserl",[11] he switches positions. The primacy of the theoretical becomes the source of "liberal inspiration" that constitutes the life of the spirit, the essence of western spirituality. The "philosophy of freedom" championed by Husserl is radically contrasted with Heidegger's philosophy of fate, "where man is submerged by existence." In his later writings where he presents his ethics of alterity, Levinas challenges Husserl's model of knowledge—the correlation between thought and its object, the noetic-noematic correlation—without ever denying their validity to the sciences or technology.[12] He thus breaks not only with Heidegger but also with all reactionary temptations of a return to the land and peasant roots.

Levinas' justification of rationality, and his positive attitude towards the sciences form the basis for the article by Jean-Michel Salanskis. By analyzing a range of his writings—phenomenology, thought and ethical metaphysics, and "religious" writings—Salanskis shows how the theoretical comes—every time—"to the rescue of Levinas."

Simon Critchley discusses the way Levinas wanted to "leave the climate of that philosophy"—the philosophy of Martin Heidegger—without however returning to a "pre-Heideggerian" philosophy. Drawing on the preliminary essays leading up to *Totality and Infinity*—"*l'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?*" (1951)—he describes the ethical relationship with the Other that, unlike the relationship to Being, cannot be reduced to "comprehension" or to "knowledge". Using Hilary Putnam's distinction between "legislators" and "moral perfectionists" Critchley enters into a critical examination of Levinasian ethics by comparing it to ethical theories in Anglo-American philosophy (Stanley Cavell in particular).

[11] "L'oeuvre d'Edmond Husserl", *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger*, 65 (1940), 33-85. Reprinted in: *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (1949), 7-52.

[12] See "Heidegger, Gagarin and us" (in *Difficult Freedom*), one of the most moving tributes to technology.

Part Two of this volume is devoted to one of the most original facets of Levinas' works: his positive attitude towards politics. Even though Levinas made ethics the "first philosophy" he never scorned the domain of collective political action. The priority of the rights of the Other means that I must have concern for the Third party, the third, the fourth, the fifth person who are also my counterparts.

The Levinasian approach nevertheless raises certain thorny issues. How can we explain, for example, that this reassessment of politics is found—notably—in *Otherwise than Being*, a book where the ethical requirement takes a hyperbolic turn, obligating me to expiate for the faults of the Other, even dying for him? How is Levinas able to link "charity" and "justice"—the infinity of my responsibility for the Other and the calculations which orchestrate the political order?

To clarify these issues, Georges Hansel retraces the development of Levinas' political thought, from *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* (1934) to his mature works. By situating this development in the context of the evolution of his thought and his "ethical core", he sheds light on a crucial difference between the status of politics in *Totality and Infinity* and in *Otherwise than Being*. In *Totality and Infinity*, ethics has "broken with politics". As Thomas Hobbes believed, the functions of institutions which govern society only consist of curbing man's natural animal instincts. By contrast, in *Otherwise than Being*, "the ethical order itself requires political rationality". The positive impact of politics can be seen in my responsibility for the Third Party who interjects equality and reciprocity into human relations.

Pascal Delhom and Annette Aronowicz discuss the theme of the State, dealing respectively with Levinas' philosophical writings and his Talmudic readings. Starting from the classic issue of the need for and the legitimacy of the State, Delhom analyzes the changes in the concept of responsibility which occur when the Third Party is involved. This

prompts a critical question: "What do I have to do with justice?"[13] Delhom finds the root of this change in "The Ego and the Totality" (1954) one of Levinas' early texts, and analyzes its extension in *Totality and Infinity*. The issue of the legitimacy of violence exercised by the State leads him to a comparison between Levinasian politics and that of the Contract theoreticians, in particular Hobbes.

The issue of "legitimate violence" is also at the center of Annette Aronowicz's exploration of the Talmudic reading entitled "Judaism and Revolution" (1969). Levinas' text is a remarkable attempt to reflect on the conditions for politics as found in Talmudic sources. There is a rather surprising confrontation between the thought of the Talmudic Sages and that of the Marxist revolutionaries of May 1968. Noting the ambivalence of Levinas' stance regarding politics—his proximity and his distance—Aronowicz suggests it is an expression of a "tension between the particularity of the Jewish tradition—its irreducibility to a common truth—and its universality—precisely its application or relevance to all human beings."

Francois Coppens' article also deals with Levinasian politics. Coppens examines the way Levinas defines the relationship between "political reason" and "prophecy" as well as the meaning he ascribes to the canonical formula "Athens and Jerusalem". Rejecting interpretations which, from Tertullien to Leo Strauss, viewed the relationship between the two cities as an irreducible conflict, he shows how Levinas considered the articulation of ethical concern for the Other with "law, politics, and the need for justice." By using the key notion of an-archy, Coppens examines three key issues in *Otherwise than Being*: subjectivity and conscience, philosophy and discourse, and the question of government.

[13] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, translated by Alphonse Lingis, The Hague, 1981, 157.

The articles by Joelle Hansel and Peter Atterton deal with the issue of justice. J. Hansel shows how the tension between ethics or the order of the infinite, and politics or the order of measure expresses a duality inherent to the Levinasian notion of justice. She differentiates two parallel movements in the development of his thought: the first movement—from *Existence and Existents* to *Totality and Infinity*—corresponds to "messianic justice", infinite and incommensurate, synonymous with charity; the second movement—from *Time and the Other* to *Otherwise than Being*—is that of Greek justice which is located in the realm of measure and proportion. J. Hansel situates the Levinasian concept of justice within the history of philosophy, by comparing it to that of Aristotle and above all, Bergson who was close to Levinas as of his student days at the University of Strasbourg.

Peter Atterton looks once again at the problem of legitimacy of violence by contrasting ethics with justice and with law. Based on texts written after *Totality and Infinity*, he reconstitutes the line of argument Levinas employs to justify the use of violence in cases when the rights of the Third Party must be defended. By so doing he highlights the constant interaction between ethics and justice: justice moderates the infinity of responsibility for the Other in order to respect the Third party; ethics remains the cornerstone of politics, thus preventing it from degenerating into totalitarianism.

The articles by Francesca Albertini and Hanoch Ben Pazi which form the third and last part of this volume deal with the Levinasian concept of art and aesthetics, Eros and the feminine. The existence of a Levinasian theory of aesthetics has elicited controversy and debate. When reading his early works, one is struck by the severity of his criticism of the fine arts—painting and music. Art is a mere "shadow" of reality; the artist's activity—the painter or musician—is besmirched with irresponsibility. Albertini analyzes the evolution in Levinas' attitude which, negative up until *Totality and Infinity*, gradually changes, as aesthetics little by little opens up to ethics through a gesture which is reminiscent of that in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. She finds elements of this

reassessment of art in the third section of *Totality and Infinity*, entitled "Face and Exteriority". She illustrates this by an analysis of Levinas' discussion of the phenomenology of Eros at the end of this book.

Hanoch Ben Pazi pursues the analysis of Eros in Levinasian thought by concentrating on the theme of the Feminine, and the ethical implications of motifs such as pregnancy and motherhood. Describing the recent changes in feminism and its reevaluation of motherhood, he draws a parallel between the Levinasian concept and the vision of pregnancy as a state where "consciousness is directed toward the Other". He also examines the nature of the Levinasian tie between teaching and parenthood, a term which he never reduces to its biological meaning alone. Drawing on philosophical writings and on Levinas' Talmudic readings, and comparing them with Freud and Winnicot, Ben Pazi shows how "the internalization of feminine aspects" operates through teaching or education.

The Levinas Conferences in 2002 and 2003[14] made a significant contribution to the expansion of Levinasian studies in Israel. Today, a growing number of works have been devoted to Levinas both by well-known scholars and PhD students. More of his works have been translated, enabling an increasingly larger proportion of the public to have access to his writings, and making him an integral part of the Israeli intellectual and cultural landscape.

[14] My heartful thanks to my co-organizers: Shalom Rosenberg (Hebrew University), Richard A. Cohen (University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA), Jeffrey A. Barash (Université de Picardie, Amiens, France). The 2002 conference was made possible thanks to the support of the following institutions: Centre Raissa et Emmanuel Levinas, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Centre Desmarais de Recherche sur la Culture Française), Keshet Foundation (New York), Institut Français de Tel Aviv (French Embassy in Israel), Centre de Recherche Français de Jérusalem (CRFJ), Municipality of Jerusalem, Ministère de la Recherche (Paris), Fonds Social Juif Unifié, Fondation Alain de Rotschild, Alliance Israélite Universelle. Some of these institutions also supported the 2003 Levinas Conference.

In January 2006, we organized an international conference entitled "A Century with Levinas: Resonances of a Philosophy" at the Hebrew University (Institute for Advanced Studies).[15] For a week, more than fifty speakers from Israel, Europe, North America and South America dealt with Levinas' works. This conference was the first event in the series of international venues in "A Century with Levinas"[16] which were held in 13 countries throughout 2006. Like the other conferences for the centennial, the interdisciplinary of the Jerusalem conference was striking, as was its openness to the new generation of students and young researchers. It contributed to the emergence of "another Levinas",[17] the author of a work whose political, aesthetic, linguistic, historical and Jewish dimensions have yet to be explored.

We strongly hope that this book reflects the vitality of Levinas' thought as well as the impact of his work in Israel.

[15] My heartful thanks to my co-organizers: Shalom Rosenberg (Hebrew University), Marie-Anne Lescourret (Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, France), Shmuel Wygoda (Herzog College of Jewish Studies and Hebrew University) and Cyril Aslanov (Hebrew University). This conference was supported by the following institutions: Conference Committee and Forum Europa (Hebrew University), Fonds Social Juif Unifié, Keshet Foundation (New York), Les Amis de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem (Paris), Institut français de Tel Aviv, French Embassy in Israel, Royal Netherlands Embassy in Israel, Centre de Recherche Français de Jérusalem (CRFJ), Communauté française de Belgique, Communauté flamande de Belgique, ACCEL (Committee for the Celebration of E. Levinas Centenary), MOFET-Raissa and Emmanuel Levinas Center (Jerusalem), the Levinas Ethical Legacy Foundation (LELF, USA).

[16] This program was coordinated jointly by three institutions: Raissa et Emmanuel Levinas Center (Jerusalem), Committee for the Celebration of E. Levinas' Centenary (ACCEL, Paris) and the Levinas Ethical Legacy Foundation (LELF, New York).

[17] Term used by Marie-Anne Lescourret, the author of the biography of Levinas mentioned above.

PART ONE: PHENOMENOLOGY

THE PRESENCE OF *BEING AND TIME* IN *TOTALITY AND INFINITY*

Jacques Taminiaux

Levinas in his preface to the German translation of *Totality and Infinity* wrote the following: "This book which wants and feels to be of a phenomenological inspiration proceeds from a long frequentation of Husserl's texts and from paying a ceaseless attention to *Sein und Zeit*" (my translation). The topic of my paper is going to be that "ceaseless attention" that Levinas paid to *Being and Time* as he was preparing *Totality and Infinity*. The word "ceaseless" not only suggests that a debate with Heidegger thoroughly pervades Levinas' book but also that the debate at stake had already occurred in Levinas' work before the publication of *Totality and Infinity*. Consequently I am invited to divide my analysis into two stages. In a first stage, I will try to find out evidence of a debate with Heidegger in the early work of Levinas, before *Totality and Infinity*. In a second stage, I'll try to display the major signs of an attention paid to *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*.

Since Levinas himself devotes more than hundred pages of the first section of *Totality and Infinity* to define basic concepts and principles of his investigation, I'll try first to contrast those concepts and principles with Heidegger's own concepts and principles in the investigation carried out by him in *Being and Time*. Secondly, in the light of such contrast I'll try to show briefly how the debate with Heidegger operates on the level of concrete descriptions.

1. The Debate with Heidegger Before Totality and Infinity

In order to scrutinize the traces of a debate with Heidegger in the early work of Levinas, allow me to focus primarily on one of the two essays published by him in the years following the end of World War II, essays thanks to which he imposed himself as an original thinker in the French phenomenological movement which was winning fame through the works of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Those two works are *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*. I would like to suggest that the very titles of those short books already demonstrate a deep attention as well as a strong resistance to Heidegger who was arguing in *Being and Time* in reverse terms, by which I mean in terms of a movement *from the existent to existence* and in terms of *Time and the Self*.

As a matter of fact that resistance within the admiring attention was already anticipated, several years before, in a text written by Levinas in 1940 on what he called "L'ontologie dans le temporel" ("Ontology in the Temporal"), and conceived as an introduction to *Being and Time* for the students of Jean Wahl, professor at the Sorbonne. The text has not aged at all. It combines close attention and critical resistance.

Close attention to the extent that it is focused indeed on the only primordial question of Heidegger's investigation: the question of the sense of Being, and on the answer given to the question by the Heideggerian analysis of the structures of the comportment of human beings, whose essence is to be there, thrown in their own existence and temporally projected toward their end.

But the close attention is combined with a *critical resistance*. Indeed Levinas concludes his careful presentation by pointing out two essential flaws of Heidegger's new ontology:

1. The shutting of all "window upon the eternal";

2. The fact that the predominance of the ontological is such that the relation to the other is no longer fundamental. Indeed, I quote: "The ontological question is raised within the Same,

> this Self who by existing has a relationship with Being as his own Being",[1] which means that the ontological problematic develops itself within the boundaries of an exclusive Selfhood. Levinas writes in the same context: "In the original time, or in Being towards death, (Heidegger's ontology) discovers the nothingness upon which it is based, which means that it rests upon nothing else than itself."

On close inspection the reader who happens to know the further development of Levinas' thought is compelled to observe that the emphasis put on those two flaws already sketches the main lines of a debate with Heidegger. I believe that those main lines can be expressed by the following questions: Is the relationship of an existing being to Being primordially an inner relation between that being and its ownmost Being? If it is the case indeed, does it mean that the relation to the Other is in no way fundamental? More concretely, if it is true that such an inner relationship between a being and Being is grounded upon the ownmost temporality of that existing being, am I supposed to claim that time is something that I give to myself without any involvement of a gift coming from the other? Or—to put the issue in ethical terms—if what is fundamental is my inner relationship with my ownmost Being, does this primordial ontological Selfhood entail that my first obligation is towards myself, and consequently that my obligation towards the Other comes second as a merely ontical derivation of a selfish ontological obligation?

Those questions are at the background of the post-war publications of Levinas before *Totality and Infinity*. They play, however implicit they might remain in the text, a decisive role in both *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*.

Let me focus on *Existence and Existents* in order to find evidence of a debate with Heidegger around the questions I just mentioned. The key concept introduced by Levinas in that little book is "hypostase": *hypostasis*. For those who are acquainted with Heidegger's analytic of

[1] "L'ontologie dans le temporel", in: *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris, 1994, 89.

Dasein, the word hypostasis immediately evokes an echo to the key word used by Heidegger in order to characterize the mode of being called Dasein, i.e. the word *ek-stasis*. According to Heidegger, the own-most relationship of an existing individual to its existence is *ek-static*. This is what Levinas criticizes. He writes: "The idea which seems to rule Heidegger's interpretation of human existence consists in conceiving existence as ekstasis, possibility, consequently exclusively as an ekstasis towards the end".[2] This is precisely the target of his critical reflections which, as he says, "are governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy".[3]

However Levinas insists that his point is not at all to leave that climate "for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian". And he acknowledges at the beginning of his investigation that Heidegger is right when he teaches that the relation between a being and Being in the verbal sense of the word should be taken seriously in all the strength of its relational character. Accordingly Levinas acknowledges his debt with regard to Heidegger: "At the beginning, our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being".[4]

In other words, Levinas agrees with Heidegger as far as the concept of ontology is concerned. The task of ontology is not the task of a superscience defining the ultimate properties of all beings and characterizing their relations. The task is to ask what it means to be, a question that only makes sense for the human being, a question which points to a relation between a being, or an existent, and its Being or its existence.

But it is one thing to agree with Heidegger on this formal concept. It is quite another thing to agree with Heidegger's definition of the relation existent-existence in ekstatic terms.

[2] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Dordrecht-Boston-London, 1995, 4. The author has modified the English translation. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, Paris, 1978, 19.)

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

At close inspection, it turns out that the very title of Levinas' short book *De l'existence à l'existant* expresses his disagreement. Indeed the title, as I was suggesting, indicates a reversal of Heidegger's problematic. Levinas' title indicates a process, a transition, a move from one point to another point. The move at stake in Heidegger's ontology is not from existing to the existent but the reverse: from existent to existence, which means in his frame of thought from an existing human being who finds himself thrown among other beings and whose mode of being is at first determined from without and not properly his own —*uneigentlich*—towards a mode of being which is his ownmost possibility, and becomes authentic by facing his finite and mortal temporality. Or, to use the language of Levinas at that time, the move at stake in Heidegger's ontology takes place as a transition from a condition which is the condition of a *substantive* towards a purely *verbal* condition: *das Dasein existiert umwillen seines*, Dasein exists for the sake of its own existing. By contrast, the title chosen by Levinas for his book of 1947 indicates a transition from a condition which is initially verbal to the condition of a substantive.

But of course in order for that reverse transition to make sense, the point is to understand what verb and substantive mean in Levinas' own problematic. His title suggests that the human being emerges as a substantive out of a condition which is initially verbal. It is here that the notion of *hypostasis* plays a decisive role. The word hypostasis which is Greek literally means "staying under". In the history of philosophy the word was of frequent use in neo-Platonism and especially in Christian neo-Platonism where it designated the status of the created in its relation to the creator. The creator, in neo-Platonism, was taken to be a pure verb whose essence is to exist whereas the created, at several levels, merely derives from that source in a limited manner which is an *hypostasis* of the divine. The created is a substantive refracting the pure verb under which it stays.

Likewise the *hypostasis* in Levinas' sense of the word is a relational notion. But the relation designated by the word does not take place between a divine verb and a substantive refracting it. The relation at stake in Levinas' use of the word is the emergence of the human substantive, an *existent* out of a verb which is strictly anonymous, neutral,

impersonal, called in French: *il y a, there is*. By naming hypostasis the primary relation between an existent and existence, Levinas means that the human being emerges first of all from an anonymous flow of existence under which he stays, to which he is intimately submitted and which again and again is experienced by him as a load, a burden he has to sustain.

I believe that the notion was chosen by Levinas as a phenomenological reply to Heidegger's notion of ekstasis. The notion is meant to draw attention to a relation to existence which is overlooked by Heidegger's emphasis on ekstasis.

Indeed the relation existent-existence called hypostasis takes place beneath all intentionality either as understood by Husserl in terms of a noetic-noematic correlation characterizing consciousness or as understood by Heidegger in terms of a project characterizing Dasein.

Because hypostasis as a relation of staying under the burden of the *there is* escapes all intentionality, it can only be approached in situations which cannot be described according to the bi-polar structure *intention-intended*. Among those situations we find for example *fatigue*, *laziness*, *insomnia*. It is easy to observe that those situations have no place whatsoever in Heidegger's analytic of Dasein for the simple reason that they escape all intentional project. Nobody can project to be weary or insomniac. Those states are frequently considered to fall exclusively within the province of psychology or physiology. Levinas shows that they denote a basic situation of the human existent in his relation to existence. Fatigue reveals that existence is a burden for the existent. Laziness as the impossibility to start anything reveals an inner inhibition at the core of any beginning. Insomnia as a state of dispossession of oneself and of subjection to the mere repetition of an empty present reveals that the existent is innerly submitted to the anonymous factuality of the *there is*. It is important to notice that in all those states the present is experienced as disconnected, resisting to a projection towards the future. In other words those situations are in no way ekstatic in Heidegger's sense. And indeed by referring to those situations, Levinas wants to detect the specific features of an *hypostasis* opposed to all *ek-stasis*.

Allow me to recall the contrast between those features and the features of Heidegger's *ekstasis*. The very title of Levinas' analysis of the features of hypostasis is already very significant as far as the contrast is concerned. The title is *position*. It means that it is always at some place, here, that an individual emerges from the anonymous *there is*. Whereas Heidegger defines the individual existent as a *there-being*, Levinas defines it as a *here-being*. The Da of Da-sein is right-away absorbed in an ek-static movement. Levinas objects that the emphasis put on such movement overlooks what he calls the position of consciousness.

This is why he writes: "The here that belongs to consciousness, the place of its sleep and of its escape into itself, is radically different from the Da involved in Heidegger's Dasein. The latter already implies the world. The *here* we are starting with, the here of position, precedes every act of understanding, every horizon and all time."[5]

Along with a primordial localisation, position denotes a primordial embodiment of the singular existent emerging from the anonymous *there is*. On this again there is a striking contrast with Heidegger. Because he conceives of immediacy as the projection of an individual upon an articulated world in which the point is to produce results, the embodiment of the existent is almost overlooked. It only appears marginally through words like *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* which designate the way things appear within the frame of everyday concern: they appear ready to hand or present at hand. The very use of these key words demonstrates that Heidegger considers the body only in terms of mean for grasping, holding, controlling. By contrast, Levinas insists that "the place before being the concrete surroundings of the Heideggerian world is a basis thanks to which the body is the very event of consciousness".[6]

Essentially linked to a *body*, position is essentially linked to the *present* as well. Levinas insists that the present of position "refers only to itself, starts with itself, is impervious to the future".[7] And he explic-

[5] *Existence and Existents,* 68. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 121.)
[6] *Existence and Existents,* 69. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 122.)
[7] *Existence and Existents,* 71. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 125.)

itly objects to Heidegger when he writes that the instant "is devoid of the power to be beyond itself". Whereas Heidegger claimed that the open-ness to a future defined the relationship of a Dasein to Being, Levinas claims: "It is really the instant that is the accomplishment of existence (...)" and he specifies: "of itself an instant is a relationship (...) although this relationship does not refer to any future or past, nor to any being situated in the future".[8]

In other words, the self-referential character of the present is such that it is deprived of all ek-static dimension. Position, linked to a body and to the present, indicates what Levinas calls "the definitive character of my very existence", "the fact that I am forever stuck to myself. And this element is my solitude".[9] By itself the present cannot open a future. By itself it is irrevocably encapsulated in the subjectivity of an ego.

In order for time to emerge as a dimension of openness in which the overcoming of the irrevocable is possible, the encapsulation of the ego upon itself has to be broken.

Here we brush the issue dealt with by Levinas in his second book: *Time and the Other*. Essentially enclosed within itself, the existent, in the hypostasis, experiences "the need for time as for a miraculous fecundity of the instant itself, by which he recommences as other".[10] But the otherness of time cannot come from the self; it is not a dialectical reversal within the Self. "The impossibility of constituting time dialectically is the impossibility of saving oneself by oneself and of saving oneself alone". Therefore one cannot claim, as Heidegger does, that the solitary subject is able to deny and transcend itself, that it is pervaded by negativity. The alterity, or otherness inherent to time, the "renewal that time brings is not an event which can be accounted for by the monad of the Self: it comes to me only from the other" qua other.[11]

[8] *Existence and Existents,* 75. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 130.)
[9] *Existence and Existents,* 85. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 144.)
[10] *Existence and Existents,* 95. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 159).
[11] *Existence and Existents,* 95-96. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 160).

Here again the contrast with Heidegger is striking. When Levinas insists that sociality and time are inseparable, the sociality he has in view is not Heidegger's *mitsein*. Indeed *being-with* instead of breaking solitude merely expands solitude, whereas sociality in Levinas' sense is not being with another but "facing" another. It is not, as he says, a participation in a third term: "It is the face-to-face situation of a relationship without intermediary, without mediation" [12]

2. The Debate with Heidegger In Totality and Infinity

I now reach the second step of my presentation: the debate with Heidegger in *Totality and Infinity*. As I said, the first section of the book outlines the basic concepts and principles of the entire investigation carried out in that work.

The title of the section is "Le Même et l'Autre", The Same/Self and the Other.

The section is divided into three parts:

A. *Metaphysics* and *Transcendence*
B. Separation and *Discourse*
C. *Truth* and Justice

In each of these subtitles there is at least one word which also belongs to Heidegger's language and which designates a key topic of *Being and Time*. Consequently we may surmise that in each section a debate with Heidegger is at stake.

A. Right at the beginning of subsection A, Levinas quotes a verse of Rimbaud: "The true life is absent" and he adds the following: "But we are in the world. Metaphysics arises and persists in that *alibi*. It is turned towards the 'elsewhere', the 'otherwise', and the 'other'". This metaphorical introduction is meant to provide the most general characterization of *metaphysics* in the history of thought. *Metaphysics* is a

[12] *Existence and Existents,* 98. (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 162.)

movement from a condition of being at home with oneself in the world towards an outside of oneself. To that extent metaphysics, before being a doctrine, is a desire for the other, as Plato has already acknowledged. But traditionally the desire for the other pervading metaphysics was taken to be a desire for another home. In other words being at home was at the beginning of the metaphysical movement and at the end as well. Accordingly the metaphysical movement was like an Odyssey, a circular movement longing for a return on a higher level supposedly offered to a view, thanks to which the desiring metaphysician, i.e. the human being as such, truly becomes itself. So understood the metaphysical desire is aiming to a full visibility through which thought reaches an achievement.

Levinas fully agrees with the notion of a metaphysical desire as a desire for the other but he fully disagrees with the supposed accomplishment and satisfaction of that desire in a final visibility. Metaphysics, he says, is *désir de l'invisible*. The other is not at all offered to a vision of the Self. It is desired as invisible.

Hence the meaning of the word *transcendence* in Levinas use of it. Since the metaphysical desire aims to the otherness of the other without possible satisfaction or fulfillment in an ultimate vision, the movement of such desire is transcendence. The word designates an elevation. It is a "transascendence",[13] Levinas says. Transascendence is a relation between myself and the absolute exteriority of the other which is such that the Self and the Other cannot be part of a visible totality in which their relation would be symmetrical and reversible. In other words, transascendence is a "breach of totality".[14]

Upon close inspection it appears that a confrontation with Heidegger is involved in that characterization of metaphysics and of transcendence. The confrontation is, so to speak, condensed in Levinas' strong formula: "Metaphysics precedes ontology". Metaphysics has precedence over ontology. By contrast, Heidegger claims that metaphysics accomplishes itself in ontology, that is in the *vision* attainable by the human

[13] *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1969, 35.
[14] *Ibid.*

Dasein of what it means to be. The Greek word for vision is *theoria*. Heidegger again and again insists in *Being and Time* on the precedence of the *bios theoretikos*, contemplation as the highest way of life.

In Levinas' analysis the trouble with *theoria* is that it does not fit with metaphysical desire because it does not respect the alterity of the other. To be sure it claims to let what it contemplates manifest itself for its own sake but since its contemplation is a matter of understanding it always renounces the marvel of exteriority by absorbing the other into the Self thanks to a third term that the knowing subject finds in itself. So does Heidegger's ontology by finding the key to the meaning of Being in my own temporality. The primacy of the question of Being in Heidegger's thought leads to a self-sufficiency, to egoism. Metaphysical desire as understood by Heidegger is a desire to be properly myself to the detriment of the Other. Ontology is an Egology.

This is what confirms Heidegger's notion of *transcendence*. Transcendence in *Being and Time* is not a movement of elevation towards the other but a movement through which the individual Dasein, by overcoming what is not properly its own, elevates itself to an insight into what is exclusively its own, its ownmost possibility, the possibility of its own death. Dasein becomes authentic by confronting its own mortality. Transcendence in Heidegger's sense is essentially a return to the Selfhood of the Self. It is a totalization.

According to Levinas there is only one way for transcendence to avoid that totalization, to be a breach of totality: it is by being *ethical*, by acknowledging the primacy of the Other over the Self.

To say that *Metaphysics precedes ontology* amounts to claim that *Ethics precedes ontology*, whereas in Heidegger ontology precedes ethics. Levinas used to quote repeatedly Plato's famous formula: *to agathon epekeina tès ousias* and to translate it into: *the Good is beyond Being*. It is significant that Heidegger also used to quote repeatedly the same formula but to deprive the motto of an essentially ethical connotation by reading it as meaning *Being is beyond beings*. In other words what is at stake in Plato's formula for Heidegger is merely my elevation towards my ownmost possibility, not at all my elevation to the height of the Other.

Or to put it differently, what is at stake in Plato's formula according to Heidegger is my ability to attain freedom by overcoming by myself what is not properly my own, my attachment to beings other than myself and even my attachment to myself as a being given among other beings. This is what Levinas criticizes when he writes about Heidegger: "The relation to Being which operates as ontology neutralizes beings in order to understand them. Hence it is not a relation to the other qua other, but a reduction of the other to the sameness of the Self. Such is the definition of freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, in spite of all relation with the other, to ensure the autarchy of the Ego. Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power".[15] By contrast, what is at stake in Plato's motto according to Levinas is the putting into question of my power by the ethical command coming from the other; in other words, it is not the increasement of my spontaneity but the investiture of my freedom by the other, the justification of my freedom by the other.

B. Let me consider now the second division of *Totality and Infinity*, which bears the title: "Separation and Discourse". The French word "discours" used by Levinas and correctly translated into discourse, is the equivalent of the German word *Rede* which plays an important role in *Being and Time*'s analytic of Dasein. According to Heidegger, discourse is an *existential*, i.e. an ontological basic characteristic of existence. That is the way Heidegger retrieves Aristotle's definition of the human being as *zoon logon echon*, as a living being who has the gift of speaking.

In his peculiar reappropriation of Aristotle's notion of *logos*, Heidegger contends that discourse is essentially *apophantic*, which means that it reveals something, it discloses what it talks about; the topic of discourse is a theme made visible to the speaker and to his listeners thanks to words which bestow a determination, a form to what is talked about. Hence speaking is primarily speaking about something, and listening to a speaker is primarily gaining access to the visibility of a subject-matter about which listener and speaker can agree.

[15] *Totality and Infinity*, 45-46.

It is to be noticed that according to this reading of the Greek *logos*, discourse does not address itself to someone invoked but to a theme that one evokes and about which one discusses. It is no less remarkable that, according to this reappropriation within an ontological framework, discourse is the mediator of a vision of beings and more deeply a vision of the meaning of Being. Indeed in *Being and Time* vision operates at two levels: the level of everydayness on which we see the meaning of entities around us according to our usual concern, and the level of authenticity in which discourse reaches its accomplishment in the silent call that my Dasein gives to itself in order to take up its ownmost possibility: mortality. Consequently discourse in its essence is not only a monologue but a mere preamble to a transparent sight of oneself by oneself.

The very title chosen by Levinas for the introduction to his notion of discourse is extremely significant of a contrast with Heidegger's characterization of discourse. The title suggests that discourse occurs and is made possible by a situation of separation between the Self and the Other. Whereas discourse in Heidegger's sense is made possible by the ability for the Self to have access to the Other, i.e. for the speaker—either individually or in community—to render the world visible and to seize it as a subject-matter offered to a view.

The primary situation of discourse in Levinas sense is a separation between myself and the other human being, a *face-to-face* situation. Speaking is primordially *speaking to* someone else. Instead, in Heidegger's notion of it, speaking is primordially *speaking about* entities, about beings, either *with* oneself or with a member of the same speaking community.

Let's consider Levinas' description of separation. In the separation involved there are two terms: the Self and the Other. As such the Self, i.e. the ego is selfish. Its mode of being is economic, searching satisfaction of needs, enjoying what is offered to it, considering what surrounds it as a supply corresponding to its own demand. Moreover the Self is autonomous and even autarchic; imposing its own law, enlarging its rule. As such the selfhood is a totalization, it includes everything in its realm, asserts an absolute independence, and thoroughly ignores the Other. But there are two terms. The Other breaks the Totality of the

Self by overflowing absolutely the capacities that the Self *a priori* contains. Coming face-to-face vis-à-vis the Self, the Other is an Infinity installing in the Self a desire which is in no way a need to be satisfied, because it is submitted to an appeal, a call, an interpellation which again and again puts the Self into question instead of providing an answer to its wishes.

This situation of separation between the Totality of the Self and the Infinity of the Other is the birthplace of discourse. What is primordial in discourse is the interpellation of the Self by the Other. Such interpellation is not at all the offering by the Other of a meaning for which I find in myself a key. It is not the disclosure of a theme corresponding to my disclosing project.

Against Heidegger, Levinas insists that invocation, this "saying to the other ... precedes ontology." It also precedes all disclosing for the way in which the other presents itself, the face of the other "does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze". As Levinas writes, the face of the other "at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me with". Instead expressing a theme, the face of the other manifests itself *kat auto*, as such, absolutely, "it expresses itself", period. And it is of course Heidegger whom Levinas has in mind when he writes: "The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being".[16] Or: "The absolute experience is not unconcealment but revelation: coincidence of the expressed and the one who is expressing".

Unconcealment, dévoilement, these words translate a key word in *Being and Time*: Unverborgenheit which is Heidegger's translation of the Greek word for truth: *aletheia*.

C. We thus reach the topic of the third division of the first section of *Totality and Infinity*. Indeed the title of the third division is "Vérité et Justice", "Truth and Justice".

[16] *Totality and Infinity*, 51.

This subtitle, by introducing *a link between truth and justice* right away suggests once again a debate with Heidegger. Indeed the issue of truth as disclosedness is everywhere at stake in *Being and Time* but justice is nowhere mentioned in the book. The word justice does not even appear in the very careful index of the English translation.

Moreover when Heidegger in the wake of *Being and Time* devoted an essay to defining the essence of truth, the link he focused upon was not "Truth and Justice", but "Truth and Freedom", by which he meant the resoluteness by which Dasein faces its ownmost Selfhood: being towards death.

Let me pay attention to the first subdivision in Levinas' study of the link between Truth and Justice. The title of that first subdivision is significant enough: "Freedom called into question".

The phrasing could fit with Heidegger's problematic if, but only if, it meant that Dasein's resoluteness in the confrontation with its own mortality is able again and again to put itself into question by reversing the everyday tendency to fall away from authenticity and to pay more attention to ordinary preoccupations than to its authentic selfhood. But it is precisely not what is meant by Levinas' phrase. On the contrary, for Levinas, the freedom of the Self is unable on its own to call itself into question: it is called *into question by the Other*. That calling into question occurs in the face-to-face with the Other, a face-to-face which is at the foundation of justice. Indeed the primordial meaning of justice is what Levinas calls: la "droiture de l'accueil fait au visage", the "uprightness of the welcome made to the face".[17]

The calling into question of my freedom by the Other depends on my subordination to the Infinity of the Other who "presents himself as interlocutor, as him on whom I am not allowed to have power, whom I am not allowed to kill", thereby conditioning "this shame where, qua I, I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer".[18] Hence "it is the welcome of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness,

[17] *Totality and Infinity*, 82.
[18] *Totality and Infinity*, 84.

which calls in question my freedom",[19] entails the awareness that my spontaneity is of itself arbitrary and that only the Other can invest or justify my freedom.

In this context, Levinas writes, in a clear allusion to the existentialism of Heidegger (and Sartre): "Existence is not in reality condemned to freedom, but is invested as freedom. Freedom is not bare. To philosophize is to trace freedom back to what lies before it, to disclose the investiture that liberates freedom from the arbitrary".[20]

But beyond the allusion we do find in this context an explicit objection to Heidegger. Indeed Levinas writes: "We therefore are ... radically opposed to Heidegger who subordinates the relation with the Other to ontology (which moreover he determines as though the relation with the interlocutor and the Master could be reduced to it) rather than seeing in justice and injustice a primordial access to the Other beyond all ontology".[21] What is primordial in Heidegger's ontology is the relation of the Selfhood of Dasein to Being; and the other is there taken into consideration marginally with respect to the ontological relation in such a way that the ethical is either ontologicized or reduced to the ontic. By contrast, what is primordial for Levinas is not ontological but ethical. Justice, not Being, is the origin of truth. Truth presupposes Justice.

Allow me to focus briefly on the points in Levinas' argument which obviously target Heidegger. There is, according to Levinas, a traditional conception of truth that Heidegger does not overcome in spite of all his deconstruction of truth as adequacy and his attempt to define truth in terms of unconcealment. That traditional conception refers truth to an ultimate spectator characterized as a solitary Ego. Whatever the differences between the Cartesian *Cogito* and the Heideggerian *Dasein*, between the universal doubt and the *epokhè* of everydayness, in both cases solipsism is part of the definition of the core of the problematic. But Levinas discovers in the negativity of the Cartesian doubt a lesson he doesn't find in the negativity of Heidegger's transcendence. He

[19] *Ibid.*
[20] *Totality and Infinity*, 84-85.
[21] *Totality and Infinity*, 89.

insists that Descartes "possesses the idea of infinity, and can gauge in advance the return of affirmation behind the negation. But to possess the idea of infinity is to have already welcomed the Other".[22] There is no trace of that welcoming in Heidegger's analytic of Dasein. Whereas Descartes puts the infinity of the Other at the very foundation of the appearing of the world, that appearing such as it is described by Heidegger depends exclusively on the disclosing project of the Self and his solitary *logos*. By contrast, Levinas writes this: "The world is offered in the language of the Other; it is borne by propositions. The Other is the principle of phenomena".[23]

Here hermeneutics reappears but as an hermeneutics which radically breaks with the totalizing circle of selfhood in which it is imprisoned by Heidegger. Levinas agrees with Heidegger that what appears to me in the world appears as meaningful but he insists that Heidegger's description of the two levels of disclosure of meaning—everyday concern and being-towards-death—fails to recognize that in both cases the relation with the Other is essential to the opening of meaning. By claiming with respect to the first level that the mere appearing is only the residue of a practical proposiveness which is the root of meanings, Heidegger turns objectivity into a mere effect of a project of power which is mine. To this Levinas objects: "Objectivity is not what remains of an implement or a food when separated from the world in which their being comes into play. It is *posited* in a *conversation* ("entretien") which *proposes* the world. This *proposition* is held between two points which do not constitute a system, a cosmos, a totality".[24] As to the second level, Heidegger is obviously the target of the following statement: "Qua practical, signification refers ultimately to the being that exists in view of this very existence. It is thus derived from a term that is of itself an end.... The process from which beings would derive their meaning would not only in fact be finite, but as finality it would *by essence* consist in proceeding to a term, in coming to an end". This is a fair picture of Heidegger's phenomenology of

[22] *Totality and Infinity*, 93.
[23] *Totality and Infinity*, 92.
[24] *Totality and Infinity*, 95-96.

meaning. But Levinas objects forcefully to that conception when he writes: "But the outcome is the point at which every signification is precisely lost".[25] Indeed that point in Heidegger's description results in the loss of every signification, inasmuch as it is a point of solitary and silent vision of one's own nothingness, a vision from which the Other is entirely excluded, and which is the culmination of Selfhood or Sameness.

To that Levinas objects that "Signification or intelligibility does not arise from the identity of the same which remains in himself, but from the face of the Other who calls upon the same".[26]

Whereas in Heidegger the signified refers to a signifier which is my ownmost possibility, the signified in Levinas refers to a signifier which is the Other. Whereas in Heidegger signification is maintained only thanks to an hermeneutic circle which ultimately is the circle of a selfish Dasein existing for the sake of itself, in Levinas, by contrast, "signification is maintained only in the breach of the ultimate unity of the satisfied being".[27]

I thus reach the concluding stage of my presentation. What is the impact of the principles I have recalled on the level of the concrete descriptions? Is the debate with Heidegger also present on that level? Yes indeed. The evidence of the debate on that level is provided by many analyses. Allow me to focus briefly on only one of them which is obviously conceived by Levinas as a reply to an analysis which is at the core of the problematic of Heidegger's fundamental ontology: the relation to death.

It strikes me to observe how much in its very phrasing Levinas' analysis is the exact opposite of Heidegger's description.

First sign of opposition: Whereas Heidegger claims that it is in the anticipation of his own death that Dasein is able to confront his projective essence by turning the possibility of his impossibility into his ownmost potentiality, Levinas already in *Time and the Other* insists

[25] *Totality and Infinity*, 94.
[26] *Totality and Infinity,* 96-97.
[27] *Totality and Infinity*, 95.

that "what is important in the proximity of death, is that at a certain moment, *nous ne pouvons plus pouvoir*, we no longer have the power to...". Death, he says, is "the impossibility to have a project".[28]

Second sign of opposition: Precisely because Heidegger considers death with respect to the possibility which constitutes the Dasein, he carefully avoids to consider it as an *event*. By contrast Levinas insists that death is an *event*, more specifically an event to which *no apriori* could correspond in myself, hence an event which occurs to me beyond the order of any potentiality. He writes: "My death comes from an instant upon which I can in no way exercise my power".[29]

Third sign of opposition: Whereas Heidegger claims that the anticipation of his own death renders Dasein transparent (*durchsichtig*) to himself and offers him a clear insight into his ontological condition, Levinas conversely insists that "Death is a menace that approaches me as a mystery; its secrecy determines it—it approaches without being assumed...".[30]

Last sign of opposition: In Heidegger, death understood as the basic *existential* is assumed in an awareness which is essentially solitary and non relational (*unbezüglich*). Levinas, by contrast to Heidegger's analysis of anxiety in those terms does not hesitate to state that the menace of death "comes to me from an absolute alterity" (*ibid.*).[31] Which means that instead of erasing all relation to the other, death shows what Levinas calls "a reference to an interpersonal order".[32] He writes accordingly: "The solitude of death does not make the Other vanish, but remains in a consciousness of hostility, and consequently still renders possible an appeal to the Other, to his friendship and his medication...

[28] *Time and the Other,* Transl. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, 1987, 74 (translation modified). (*Le temps et l'autre, Paris*, 1979, 62.)

[29] *Totality and Infinity*, 234.

[30] *Totality and Infinity*, 235.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Totality and Infinity*, 234.

Death approaches in the fear of someone, and hopes in someone".[33] Or, as he said in *Time and the Other*: "my loneliness is not confirmed by death but broken by death".[34]

All this demonstrates that about a topic which is approached by Heidegger with respect to selfhood only and in terms of a totalizing project of the Same, Levinas detects signs of a breach of that Totality thanks to the Infinity which constitutes the otherness of the Other.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Time and the Other*, 74. (*Le temps et l'autre, 63.*)

THE THEORETICAL TO THE RESCUE OF LEVINAS

Jean-Michel Salanskis

Levinas acquired celebrity late, mainly because of the interest expressed by French philosophers from a different generation than his, and from a culture which at least politically was also somewhat different (Derrida, Lyotard). His celebrity grew to vast renown, which quickly extended beyond France, again partially due to reasons extrinsic to his thought (because of the perceived or imagined affinity of what he had to say about relations towards the other man and Christian precepts and sentiment, or because his discourse shored up a new generation after the collapse of the Marxist utopias). Today, we are in the process of recognizing the work and the thought of Levinas for what it is; namely, a very great work, that speaks to minds well beyond the contexts it has been associated with up to now.

To enable Levinas' work and thought to achieve recognition of this type, we still need and must continually combat misconceptions and reductionism. Rather than criticizing, as could be done, the reduction of Levinas to the simplicities of an edifying discourse or a narrowed reading which views him solely in terms of his predecessors and phenomenological referents (Heidegger, Husserl, or even Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, his contemporaries); I will try to rectify the mistaken image of Levinas as one of a group of philosophers opposed to the theoretical. Proceeding radically, I will in fact try to show first of all what the most highly "theoretical" position and the one which is most strongly attached to theoretical stakes in philosophy can find in Levinas, but also what this position can give to him in return. The reader of Levinas feels as though he were immediately caught up in the "demand from the other man as such," the intrigue, the principle, the meaning and the inexorability of which are depicted in his books. Others have indeed made this comment or pointed it out. However this ethical onslaught, in the case of receiving philosophical discourse,

expresses itself as a feeling of obligation to come to its rescue with whatever nourishment one is capable of supplying. I personally have always felt, while reading Levinas, that I should provide him with the support of the jewels of theoretical, logical, scientific, epistemological, conceptual thought—however one wishes to call them.

I would like to expand upon this unusual justification of Levinas on the three registers into which his work can be divided: the register of phenomenology (associated with the history of philosophy, even though the past Emmanuel Levinas deals with under the label of phenomenology is also the present), the register of thought or ethical metaphysics, and the register of his "religious" writings.

Levinas, Reader of Phenomenology

Here we are faced with a problem: Levinas himself appears to have dovetailed with Heidegger in his critique of Husserl in the name of the undue privilege that the latter conferred on the theoretical in phenomenology. He apparently refused, along with Heidegger and like virtually all of Husserl's successors, to adopt the "guide of the object" for all phenomenological descriptions. This stance, one might say, can be found explicitly in *Théorie de l'intuition*, Levinas' first "historical" work.[1] If we also take into consideration the collection of articles published in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, we see that Levinas sets down the conditions for reading Husserl which would basically remain those of all his French commentators afterwards. In this reading, Husserl is above all the thinker of intentionality, and the notion of intentionality is primarily that of an instituting "relationship" that pre-originates both the subject and the object, a type of middle originating and dynamic term from which everything proceeds. In this type of reading, Husserl should be credited with having envisaged the object in intentional terms even outside the theoretical sphere (by conceiving the noemes of "loved as such, pleasant as such",

[1] See for example, the end of Chapter IV (99) or the end of Chapter V (141-142) in Levinas, *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phenomenologie de Husserl*, Paris, 1930.

etc), but he should be criticized for having always conceived standard spatio-temporal objectivation as the substructure of all intentional "reality" and hence to have subordinated all intentional reconstruction to a horizon of validation and objectivation which is that of science. Heidegger is supposed to have unshackled phenomenology from this foundational and theoretical construct by giving an existential and hermeneutic definition to the phenomenon, opening it up to a description of *being-in-the-world*: with this definition, the phenomenologically primitive organizes into a non-theoretical, or even, with *Befindlichkeit*, emotional layer.[2] Levinas thus appears to be part of a general movement away from Husserl and in agreement with Heidegger, which simultaneously signals a "flight" of phenomenology from the theoretical, from the epistemological, from the foundational. Further, it can be argued that Levinas was responsible in France for setting the tone for this reception of phenomenology, since his writings on the subject seem to have unquestionable historical precedence.

In contrast to this version of Levinas' reading of Husserl and Heidegger, I will argue on the basis of one of his first personal essays, *De l'existence à l'existant,* which Didier Franck has often brought to our attention in the last few years.[3] In this striking text, Levinas does not yet formulate his cardinal theme of the ethical relationship; rather he describes the subject's phenomenological "genesis". This genesis is described in terms of existence and the existant, vocabulary which he makes no attempt to conceal as the vocabulary of Heideggerian "ontological difference"; existence standing for the verbal form to be and existant standing for the noun form of being. More simply, the "existential" lexicon and the references to an individual's daily life (the man of sleep, laziness, effort, insomnia, alertness...) which appear later on in the book create an atmosphere which is difficult not to recognize as that of the analytics of *Dasein* of *Sein und Zeit*. Nevertheless, the same type of resolutely un-epistemological approach, one could say, pro-

[2] See *Sein und Zeit*, par. 29, 134-140, French translation by E. Martineau, *Être et Temps*, Paris, 1985, 113-116.

[3] See in particular "le corps de la différence" in *Philosophie (*34), 1992; reprinted in *Dramatique des phénomènes*, Paris, 2001.

duces a radically different result. The Heideggerian subject, called *Dasein*, is basically understood as a projection into a world from which it cannot be separated. The Levinasian subject, called *hypostasis*, is basically understood as escape from the "there is", i.e. from the impersonal buzz of pure existence, from the world as the work of anonymous Being. The Heideggerian subject was originally affair and even collective affair; the Levinasian subject is originally "locked" in the present it is trying to conquer: it only detaches himself from the "there is" by equally "claiming" to make himself master of existence by attributing the epithet to himself, and by "protecting" himself from the engulfing-impersonal movement of existence by never ceasing to leave the self to return to the self, obeying an essential solipsism and a-temporality. Instead of the projecting arrow of *Dasein*, we find an inward movement in which the *Dasein* "returns" to its 'base,' the locus of escape from the 'there is,' which Didier Franck identifies as the body, according to Levinas' own words. I primarily retain the dual figure of solipsism and inward turning to the base, which, in the framework of an existential description of the original "struggle" against the "there is", instantly rehabilitates, without saying so and to a certain extent without us recognizing it, the old concept of the subject as a "prior interiority", against which modernity, drawing on Hegel and Marx then Heidegger and more recently Wittgenstein, has fought so hard. Naturally the subject as hypostasis is not absolutely prior, since the impersonal buzz of the "there is" remains the first given, but it is phenomenologically prior and interior: this inward turning, this solitude, this own-most return, this encapsulation in the present, these are the ways which it feels selfhood, these are the identificatory access routes to the self.

However, to paraphrase Lacan by reversing the meaning of his statement, this inner and anterior subject is the subject of science par excellence. It has been claimed to be that of idealism or at least a certain idealism (Cartesian, Kantian, Fichtian) but this idealism is precisely the one which describes the subject in terms of the function which is mobilized in and for science. I do not theorize the world scientifically, projecting onto it the strange language of my models, as "son" of this world, tied to this world and never affirming myself

except within this pact, according to its coordinates and for purposes of its rebalanced renewal. The inaugural philosophical gesture of science is the infinite distancing of consciousness, oriented toward the world as though toward something that must be imagined 'before' joining it (the transcendental destiny of science).

Levinas, in *De l'existence à l'existant* makes a considerable contribution to the "cause of scientific rationality": he defines the *separated* subject, detached not only from the world but also from being—the solipsist subject constantly fleeing inward and gives him an existential dignity. Immediately following Heidegger's work, he shows that Heidegger's analyses do not resolve the debate by showing Hegel's victory over Kant within the new fundamental language of phenomenology: in this language as well a "Kantian-type" subject can be found and described.

Note as well that this Levinasian content which is so favorable to science is found in an essay where he begins to deploy his personal "thought"—which will be that of ethics and the other man in later works—although in this essay he is still the reader of phenomenology. This is the originality of *De l'existence à l'existant*: the "narrative of subjectivation" which is found there should be understood amongst other things as a text which by "re-establishing" a Husserl-type consciousness in the context of a Heideggerian—style phenomenology analyzes the initial breakthrough of phenomenology.

I now turn to Levinas' relationship to the theoretical pole of philosophy as it can be apprehended in his own construction of ethical thought.

Levinas, Thinker of the Ethical Relationship

This Levinas is usually said to have placed ethics as a first philosophy and to have "devalued" a-priori the theoretical tropism of humanity as much as and like Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty in a passionate appeal in favor of ethics.

And we would be right to continue stating this if we adhere to what is stated by Levinas about his own ethical perspective. It is of the greatest importance for him to have us understand that the theoretical attitude is not the ethical attitude in itself, and that no approach and no achievement of knowledge dispenses us in any way from the obligations of ethics. The attitude of knowledge towards an object is akin to the attitude of the consumer of the goods of this world, the fulfillment it provides is a gratification but does not possess any moral value. When I try to speak authentically about an object, the object is a "fake" alterity always assigned a-priori to the subject's statements, to this manifesting structure which belongs at the same time to discourse and to the unconcealment of being. This otherness has nothing to do with the otherness of the Other which takes the subject out of this loop that returns him to the ownmost Self as an *atheist subject* (as is already presented so clearly in his work *Le temps et l'autre*). When I hear the face commanding, when I go towards the Other-in-distress through the *here-I-am*, I do so before any theoretical assessment of who the other is, or what his motivations, his determinations, strengths, weaknesses, particularities might be; I do not even consider theoretically that the Other is an *alter ego* or that his "cause" is a good one compared to that of other individuals, myself for example. The "motility of rescue" of *here-I-am*, which fulfills the ethical relationship as such, valorizes the other man as *alter ego* but does not rely on the theoretical apprehension of this quality: rather, the Other is incommensurable to me in that I am infinitely in his debt through this relationship, despite the fact that such a relationship takes place on a human scale in my company.

In another way, the scientific goal of conformity to Being in science cannot be valid in the ethical perspective, since all meaning resides in the approach to the register of beyond-Being. Being shelters the *conatus* of all things, and the unfettered movement of this exclusive and universal principle creates a conflict that nothing can resolve. The Good absolutely presupposes a disengagement from the game of Being, from the imposition of the "leveling out" of the beyond-Being.

All this is accurate, but it says nothing about the way Levinas understands the attitude of science; it only says he is against reducing the ethical attitude to it: all this verbiage merely has a function of demarcation, and no evaluative function of science. To understand what Levinas thinks of the theoretical function, we need to look in other writings.

In this regard, the exposition in *Autrement qu'être* that introduces the notion of the third party and justice is often quoted. It is true that in this last major essay by Levinas, he explains how taking the third party into consideration "shifts" the "phenomenology of morality". Although Levinas believed he was obligated to narrate the ethical intrigue of the epiphany of the face to adhere to meaning of the intervention of the moral motif in the human sphere, and hence place himself in the framework of a dual dramaturgy, he could not ignore as long as he wanted to adhere to the stakes and the difficulty of this moral motif, that the *I* encounters several *Others*: that already affected by the ethical assault and mobilized beyond all limits and without ontological foundation for the other man, I have to confront a second face, which intervenes as a third party in the intrigue within which the ethical meaning arose. What Levinas says at this point is that this supernumerary "incidence" raises the issue of justice, the issue of the acceptable establishment of countless limitations which must apply to the unlimited countless responsibilities of subjects-hostages-accused parties—so that none will silence the legitimacy of any other, so that the principle of infinite dedication to others can be modulated and hence so to speak distribute itself over the subjects of a sociality. This is merely, says Levinas, a completely different way of seeing society that he is suggesting. It is not basically the restrictive arbitration of the all powerful a-priori of freedom, but that of the a-priori unbounded depth of obligations—responsibilities.[4] In any case, Levinas clearly says that only the rational logos can support and accompany this type of arbitration. The establishment of justice hence poses to moral humanity a problem which warrants the formulation of methodological reason, capable of knowing its object and differentiating things and situa-

[4] F. Sebbah stresses this point in his *Levinas*, Paris, 2000.

tions in terms of what they are: we need an optimal "science of man" on equal ground with the subtleness and the conceptual wealth of human configurations, and such a science can only be one that "leans" on the science of nature, characterized by its universal and exemplary gestures of objectivity, a natural science which itself requires the deployment of a coherent logos, a felicitous logical expression and a valid argumentation.

Naturally, in Levinas we get this justification of rationality, so to speak in the second round. But we have more than this. We also have, to start with, the absence of any ill will to science or techniques, which contrasts sharply with Heidegger's positions on the same topic over the course of his life.

But we also have, in my opinion, in the final analysis, something even more important, a whole apprehension of the "value" of the logico-scientific schize. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas clearly states that the mode which succeeds in bridging the gulf of me-others, towards a "term" which must never take on the appearance of a thematizable object, of the external devolved for concept-formation, that this mode which is absolutely necessary to ethical "commerce", qualifying for otherwise-than-being, thus, is above all that of *discourse*. Talking to someone is to address a non-thematizable, haloed with the prestige of beyond-being, it is meeting with him through meaning and beyond all grasp.[5] But it would be mistaken to believe that discourse—where Levinas naturally accentuates the value of address, signification in the sense of "signifying an order", gift and request—should be reduced at the same time to its "pragmatics".[6] No, discourse, which when addressing, connects individuals through the beyond-being of interpellation as well, and not only by the sharing of objectivated being, is the well-formed discourse of the apophansis of things and their manifestations; this discourse which does more than record the pulsation of what Levinas terms *essance*—the incessant movement of unconcealment of the

[5] See *Totalité et infini*, 1961, 35-42.

[6] In the modern logico-linguistic meaning of the word.

being of things as such in a configuration, an unconcealment which is the basic dynamic of the Heideggerian ontological difference—does more than record because it signs it, fulfills it, bears it.

In *Autrement qu'être* there are striking descriptions, entirely unaffected by any pejorative coloration, of this logical exactness and this originally theoretical perfection of discourse as the output of Saying, the function of synchronization and articulation which is that of discourse from the standpoint of the Said. It is worth re-reading section *c)* of *3° temps et discours* in *II De l'intentionalité au sentir* where the first movement, a descriptive of this function of Saying in the Said, ends with the very explicit:

> And it is for that that man is a being of truth, belonging to no other genus of being.[7]

What Levinas adds to this validation of the "theoretical destination" of man is simply this, which comes immediately afterward:

> But is the power to say in man, however strictly correlative to the said its function may be, in the service of being?[8]

What Levinas is in fact describing before these two sentences is the non-contingent agreement between the form of temporality, the emergence of the being in its Being and the grammatical structure of the utterance: a profoundly a-priori agreement, stemming from the fact that the same thing is placed by principle and in a governing fashion in several orders at the same time. Let us look at the following sentences:

> It is only in the said, in the epos of saying, that the diachrony of time is synchronized into a time that is recallable, and becomes a theme. The epos is not added to the identical entities it exposes; it exposes them as identities illuminated by a memorable temporality.[9]

[7] *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, 1981, 37. (*Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence*, The Hague, 1978, 48.)

[8] *Ibid. (Ibid.)*

[9] *Ibid. (Ibid.)*

What Levinas is describing here in a language more or less derived from Heidegger is the "necessity" expressed by the two versions of the transcendental deduction of categories and he in fact mentions in the same analysis the first one (in point b of the same passage of *Autrement qu'être*). The intimate of the logical form of discourse bears the certainty of the conformity of things with it because it, so to speak, makes the frame for their reception. The "reservation" expressed in the quote in italics thus means simply the following: that the distance from subjectivity to Being is always presupposed in this transcendental node (the Saying has to come from elsewhere in order to pin the gesture of essance to the Said) and this distance cannot reside anywhere else that in the not being devoted to *Being* of Saying, or, to formulate it properly, in its dedication to the other man. Corinne Enaudeau has found an apt way of expressing this, by reading Kant in a Levinasian fashion: she suggests that the transcendental detachment, the separation from the world, from givens, from nature which is the basis of transcendental subjectivity itself as an active locus of synthesis and legitimization, can perhaps be explained by the fact that the subject must remove himself from the world to give it to the other man (as an intersubjectively stable theme). In *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas states:

> We shall retain from Kantianism a meaning that is not dictated by a relationship with being.[10]

He argues this point primarily by basing himself on Kant's practical philosophy, but also mentions the transcendental dialectic in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Analysis of Levinas' "metaphysical ethics" takes us to the same conclusion as the examination of the way he received phenomenology. Levinas understands the theoretical function, he celebrates it, he acknowledges it as being in some respects man's affair par excellence, he only wishes to have us grasp that man's theoretical flourishing is in

[10] *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Stanford, 2000, 65. (*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, Paris, 1993, 77.)

debt to ethics: significance should be ethical before it can be theoretical, lend itself to adaptation of various layers in ontological statement; by being ethical before being theoretical it holds the schize science absolutely needs, this schize which still hints at, although the resonance has been muted, the Merleau-Pontian motive of *depth*.

The Theoretical in the "Religious" Work of Emmanuel Levinas

Let us now turn to the third facet of Levinas' work, which will be called, for the sake of convenience rather than accuracy, the "religious" facet. The center of gravity of this third part consists of the series of "Talmudic lectures" given by Levinas every year at the *Colloque des Intellectuels Juifs de Langue Française*: in these meetings, which were naturally Jewish but not restricted to the observant since regularly non-observant and agnostics and even non-Jews lectured, Levinas' talk became the closing rite of the meeting, the way for the conference to link to the immemorial demands of a tradition. Levinas thus demonstrated his faithfulness to the laws and intellectual traditions of Judaism in a world for the most part detached from them. This position was typical of this "religious" facet which is not the meaning usually assigned to the term. Although it is correct to state that the Levinas of phenomenology and ethical thought developed in an absolute theoretical independence necessary because of the essence of philosophy as regards the religious content of Judaism, it is wrong to claim that the Levinas of the Talmudic readings was "another" in some kind of substantial "otherness" with respect to the first. The Levinas of the Talmudic readings still speaks the language of his philosophy and pursues the elaboration of his philosophical quest—and even with greater ease since his discourse position in these readings is still that of a call for values and the method of Jewish tradition, in a Jewish rather than in a neutral world this time.

I would simply like to characterize rapidly the interplay with the theoretical register in these "Talmudic" contributions. Most of the time, as we know, Levinas chose passages from the Haggadah, avoided dealing directly with issues of Halachah, although they correspond to the

heart of Talmudism. He commented on them using two approaches: first of all he based himself on traditional commentators to get to certain main and often symbolic points, clearing the way for his specific reading; and secondly he raised a speculative point, he took advantage of the philosophical "rebound" of the content, extending the issues to broader avenues for meditation. What was the result of this dual approach to theory? How, in terms of the theoretical, can we define this homiletic activity? To respond, we need to take into consideration the overall impact of the relationship between rationality and religion generated by Levinas.

It is virtually impossible to mention the scope of thought introduced by Levinas into his many readings, or the various stands of his general articles on Judaism. I would simply like to point out that he frequently oriented himself toward considerations of the relationship between Judaism and "Greek wisdom". The analysis of this relationship, which is implicit in his phenomenological work and in his ethical thought, is obviously an extension of his personal approach: Levinas attempts to deliver in the philosophical arena a message which he felt he had received from the *Torah* and the millennia of Jewish experience.

When he inquires, along with the Talmud, for example on the advantages of translating the Torah into Greek—commenting on a passage which mentions the work on the Septuagint—he starts with the stark observation that the Torah must be written in Hebrew to "make hands impure", i.e., basically have the impact and solemnity it requires. However he reaches the conclusion that the Jews have more wisdom than words, and that the translation into Greek was the opportunity to enable the content of the tradition to reach the level of universally sharable rationality. In these conditions, the "Greek translation" no longer literally means "translation into Greek" but obviously and primarily the millennia of efforts within the study of Judaism to bring the analysis of the law from its own perspective to a certain level of theoretical perfection. The theoretical is the sole path where thought can be shared unrestrictedly, and Emmanuel Levinas neither forgets nor ever rejects this value. Similarly, he indicates in several of his readings how the Jewish tradition valorizes study, declaring it higher in its

ranking than orthopraxy. Levinas never hides nor minimizes what can be termed the intellectual and theoretical idealism that is part of Judaism. He is far from denying that a similar ideal has been known and experienced elsewhere, or manifesting an exclusivist antagonism. To be convinced of this it is sufficient to recall the glorified image he had as a youngster of the homeland of Zola, the credit he gives to Sartre, or to cite a textual element and non-autobiographical element, the terms in which he describes the sublime nature of the conclusion of Aeschylus' trilogy when the tribunal of Athens—human and rational—ends the persecution of the Eumenides and imprisons them in the cave of the city. Levinas feels this sublimity so strongly that he is unsure whether Jewish wisdom has something "better" to add.[11] It should be noted as well that in the reading entitled "the Pact" Levinas discusses the various occurrences in the making the Covenant, viewing them as different modes of acceptance of the Law. He then describes the importance of teaching as regards this acceptance of duty: a moment connected to the yeshiva and the irreducible use of theoretical reason to disentangle the logical intertwining of the particularities of the Law.[12]

Something could be added, in connection with the problem of Jewish education. Levinas fought, during his whole life, in favor of the specific teaching of Jewish topics, which he regarded as more important than anything else, in the perspective of going on with Jewish experience. And he always insisted that such an education should be dispensed also—maybe before all—at a higher level. The essence of Jewish tradition is connected with its intellectually complex and difficult components: with its theoretical part, involving acute and deep issues. As Levinas writes in *Difficile liberté*, the renewed interest for Jewish tradition is not authentic as long as "The Pharisee is absent":[13] it is only if we come back to Jewish tradition as enfolding rigorous knowledge that we really come back to it.

[11] See *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, Paris, 1968, 165-166.

[12] See *L'au-delà du verset*, 87-106, Paris, 1982.

[13] Cf. Levinas, *Difficile liberté*, Paris, 1963, 1976, 47-50.

It is true that there are also constant references in Levinasian texts to reservations as regards certain use of the theoretical which can let itself be trapped by itself and forget the personal dimension, which imperatively underlies and is also the raison d'être and purpose of theory. Something that resonates like the now banal observation that "science without conscience is the ruin of the soul" haunts the "religious" Levinas. Levinas has the idea that the exercise of the theoretical function reaches, in the context of Jewish study, a purity that preserves it from the dangers of inhumanity so well known to the non-Jewish world. He writes:

> ... in purely human knowledge without Torah, in pure humanism, this deviation already slips towards rhetoric and all the betrayals against which Plato himself struggled.[14]

or:

> Every generous thought is threatened by its Stalinism. The great strength of the Talmud's casuistry is to be the special discipline which seeks in particular the precise moment at which the general principle runs the danger of becoming its own contrary, and watches over the general in the light of the particular. This protects us from ideology.[15]

Note in addition that this "spirit of the particular" needed to avoid Stalinism, passes through a logicization of the argument even though it does not reduce to it.

Or again:

> It comes very well at the end of all this text, with all its exactions of pure spirits, all its superb and admirable rigor. To this admirable rigor, this superb spirit, a movement of openness must be joined. Failing which the high-mindedness of the Torah becomes haughtiness of spirit.[16]

[14] *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole, Bloomington, 1994, 28. (*L'au-delà du verset*, Paris, 1982, 44.)

[15] *Beyond the Verse*, 79. (*L'au-delà du verset,* 98-99.)

[16] *In the Time of Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Bloomington, 1994, 75. (*A l'heure des nations*, Paris, 1988, 88.)

There is also the text entitled *Shabbat* in the *Quatre lectures Talmudiques* where Levinas develops the theme of *the temptation of temptation*, and which may seem to integrate *knowledge* to the non-Jewish figure of experience engaged solely in the return to the self.

All these "reservations" have the same meaning, which is not at all that of impugning the theoretical. Levinas remains a thousand leagues from modern anti-rationalism, anti-foundationalism that draws on Nietzsche, Heidegger or Wittgenstein. He simply attempts to bear witness to a form of thought which has not responded less to the overall call of idea, knowledge and logic than Western tradition of Greek extraction, but which has sought to found a theoretical tradition concerning man (a "science of Who" as Georges Hansel says)[17] whose polarization is at the same time ethical. This doubtless raises a considerable epistemological problem, and it is not easy to understand how *Hochmah* (science-wisdom) is possible, but Levinas bequeaths us the task at least.

The Theoretical to the Rescue

The previous sections have presented features which in Levinas' thought, although they primarily intend to lead us into the perspective of otherwise-than-being, justify and celebrate the theoretical relationship to being. I would now like, reciprocally, to attempt to formulate, rapidly, what contemporary theoretical approaches, in their effervescence and their diversity, can contribute to Levinasian intuitions, in what way they can make them credible, can clarify them, support them. I will only mention a few and only briefly.

The first able to muster in favor of the Levinasinian idea is anthropology. By describing the ethical relationship as he conceived of it, shattering the totality of the world and opening onto the otherwise-than-being, Levinas does not only present us with the core of all normative morality, he does not only teach us what we already know ethics involves us in provided that we do not drop our association with

[17] Cf. G. Hansel, *Explorations talmudiques*, Paris, 1998, 39-52.

it. He portrays the authentically human of man, he gives us access to the non-inhuman stratum of man, to the intrigue everything that counts as human sharing in the strict and correct sense is organized around. Anthropology can confirm this Levinasian teaching, by showing how language, culture, practices, human relationships center around the dialogical axis, and the individual's faculty to be seized by another person, to build a relationship with him which comes as an order, where a demand is expressed; where, at least, my dependence on the Other as regards meaning and possibility roots itself. Modern anthropology has discovered in several ways how much and to what extent human life and essence have been "forged" by ethical or dialogical "passivity". Discourse stressing this "construction feature" of humanity appears in many places and in many fashions. This type of analysis even penetrates and rightly so, the cognitive sphere: there are studies in psychology and ethology which explain to what extent it is in the relationship with the Other, to the con-specific in the animal realm, that the cognitive capacity of the living organism develops. Modern cognitive sciences are increasingly aware that they cannot neglect the collective parameter studied by the social sciences, but this parameter itself is linked to the dual intrigue as to its source of meaning.[18] In the field of formal logic, the abstract apex of anthropology in a way since it describes the most general form of human rationality, the role of the dual intrigue is highlighted by work in the field of dialogical logic, prompted by Lorenzen and Hintikka, and which today has been enriched by the work of Shahid Rahman. The formal conditions identifying the specificity of diverse logics can be "translated" into rules prescribing their validity to dialogues: for instance accepting terms devoid of reference corresponds to a dissymmetry in the dialogue, prohibiting one of the two partners from entering a new term into the formulary exchange.[19]

[18] I will give only one reference for this entire paragraph, but it will guide to many others: F. Rastier and S. Bouquet (eds.), *Une Introduction aux sciences de la culture*, Paris, 2002.

[19] See S. Rahman, "On Frege's Nightmare: A Combination of Intuitionistic, Free and Paraconsistent Logic", in H. Wansing (ed.), *Essays on Non-Classical Logic*, 2001.

What needs to be understood is that there is no contradiction between the apparently "ontic" nature of a description of man as an "ethical animal" and the "metaphysical" theme of otherwise-than-being. Precisely what the book *Autrement qu'être* describes is that the subject who is confronted with the other as infinite distress-demand-height is redefined from top to bottom by this ethical condition, to the point of appearing purely and simply as the locus of hostage responsibility and thrust of substitution, lacking any retreat into which he could protect himself from the ethical demand: the book shows us the effect of the ethical relationship in its immemorial incidence, as a sort of conversion which completely tints the subject with an original value, warrants a genuine description of the latter as "constituted" in his subjectivity by this self-emptying out which is caused by the vocation to the other prior to all deliberation. The notion of humanity which Levinas introduces is that it can be described authentically in terms of what is in no way a nature, and which escapes even from the order of being, to the extent that it is is poorly understood in a merely ontic-ontological mode. Knowing man well is to realize the expanse and the depth of his redefinition through otherwise than being. The science of man is methodologically obligated by the consideration of the ethical intrigue; this is what makes naturalist positivism off limits for it. Levinas has a neo-Diltheyian facet which is no less important: apparently modern anthropological research has, in its own way, guessed the role of the ethical kernel for the significance of man.

It is not only anthropology, in its classic social or humanities version or its modern cognitive forms which comes to the rescue of Levinas, it is also the traditional science of Jewish law, "Judaism" to use the religious term. Levinas' philosophy calls for a formulation of Judaism which excludes all theology, and only accepts as a transcendent figure, in depth, the face of the Other in the way that Levinas uses it. Things in fact are a little more subtle than that: the rational example of traditional science is that of a science in which is deployed a non-indifferent theoretical infinite. Understanding the finesse and the depth of a conceptual and categorical system articulating within Jewish law, in its adaptation to the unbounded diversity of cases on the one hand, in its wealth of meaning always better updated by interpretation on the

other, means, for the Jew taking on a life of study and observance, constantly answering in the theoretical mode to a requirement coming so to speak from this law which addresses him, obligating him both on the practical and theoretical levels. Jewish law, choosing the Jew by its specific obligations, can never be indifferent the way the *Being* of ontology is, according to Levinas, and the approach adapted to the theoretical "given" of this law, study, procures the experience of an infinite: the theoretical infinity of this law, the inexhaustible conceptual and significant encounters in it. This infinity is in a way an intermediate figure between the Levinasian ethical infinity and the strictly rational infinity of the standard theoretical field, to which it associates itself nevertheless on the methodological level. Jewish law has always been this contribution of the theoretical to the basically ethical revealed by Levinas, and it is obviously as having been rescued by it that Levinas could explicate the ethical intrigue as he did. This is so in many ways which I can only hint at here. What I think and believe I should say at this juncture is that Jewish law nevertheless needs, in our time, an exposition which "supports" the Levinasian perspective. An exposition which avoids the pretence of the theological version, the religious one in the usual sense; which magnifies the rational structure of the law, while highlighting through such an emphasis on the theoretical the non-indifference of the infinite that emerges. This exposition is a true theoretical work: it is the one that Georges Hansel has devoted many years to, and from whom I learned what I know about this subject.[20]

It will perhaps be useful, here, to state explicitly some aspects of the understanding of Jewish tradition which underlies what has been said, and which contrasts it strongly with what we usually call *religion*.

1) What constitutes the core of "Judaism" is neither the thesis of some ultimate ontological power ruling the world, nor the psychological relationship to such a power called *faith*, nor the promise of the

[20] See his *Explorations talmudiques*, Paris, 1998; I have tried to recapitulate what I could understand from his teachings in my work *Extermination, loi, Israel, Ethanalyse du fait juif*, Paris, 2003.

ontological reward of immortality: it is rather Jewish law, as explained and discussed in the Talmud, and human practical observance of this law.

2) Jewish law is disclosed in the Talmud with respect to some specific method, which defines some particular rational field: let us call it, following traditional use, '*ho'khma*. It is perfectly possible to compare at the intellectual and epistemological level '*ho'khma* with mathematics, logic, or analytical philosophy, to limit ourselves to three significant possibilities.

3) Jewish commandments (the *mitsvot*) generally ask some relation to be "realized" in the world, even if this relation is by its essence an ideal or conceptual one. Therefore, Jewish law calls for a human life lived at the level of the concept.

4) The goal which Jewish experience aims at is purely an ethical one. Jewish tradition seeks for the collective achievement of some superior social life, which would not be any longer forgetful of ethical imperative (as we may learn it from the face).

Well, this "Jewish program", which is in many ways a rational one, was very clearly an inspiration of Levinas, and Levinas' philosophy may in turn help us to clarify it and understand it: this is what we have tried to argue.[21]

In closing, I would like to mention a third way which in my opinion the theoretical can come to the rescue of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas: through what I am currently attempting to promote on the philosophical level, and what I call a philosophy of sense or meaning. A philosophy of sense is for me a philosophy which finds its place, its resources and its stakes in sense or meaning. A philosophy which takes on a certain primitiveness, a certain non-derivability of meaning, which abandons its ontological capture traditionally achieved through intentional interpretation of meaning as the relationship to an object. That 'understands' meaning in terms of an *intrigue of meaning* so to speak doubling back on the Levinasian ethical intrigue: the idea is that

[21] For more about this picture of Jewish tradition, see the two references given in preceding footnote: Georges Hansel's *Explorations talmudiques*, and eventually *Extermination, loi, Israël—Ethanalyse du fait juif.*

the main feature of meaning is the "being semantically affected", allowing access to a listener of what is significant, that the originally relevant dimension concerning meaning is the address. Meaning is enveloped in itself, like a text subject, it generates a return, in a given direction, a return which acts like a demand, a direction which above all is the direction of bridging the *I-Other* abyss. Beyond, meaning finds its coordinates on the side of theoretical form and from what I call the ideal body. This fundamental thought is presented in my recent work *Sens et philosophie du sens*[22] where I stress the fact that the dimension of the address "attributes" so to say meaning to the otherwise- than-being Levinas talks about. My premise is that we need the teachings of Levinas to do justice to what we need the most in any exercise of philosophy and beyond this, of thought—to meaning. This does not mean that my "responsibility" toward received meaning is identical to my responsibility to the Other: simply that I can only grasp the former "thanks" to my understanding of the latter, the ethical out-of-being underlies meaning of the semantic out-of-being. The Levinasian ethics as "primary philosophy" procures a kind of non-ontological foundation for the philosophical semantics attempted here.

The philosophy of sense or meaning I am referring to, as I said, also accepts meaning as a stake: the goal of philosophy is redefined as that of an "explication" of meaning which governs each sphere of human life, each area in which humanity is involved, in which it is enmeshed. Whether it is politics, mathematics, or love, we try to understand the address of meaning that supports the area in general; i.e., what refers to what according to which demand, since this type of understanding of meaning is indeed what qualifies us for the sphere or area in question. Philosophy thus becomes a quest, analysis, regional explanation of meaning, adhering to a method and an approach which I have called *etho-analysis*: it consists of analyzing an area on the level of *ethos*, which is a level of non-unspecified arrangement, evaluated each time from the way experiences, words and acts make sense.

[22] Paris, 2001.

In particular I argue, drawing here on the results of what I have gleaned from my work in the epistemology of mathematics and my reflections on logic, that etho-analysis helps place in perspective in an accurate way the role and the scope of infinity in mathematics, its unavoidability, its own weight of meaning compared to infinity of any symbol as a type (opposed to its tokens).[23]

This philosophy of sense or meaning working area by area in the mode of etho-analytical investigation "comes to the rescue" of the ethical thought of Emmanuel Levinas because it shows us that the conceptual paradox of otherwise than being is in any case obligatory if we want to re-appropriate our culture correctly, if we want to understand it as it asks us to do by understanding according to their meanings the major domains in it, if we want to respect the meaning in its transcendence of address. The whole setup of all theories, all the fabulous complexity of the scientific edifice is a meaningful construction, which must be grasped and evaluated as a relevant assemblage before being judged as true and which would have no chance of generating truth if it did not first of all adhere to the meaning in its demands.

The philosophy of sense or meaning thus explains, in my opinion, why Levinas sees ethics as first philosophy: it is because ethics gives us the language, the feeling, the experience to conceive of the dimension of the address as a derogation of being, that it is the resource to hear meaning accurately, and thus indirectly to deploy the generalized phenomenology that philosophy should be. The etho-analytical study, necessarily acquainted with the theoretical order whose foundation and contribution to making meaning it elucidates in each particular case, hence supports to the highest extent Levinas' ethical "metaphysics" and convinces us of the radical nature of the reversal of attitude and point of view that he proposed to philosophical thought.

[23] Cf. *Sens et philosophie du sens*, 187-221.

LEAVING THE CLIMATE OF HEIDEGGER'S THINKING

Simon Critchley

Levinas' work, like that of any original thinker, is possessed of a great richness. It was influenced by many sources—non-philosophical and philosophical, as much by Levinas' Talmudic master Monsieur Chouchani as by Heidegger—and it deals with a wide and complex range of matters. Levinas' work provides powerful descriptions of a whole range of phenomena, both everyday banalities and those that one could describe with Bataille as "limit-experiences": insomnia, fatigue, effort, sensuous enjoyment, erotic life, birth and the relation to death. Such phenomena are described with particularly memorable power by Levinas in the work published after the War: *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*.

However, despite its great richness, once more like any great thinker, Levinas' work is dominated by one thought, and it seeks to think one thing under an often bewildering variety of aspects. Derrida famously compares the movement of Levinas' thinking to that of a wave on a beach, always the same wave returning and repeating its movement with deeper insistence. Hilary Putnam, picking up on a more prosaic image from Isaiah Berlin, *via* Archilochus, compares Levinas to a hedgehog, who knows "one big thing", rather than a fox, who knows "many small things". Levinas' one big thing is expressed in his thesis that ethics is first philosophy, where ethics is understood as a relation of infinite responsibility to the other person. In my view, the central task of Levinas' work is the attempt to describe a relation with the other person that cannot be reduced to comprehension. He finds this in what he famously calls the "face-to-face" relation. In this paper, I would simply like to try and unpack these slightly mysterious claims by considering his somewhat Oedipal conflict with Heidegger.

As is well known, Heidegger became politically committed to National Socialism, accepting the position of Rector of Freiburg University in the fateful year 1933. If one is to begin to grasp how traumatic Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism was to the young Levinas and how determinative it was for his future work, then one has to understand the extent to which Levinas was philosophically convinced by Heidegger. Between 1930 and 1932, Levinas planned to write a book on Heidegger, a project he abandoned in disbelief at Heidegger's actions in 1933. A fragment of the book was published in 1932 as "Martin Heidegger and Ontology".[1] By 1934, at the request of the recently founded French left Catholic journal *Esprit*, Levinas had written a memorable meditation on the philosophy of what the editor, Emmanuel Mounier, called "Hitlerism".[2] So if Levinas' life was dominated by the memory of the Nazi horror, then his philosophical life was animated by the question as to how a philosopher as undeniably brilliant as Heidegger could have become a Nazi, for however short a time.

The philosophical kernel of Levinas' critique of Heidegger is most clearly stated in the important 1951 paper, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", which will provide the focus for my remarks.[3] Levinas here engages in a critical questioning of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, that is, his attempt to raise anew the question of the meaning of Being through an analysis of that being for whom Being is an issue: *Dasein* or the human being. In Heidegger's early work, ontology—which is what Aristotle called the science of Being as such or metaphysics—is fundamental, and *Dasein* is the ontic fundament or condition of possibility for any ontology. What Heidegger seeks to do in *Being and Time*,

[1] Published in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, third edition, Paris, 1974. An English translation appeared as 'Martin Heidegger and Ontology', in *Diacritics,* 26/1 (1996), 11-32.

[2] Levinas' 1934 piece essay has been very usefully and extensively discussed by Miguel Abensour in his new edition of this essay: *Quelques refléxions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*, Paris, 1997. An English translation appeared with a revealing prefatory note by Levinas in *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1990), 62-71.

[3] Included in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Peperzak, Critchley, and Bernasconi (eds.), Bloomington, 1996, 1-10.

in the spirit rather than the letter of Husserlian intentional analysis, is to identify the basic or apriori structures of *Dasein*. These structures are what Heidegger calls "existentials", such as understanding, state-of-mind, discourse and falling. For Levinas, the basic advance and advantage of Heideggerian ontology over Husserlian phenomenology is that it begins from an analysis of the factual situation of the human being in everyday life, what Heidegger after Wilhelm Dilthey calls "facticity". The understanding or comprehension of Being *(Seinsverständnis)*, which must be presupposed in order for Heidegger's investigation into the meaning of Being to be intelligible, does not presuppose a merely intellectual attitude, but rather the rich variety of intentional life—emotional and practical as well as theoretical—through which we relate to things, persons and the world.

There is here a fundamental agreement of Levinas with Heidegger which can already be found in his critique of Husserl in the Conclusion to his 1930 doctoral thesis, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* and which is presupposed in all of Levinas' subsequent work. The essential contribution of Heideggerian ontology is its critique of intellectualism. Ontology is not, as it was for Aristotle, a contemplative theoretical endeavor, but is, according to Heidegger, grounded in a fundamental ontology of the existential engagement of human beings in the world, which forms the anthropological preparation for the question of Being. Levinas writes with reference to the phenomenological reduction, "This is an act in which we consider life in all its concreteness but no longer live it".[4] Levinas' version of phenomenology seeks to consider life as it is lived. The overall orientation of Levinas' early work might be summarized in another sentence from the opening pages of the same book, "Knowledge of Heidegger's starting point may allow us to understand better Husserl's end point".[5]

However, as some of the writings prior to the 1951 essay make clear (for example, the introduction to the 1947 book *Existence and Existent*), although Levinas' work is to a large extent inspired by Heidegger

[4] *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. A. Orianne, Evanston, 1973, 155.

[5] *Ibid.,* xxxiv.

and by the conviction that we cannot put aside *Being and Time* for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian, it is also governed by what Levinas calls, "the profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy".[6] In a letter appended to the 1962 paper, "Transcendence and Height", with an oblique but characteristic reference to Heidegger's political myopia, Levinas writes:

> The poetry of the peaceful path that runs through fields does not reflect the splendour of Being beyond beings. The splendour brings with it more sombre and pitiless images. The declaration of the end of metaphysics is premature. The end is not at all certain. Besides, metaphysics—the relation with the being *(étant)* which is accomplished as ethics—precedes the understanding of Being and survives ontology.[7]

Levinas claims that *Dasein's* understanding of Being presupposes an ethical relation with the other human being, that being to whom I speak and to whom I am obligated before being comprehended. Fundamental ontology is fundamentally ethical. It is this ethical relation that Levinas, principally in *Totality and Infinity*, describes as metaphysical and which survives any declaration of the end of metaphysics.

Levinas' Heidegger is essentially the author of *Being and Time*, "Heidegger's first and principal work", a work which, for Levinas, is the peer of the greatest books in the history of philosophy, regardless of Heidegger's politics.[8] Although Levinas clearly knew Heidegger's later work, much more than he liked to admit, he expresses little sympathy for it. In the important 1957 essay, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity", the critique of Heidegger becomes yet more direct and polemical, "In Heidegger, atheism is a paganism, the pre-Socratic texts are anti-Scriptures. Heidegger shows in what intoxication the lucid sobriety of philosophers is steeped".[9]

[6] *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, The Hague, 1978, 19.
[7] *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 31.
[8] *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis, The Hague, 1987, 52.
[9] *Ibid.,* 53.

"Is Ontology Fundamental" demonstrates for the first time in Levinas' work the *ethical* of his critique of Heidegger. It is in this paper that, to my knowledge (if I am wrong, please let me know) the word "ethics" first enters Levinas' philosophical vocabulary. The importance of this essay for Levinas' subsequent work can be seen in the way in which its argumentation is alluded to and effectively repeated in crucial pages of *Totality and Infinity*.[10] The central task of the essay is to describe a relation irreducible to comprehension, that is, irreducible to what Levinas see as the *ontological* relation to others. Ontology is Levinas' general term for any relation to otherness that is reducible to comprehension or understanding. On this account, Husserl's phenomenology is therefore ontological because the intentionality thesis assumes a correlation between an intentional act and the object of that intention, or *noema* and *noesis* in the later work. Even the Heideggerian ontology that exceeds intellectualism is unable to describe this non-comprehensive relation because particular beings are always already understood upon the horizon of Being, even if this is, as Heidegger says at the beginning of *Being and Time*, a vague and average understanding. Levinas writes that *Being and Time* essentially advanced one thesis, "Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being".[11] Thus, despite the novelty of Heidegger's work, he rejoins and sums up the great Platonic tradition of Western philosophy, where the relation to particular beings is always understood by way of mediation with a third term, whether universal form or *eidos* in Plato, Spirit in Hegel or Being in Heidegger.

Yet, how can a relation with a being be other than comprehension? Levinas' response is that it cannot, "unless it is the other *(autrui)*".[12] *Autrui* is arguably the key term in all of Levinas' work and, in line with common French usage, it is Levinas' word for the human other, the other person. The claim here is that the relation with the other goes beyond comprehension, and that it does not affect us in terms of a

[10] See "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology" and "Ethics and the Face", *Totality and Infinity*, 42-48, 172-75.

[11] *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 52.

[12] *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 6.

theme (recall that Heidegger describes Being as "thematic" in the early pages of *Being and Time*) or a concept. If the other person were reducible to the concept I have of him or her, then that would make the relation to the other a relation of knowledge or an epistemological feature. As the two allusions to Kant in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" reveal, ethics is not reducible to epistemology, practical reason is not reducible to pure reason. As Levinas puts it in a discussion from the mid-1980's, ethics is otherwise than knowledge.[13] Levinas revealingly writes, "that which we catch sight of seems suggested by the practical philosophy of Kant, to which we feel particularly close".[14] To my mind, this suggests two possible points of agreement between Levinas and Kant, despite other obvious areas of disagreement such as the primacy of autonomy for Kant and Levinas' assertion of heteronomy as the basis for ethical experience. First, we might see Levinas' account of the ethical relation to the other person as an echo of Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, namely respect for persons, where I should act in such a way never to treat the other person as a means to an end, but rather as an end in him or herself.[15] Second, we should keep in mind that Kant concludes the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* by claiming the incomprehensibility of the moral law, "And thus, while we do not comprehend the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, we do comprehend its *incomprehensibility.* This is all that can fairly be asked of a philosophy which presses forward in its principles to the very limit of human reason."[16]

For Levinas, this relation to the other irreducible to comprehension, what he calls the "original relation",[17] takes place in the concrete situation of speech. Although Levinas' choice of terminology suggests otherwise, the face-to-face relation with the other is not a relation of perception or vision, but is always linguistic. The face is not something I see, but something I speak to. Furthermore, in speaking or calling or

[13] See *Autrement que savoir*, Paris, 1987.
[14] *Ibid.,* 10, but see also 8.
[15] Kant, *The Moral Law*, ed. H.J. Paton, London, 1948, 91.
[16] *Ibid.,* 123.
[17] *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 6.

listening to the other, I am not reflecting upon them, but I am actively and existentially engaged in a non-subsumptive relation, where I focus on the particular individual in front of me. I am not contemplating, I am conversing. It is this event of being in relation with the other as an act or a practice—which is variously and revealingly named in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" as "expression", "invocation" and "prayer"—that Levinas describes as "ethical". This leads to a significant insight: that Levinas does not posit, *a priori*, a conception of ethics that then instantiates itself (or does not) in certain concrete experiences. Rather, the ethical is an adjective that describes, *a posteriori* as it were, a certain event of being in a relation to the other irreducible to comprehension. It is the relation which is ethical, not an ethics that is instantiated in relations.

Some philosophers might be said to have a problem with other people. For a philosopher like Heidegger, the other person is just one of many: *das Man,* "the they", the crowd, the mass, the herd. I know all about the other because they are part of the mass that surrounds and suffocates me. On this picture, there is never anything absolutely challenging, remarkable or even, in a word Levinas uses in his late work, traumatizing about the other person. The other might at best become my colleague, comrade or co-worker, but not the source of my compassion or the object of my admiration, fear or desire. Levinas' point is that unless our social interactions are underpinned by ethical relations to other persons, then the worst might happen, that is, the failure to acknowledge the humanity of the other. Such, for Levinas, is what took place in the *Shoah* and in the countless tragedies of the last century which stubbornly persist into this century, where the other person becomes a faceless face in the crowd, someone whom the passer-by simply passes by, someone whose life or death is for me a matter of indifference. As Levinas succinctly puts it in one of his last published interviews from *Le Monde* in 1992, "The absence of concern for the other in Heidegger and his personal political adventure are linked".[18]

[18] Reprinted in *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, Montpellier, 1994, 209.

So, where Levinas puts ethics first, Heidegger puts them second. That is, the relation to the other person is only a moment in a philosophical investigation whose ambition is the exploration of the basic question of philosophy, the question of Being. Of course, the danger in all this is that the philosopher risks losing sight of the other person in his or her quest for ontological truth. It is perhaps no accident that the history of Greek philosophy begins with Thales, who falls into a ditch because he would rather gaze at the starry heavens that at what is under his nose.

*

Levinas' big idea is that the relation to the other cannot be reduced to comprehension and that this relation is ethical. But is he right? In concluding, let me shift emphasis here and try and explain Levinas' point with reference to the old epistemological chestnut of the problem of other minds. How can I know that another person is truly in pain? In Stanley Cavell's memorable restatement of the problem, let's imagine that I am a dentist drilling a patient's tooth and the patient suddenly screams out as a response to what seems like the pain caused by my clumsy drilling. And yet, in response to my embarrassed show of remorse, the patient says, "It wasn't hurting, I was just calling my hamsters".[19] Now, how can I know that the other person is being sincere, short of his hamsters scuttling obediently into my dental surgery? The point is that ultimately *I cannot*. I can never *know* whether another person is in pain or simply calling his hamsters.

That is to say, there is something about the other person, a dimension of separateness, interiority, secrecy or what Levinas calls "alterity" that escapes my comprehension. That which exceeds the bounds of my knowledge demands *acknowledgment*. Taking this a little further, one might say that it is the failure to acknowledge the other's separateness from me that can be the source of tragedy. Let me take the Cavellian example of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Most people would say that Othello

[19] *The Claim of* Reason, New York and Oxford, 1979, 89.

murdered Desdemona because he believed that he *knew* that she had been unfaithful. Prompted by his own green-eyed monster and by the sly intrigues of Iago, Othello murders Desdemona. So, if the consequence of Othello's alleged knowledge is tragic, then in what does the moral of this tragedy consist? One might say that it simply consists in the fact that we cannot ultimately know everything about the other person, even and perhaps especially when it comes to the people we love. I think this means that in our relation to other persons we have to learn to acknowledge what we cannot know and the failure to do this was Othello's tragic flaw. The end of certainty can be the beginning of trust.

In this sense, the lesson of Shakespearean tragedy and the vast human tragedies of this century, is to learn to acknowledge what one cannot know and to respect the separateness or what Levinas calls the *transcendence* the other person, a transcendence that is very much of this world and not part of some other-worldly mysticism. If the other gets lost in the crowd, then their transcendence vanishes. For Levinas, an *ethical* relation is one where I *face* the other person. It is this ethical relation to the other person that was lost in both the fact of National Socialist anti-semitism and in its philosophical apologias. And this is why Levinas wants to leave the climate of both Heidegger's philosophy and an entire Greek tradition, in order to return to another source for thinking, namely the more Biblical wisdom of unconditional respect for the other human being.

As Levinas was fond of putting it, the entirety of his philosophy can be summarised in the simple words, "Après vous, Monsieur". That is, by everyday and quite banal acts of civility, hospitality, kindness and politeness that have perhaps received too little attention from philosophers. It is such acts that Levinas qualifies with the adjective "ethical". Now, it hopefully goes without saying that the achievement of such an ethical relation with the other person is not *just* a task for philosophy, but it *is* a philosophical task, namely to understand what we might call the moral grammar of everyday life and to try and teach that grammar. The other person is not simply a step on the philosopher's ladder to metaphysical truth. And perhaps the true source of wonder with

which, as Aristotle claimed, philosophy begins, is not to be found by staring into the starry heavens, but by looking into another's eyes, for here is a more palpable infinity that can never exhaust my curiosity.

But is Levinas really doing ethics at all? Following Cavell once again, we might respond that there are two species of moral philosophers: legislators and moral perfectionists.[20] The former, like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, provide detailed precepts, rules and principles that add up to a theory of justice. The latter, like Levinas and Cavell, believe that ethics has to be based on some form of basic existential commitment or demand that goes beyond the theoretical strictures of any account of justice or any socially instituted ethical code. The moral perfectionist belief is that an ethical theory that does not give expression to this basic demand will simply spin in a void and, moreover, have no compelling way of explaining the source of one's motivation to act on the basis of that theory. The paradox of this version of moral perfectionism is that perfection is impossible and that, in Wallace Stevens' words, "the imperfect is our paradise".

Although Levinas would not have approved of this terminology, I think that he is seeking to give an account of what the Danish theologian and close contemporary of Levinas, who was also a student at Strasbourg and Freiburg, Knud Ejler Løgstrup, calls a basic existential *demand*, a lived fundamental obligation that should be at the basis of all moral theory and moral action.[21] In my view, it is a powerful and compelling account. Levinas describes this demand, like other moral perfectionists, in exorbitant terms: infinite responsibility, trauma, persecution, hostage, obsession. The ethical demand is impossibly demanding. It has to be. If it were not so demanding then it would let us off the moral hook, as it were, and ethics would be reduced to a pro-

[20] See *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome. The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Chicago, 1990, for this distinction, which is employed below with respect to Levinas by Hilary Putnam in "Levinas and Judaism," *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Critchley and Bernasconi (eds.), Cambridge, 2005.

[21] In this regard, see Knud Ejler Løgstrup's remarkable book, *The Ethical Demand*, Notre Dame, 1997, which contains a helpful introduction by Hans Fink and Alastair MacIntyre. The link between Løgstrup and Levinas was first established by Zygmunt Bauman in *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford, 1993.

cedural programming where we justify moral norms by either universalising them (Kantian deontology), assessing them in the light of their consequences (Benthamite utilitarianism), or referring them to some already given notion of custom, convention or contract (Neo-Aristotelian virtue theory). Surely the entire difficulty of moral theory and moral life consists in the fact that we require *both* legislators *and* moral perfectionists, both a compelling description of the ethical demand and a plausible theory of justification for moral norms. We need both Levinasians and Habermasians, both Cavellians and Rawlsians.

Levinas' big idea does not suffice for the solution of all our pressing and often conflicting ethical problems, and surely it would be nothing short of miraculous if it did. We can be good Levinasians and still genuinely uncertain about which course of action to follow in a specific situation. But the strength of Levinas' position lies, I would claim, in reminding us of the nature of the ethical demand, a demand that must be presupposed at the basis of all moral theories if those theories are not going to lose all connection with both the passions and the apathy of everyday life. Levinasian ethics might not be a sufficient condition for a complete ethical theory, but it is, in my view, a necessary condition for any such theory.

PART TWO: ETHICS, POLITICS, AND JUSTICE

ETHICS AND POLITICS IN THE THOUGHT OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS*

Georges Hansel[1]

Levinas' thought developed over a period of sixty years. The core of his thought is clearly ethics, which Levinas sometimes termed "first philosophy". However, alongside the deployment of this core, Levinas never ceased to formulate certain options which one can justifiably term "political". The aim of this talk is to highlight the major phases in this parallel development.

One cannot disregard the dual quality—philosophical on the one hand, anchored in Jewish tradition and history on the other—of Levinas' thought. The relationship between ethics and politics is not only a theoretical problem; it goes beyond the reflection of a thinker articulating eternal moral categories vis-à-vis the universal history of States. The Haggadah read every year at the Passover Seder stipulates that "even if we are all wise, all of us men of knowledge and understanding the law, it nevertheless is incumbent upon us to narrate the departure from Egypt". In other words, certain specific events in history go beyond and upset the categories of any mind and any thought. As Levinas notes, the underpinnings of any philosophy are certain explicit or implicit "pre-philosophical experiences."

In Levinas' case, one event played a key role: the Holocaust, or more generally speaking the advent of Hitlerism. Not that there is a cause and effect relationship, such that Levinas' thought can be explained by reference to the Holocaust, let alone be reduced to a reflection on this event. But the solutions that Levinas proposed to the problems which

* Translated from the French by Esther Singer

[1] Acknowledgments: I am indebted to Michael Smith for his invaluable help, suggestions and remarks.

he raised take into account the unique event constituted by the Holocaust, that is "the paradigm of gratuitous suffering, in which evils appears in its diabolical horror."[2]

Schematically, we can define three major stages in the emergence of Levinas' thought.

1) The writings before World War II, prior to the formulation of his personal thought, which could be called the "writings of his youth" if they did not already manifest such philosophical mastery. Although belonging to the phenomenological school inaugurated by Husserl and developed by Heidegger, Levinas did not hesitate to demarcate himself from both of them, a gap that would continue to widen, in particular as concerns Heidegger. With respect to my topic today, in 1934 Levinas published a major article entitled "Reflections on the philosophy of Hitlerism"[3] whose content I will discuss in a moment.
2) The second period goes from the Liberation to 1961, ending with the publication of the major work *Totality and Infinity*,[4] a work in which Levinas' philosophy emerges in its first complete and systematic form. It is easy to characterize the unity of inspiration for this period. Levinas defines a new meaning of ethics: the happy life of the isolated, egotistical I, is challenged by the encounter with the Other. The philosophical description of the modalities and consequences of this experience, of this "revelation" of Alterity, is the main goal of Levinas' analyses, in which the key word is the "face" of the other man. Tech-

[2] The interweaving of ethics, politics, philosophy, Judaism and the Holocaust emerges clearly in *Entre Nous*: *On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, London, 1998, 97. (*Entre Nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, Paris, 1991, 114.)

[3] *Esprit* 26 (1934), 199-208; reprinted in *les Cahiers de l'Herne*, 1991, in *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, Fata Morgana, 1994, and once more by the Editions Payot-Rivages, Paris, 1997. "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", *Critical Inquiry* 17/1 (1990).

[4] *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1969. (*Totalité et Infini*, The Hague, 1961.)

nically speaking, Levinas identifies the structures of the *Same vis-à-vis the Other.* Correlatively, the role and the meaning that at this time Levinas assigns to politics are well defined.

3) The third period begins shortly after the publication of *Totality and Infinity* and its pivotal work is *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence,*[5] which appeared in 1974. Levinas' field of inquiry shifts: now his attention is on the construction of the subject himself. The key word is no longer the "face" encountered by a subject who is already constituted, but the "responsibility" towards the Other, a responsibility which structures *from the outset* the human I. By definition, before any encounter, before any experience, the I is invested with responsibility. Egotism loses its status of a first state which is challenged by the revelation of the Other and, on the contrary, takes on the meaning of a forgetfulness of what the human I is. To formulate this technically, it is no longer a question of the Other *facing* the Same, but of a subjectivity which, using Levinas' terminology, is already structured as the Other *in* the Same. Along with this transformation, the role of politics also changes: here Levinas introduces a highly original perspective.

1. The Hitlerian Cataclysm

Levinas came to Strasbourg in 1923, began to study philosophy, and led the life of an assimilated Jewish student. In 1928, he discovered the school of phenomenology, and became part of it in a decisive way that would be a permanent one, at least as regards method. Judaism was of little concern and Levinas' first writings make no mention of it. To use the standard cliché, at that time Levinas was "happy like God in France."

[5] *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,* trans. Alfonso Lingis, The Hague, 1981. (*Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence*, The Hague, 1974.)

But historical violence was to undermine Levinas' philosophical idyll. In 1933, Evil came to power. As Levinas himself often stated afterwards, the Hitlerian cataclysm was decisive for the orientation of his thought. In 1934, he wrote the article "Some Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" which marks his entry into politics, so to speak. Levinas inquires into the meaning of Hitlerism and shows that Hitlerism should not be viewed as an ordinary type of madness. It is based on an overriding idea that threatens European civilization as a whole, more than at any time in the past.

What is the foundation of European civilization in its many forms? The notion of freedom as the idea that the individual can and must overcome history. This idea would never cease to be part of Levinas' thought. When ethics was given its radical formulation, this would be expressed as the ability to judge history. In 1934, Levinas' thought had not yet reached this point. He analyzes the forms in which the mastery of history can be identified or, which comes down to the same thing, he analyzes the figures of freedom. He examines in turn the notions of freedom in Judaism, Christianity, Liberalism, and Marxism to contrast them to the radically new phenomenon of Hitlerian doctrine.

European society, exemplified through its various figures, resolutely champions the idea of the freedom of the individual. Moral freedom, freedom through grace, freedom of the mind, social freedom: this was the cornerstone of Western humanism that Hitler was about to destroy. What is the essence of Hitlerism? In a nutshell, it consists in defining the life of the spirit by a mystique of the body. Classical materialism may claim to reduce the mind to a natural phenomenon, but it does not glorify the body and its obscure powers. The reversal was achieved by Hitlerism and accounts for its basic tenets, and first among them, racism which is "at the basis of a new conception of man [...] and of society."[6]

Levinas' considerations do not stop there. He goes on to draw a truly political conclusion. No truth, he says, not even Hitlerian truth, can renounce universality. Universality is in the formal nature of truth.

[6] "Reflections on Hitlerism", 69 (18-19) and 69 (19-20) (The last figures refer to the French edition.)

What kind of universality is compatible with racism? It cannot be the propagation of an idea; so it must be the expansion of a force. Hitlerism must necessarily lead to war. It is striking to observe how, starting from a purely theoretical analysis, Levinas was able to assess the gravity of Hitler's rise to power. Hitlerism is not a new modality of European society; it is not even a modality of human society. Hitler's racism is, Levinas concludes, quite simply the negation of man's humanity.[7]

Thus, for Levinas in 1934, man's essence is defined by freedom, and he is masterful in his ability to group disparate ideas, including Marxism, which he always felt had a humanistic facet, under this same banner. This prime role of freedom was maintained until the War and gave a specific coloration to his writings during that period.

The ideas of freedom, transcendence of the subject, reason, as well as the acknowledgment of social problems, were clearly maintained, but their role and meaning were radically altered as Levinas' formulated his own philosophy. Returning almost sixty years later to the 1934 text, Levinas, without repudiating it, indicated its limits:

> We must ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve an authentic dignity for the human subject. Does the subject arrive at the human condition prior to assuming responsibility for the other man in the act of election that raises him up to this height? This election comes from a god—or God—who beholds him in the face of the other man, his neighbour, the original "site" of the revelation.[8]

2. Totality and Infinity or Ethics above Politics

At the end of the war, Levinas began to develop his main ideas, punctuated by the publication of several key articles. This period ended in 1961 with the publication of a major work, *Totality and Infinity*.

[7] "Reflections on Hitlerism", 70-71 (23-24).

[8] Letter to professor Davidson, published in *Critical Inquiry* 17/1 (1990) and again in *Cahiers de l'Herne* (1991). Translation slightly altered.

Morals and ethics

The driving force is the concept of ethics as defined by Levinas. We can better understand it by comparing it to the classic notion which, for convenience's sake, I will call "morality".

Morality corresponds to a quest for perfection. This quest can take many forms. The establishment of a harmony or a "golden mean" in one's behavior, domination of one's impulses, man's obedience to a law imposed upon him by his own mind, reaching a state of contemplation, or on the contrary an imperative for action and achievement; these are a few possibilities. What they have in common is that the driving force is the subject himself. I must aim for this or that form of perfection and, in so doing, realize my true nature.

Levinas distances himself from these schemes. The ethical impulse no longer comes from me. It comes from the revelation of the other, namely the other man. But what does the other signify? And what does it mean to say that the revelation of the other is correlative from the outset with ethical duty?

Here is an outrageous summary of the main features of Levinas' thought, with the understanding that each of these features would deserve a full discussion in its own right. First of all, to put it negatively, the Other cannot be defined by any characteristic, does not enter into any concept, and is not an individual in a given species, not even the human species. The Other is not even another I, my *alter ego*. The Other appears to us as exceeding all thought, like the idea of infinity. Positively, the Other is a speaking face, which can mean expression, prayer, commandment. With the revelation of the Other my freedom, in contrast with the classical conceptualization, sees itself as unjust, and thereupon invested with responsibilities and duties, all of which should also be interpreted as part of my "election".

Given such a conception of ethics, what is the role of politics, institutions or more generally, history? When Levinas wrote *Totality and Infinity*, he still viewed the role of political reason in the classic way, and the ethical relationship was what, by definition, was at odds with

politics. But the gap separating it from politics is not absolute. Although it can never be entirely overcome, it nevertheless has degrees.

Politics and War

I will begin with the most tragic element: war. Extrapolating from Levinas one can say that if, using his terms, ethics should be declared "first philosophy," war is the first political reason. This observation is firmly set down as of the opening lines of *Totality and Infinity* where war is seen as what "renders morality derisory."[9]

This can be formulated in another way. War, politics as war, is not a contingency, an unfortunate accident or a disease that needs to be treated. Daring to state that war is "the very exercise of reason" implies that it cannot be reduced to meaninglessness, or even to a simple empirical situation. War has an ontological status that Levinas defines by the notion of totality.[10]

But is there really no way out? Isn't war inevitably followed by peace? Don't people recover their identities once peace is declared? Even if only within a historical dialectic, or better yet, a universal political model, the uniqueness of the individual, subjectivity, could perhaps be maintained. But Levinas also closes this door to us: "The peace of empires issued from war rests on war. It does not restore to the alienated beings their lost identity."[11]

[9] *Totality and Infinity*, 21 (IX).
[10] *Totality and Infinity,* 21-22 (X).
[11] *Totality and Infinity,* 21 (X).

Politics and Animality

Levinas' thought is not always characterized by the somber perspective I have just described. As he emphasizes in his Talmudic commentaries, truth has multiple dimensions and this principle applies first and foremost to his own thought. Politics has another dimension in which it is no longer "the art of winning the war".

Let us change prisms and start with this other truth (or half-truth): the state of nature is one of "dog eat dog" and the humanity of man requires him to go beyond the reign of animality, beyond brute force. Henceforth political reason takes on a new meaning, enabling us to escape from the war of each against all. The function of the State, of institutions, and of the law is to guarantee the exercise of freedom. Levinas firmly accepts this classic description. He is no anarchist.

However this political order is characterized by its ambivalence. On the one hand it clearly transcends animality and is the condition of freedom. It is useless trying to imagine guaranteeing freedom without institutions, law and a State. But on the other hand the political order does not recognize man as a unique individual. The universality of the political order only recognizes the citizen in his anonymity.[12]

Political order guarantees freedom but it is in no way that of the ethical relationship. This can already be seen in the shift in meaning in the concept of freedom. Here it is no longer this freedom that acknowledges itself as unjust and responsible for others. The meaning of the political institution is, on the contrary, to enable the growth of free individuals and their competition by a healthy restriction which preserves them from mutual destruction.

[12] *Totality and Infinity*, 241-242 (218, 219-220).

The political order is not that of the relationship to infinity opened up by the revelation of the other; it is still the order of a totality in which persons as such disappear to the benefit of an abstraction: the State. The gap between the political and ethical orders is for the moment unbridgeable.[13]

Judged by History or Judge of History?

In everything we have discussed so far, the spaces in which the ethical relationship and politics (or more broadly history) are played out have been separated. The introduction to *Totality and Infinity* connects the personal relationship to "the extraordinary phenomenon of prophetic eschatology," which, at this stage in the development of his thought, means for Levinas an excess without continuity to history, or in his own words, "*a surplus that is always outside the totality*". The ethical relationship indeed takes place in history but transcends it absolutely.[14]

As a consequence of this transcendence, Levinas clearly states and reiterates that history is not a criterion of judgment. Judgment by history ignores the uniqueness of each present, of each individual, reduces subjectivity to visible objectivity, and leaves no room for ethical responsibility. Unhesitating in his opposition to Hegel, Levinas rejects all judgment by history.[15]

But shouldn't we reverse these terms? If the ethical relationship transcends history, if moral conscience should not submit itself to a jurisdiction of any kind of history, should we not then conclude that reciprocally, history escapes from its jurisdiction? There is a strong temptation to follow this path which, in different forms, religious or political, has often been taken. This is not the option Levinas chooses.

[13] See Levinas' commentary on a Talmudic passage which compares Rome to a pig: *Beyond the Verse*, trans. Gary D. Mole, London, 1994, 65. (*L'Au delà du verset*, Paris, 1984, 84.)

[14] *Totality and Infinity*, 52 (23).

[15] *Totality and Infinity*, 23 (XI).

Moral conscience is authorized to make judgments on history. For Levinas, this philosophical option constitutes at the same time the root of Judaic teachings.[16]

Levinas goes further and posits that the preceding statements should necessarily have their translation within history itself. The rejection of the verdict of history, a philosophical position, should also have its own historical figure. Levinas did not need to look far to find one: this figure is the history of the Jewish people.[17]

Nevertheless, when Levinas writes *Totality and Infinity*, the judgment of history does not mean a judgment on some historical figure or another, and from this standpoint, Levinas retreats somewhat as compared to the analyses in 'Reflections on the philosophy of Hitlerism'. He is clearly a democrat, but the ideas of democracy and the liberal state do not yet have a specific philosophical dignity. Furthermore, the terms themselves, "democracy" and "liberal State" never appear in *Totality and Infinity.* The role of the State and political institutions is at best to preserve the peace, at the price of a tyranny of universality. It does not consist in enabling justice to reign. In *Totality and Infinity*, the concepts of justice and charity are used interchangeably and are subordinate solely to the ethical situation, as Levinas would specify twenty-six years later:

> There is no terminological difference in Totality and Infinity between mercy or charity, the source of a right of the other person coming before mine, in the first case, and justice in the second, where the right of the other person—but obtained only after investigation and judgment—is imposed before that of the third. The general ethical notion of justice is mentioned without discrimination in the two situations.[18]

[16] *Difficult Freedom*, London, 1990, 201. (*Difficile liberté*, second edition, Paris, 1976, 260.) *Difficult Freedom*, 23 translation slightly modified, (41).

[17] *Difficult Freedom*, 199 (257).

[18] Preface to the German edition of *Totality and Infinity,* reprinted in *Entre nous*, 198 (249).

3. Otherwise than Being or Ethics as the Foundation of Politics

Levinas' considerations on the role of politics do not stop at *Totality and Infinity*. They underwent a major change which, in fact, was already surreptitiously germinating in the conclusion to *Totality and Infinity*.

Let us ask a question. Isn't there another justification for the institutional order than the regulation of brutalities? According to this first conception, political rationality is above animality but infinitely below the ethical relationship which escapes it and which judges it. Isn't there another perspective, in which the ethical order itself requires political rationality? Levinas takes this novel path where, schematically speaking, the issue is no longer to raise the natural to the rational but rather to lower the ethical back down to the rational. Levinas will from now on show that the ethical concern itself requires political universality.

The blossoming of this new perspective takes place in conjunction with a radicalization of the meaning of the Other, which I must now describe. The path down which Levinas is leading us is the steepest in his entire philosophy. Nevertheless it should be pointed out that Levinas' thought is a complex construction in which an extreme idea is counterbalanced by the extremity of another. This is the opposite of an equilibrium obtained in a mixture, in which sharp contrasts are dulled down. Levinas does not temper his exaggerations; he counterbalances them. For instance, as we shall see, responsibility for the Other defined by Levinas is clearly "excessive" but it is balanced immediately by responsibility for the third, which is no less imperative.

As I said earlier, this new perspective can be schematized by comparing two formulations: *Totality and Infinity* deals with the Other facing the same. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas considers the other within the same. Or, in a less formalized way: in *Totality and Infinity* the point of departure is my previously constituted freedom, which the revelation of the face of the Other enables me to discover as unjust. In *Otherwise than Being*, we no longer deal with the revelation of the

Other to an already formed I. Rather, responsibility for the Other becomes formative of my I, my own subjectivity. I am concerned by the Other even before meeting him.[19]

Levinas sets forth this new figure of Alterity in an interpretation of the verse: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. The verse does not state that you shall love your neighbor "because he is like yourself" or "as much as yourself". The "as yourself" extends to the whole beginning of the verse. "Love your neighbor; it's yourself". "It is this love of your neighbor that is yourself."[20]

This change in perspective finds expression in a set of highly original and radical analyses which initially are disconcerting. Levinas is almost forced to create a new language. The goal is to describe human subjectivity without using the verb To Be. If I say for example "man is a thinking being", this presupposes a being already set in his being and, on this basis, endowed with thought. But, for Levinas, the human I must be characterized prior to any established situation, hence the phrase "otherwise than being". Five key concepts characterize the relationship to the Other. These are responsibility, fraternity, substitution, hostage and the uniqueness of the I, but I will only discuss here the first, responsibility.

Responsibility

Responsibility for the Other precedes freedom and even being. It is prior to all commitment. One does not choose responsibility any more than one chooses to exist. To use a phrase often employed by Levinas, responsibility comes to me from a past that was never present, or, in other words, it comes to me from before the creation. I am responsible

[19] *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, 1985, 95. (*Ethique et Infini*, Paris, 1982, 100.)

[20] *Of God Who Comes to Mind,* Stanford, 1998, 90. (*De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Paris, 1982, 144.)

even before I was created. On the other hand, responsibility is not measured against what it is possible to accomplish. Finally and above all, it is the meaning of human subjectivity itself.[21]

For whom is one responsible? The Other certainly, but given that this responsibility is not described as being posterior to the encounter, since it is *a-priori* formative of the subject, does it involve the first person I run into, or even unknown Others? What is one responsible for? Here Levinas is heading down a sheer path of increasing radicality.

In the first place, I am responsible for the oppression and the misfortunes experienced by the Other. This degree of responsibility is not disconnected from daily life, at least in its more noble aspects. If there is a utopia, it is an observable one, and this is precisely how Levinas responds to the criticism of having a utopian form of thought.[22]

Levinas does not stop there. I am not only responsible for the misfortunes of others. In classic philosophy, the free man is responsible for his own actions and guilty of his own faults. Levinas goes further. "I am responsible for others" means responsible for the faults of others, responsible for the freedom of others. Let us make a further effort and take this idea to its extreme limit. I am responsible for the fault of the other and even for the persecution with which he persecutes me. Levinas does go that far, while stating that this type of perspective requires immediate restrictions.[23]

Alongside responsibility for others emerges responsibility for the third, which is no less urgent, and as we shall see, opens up a truly political dimension that differs from the one I presented earlier.

Where Politics Appears

Moving from others facing the same to others in the same, daring to state that the subject in his own definition, in his own ipseity, is structured by responsibility, that he is for the Other before being an I,

[21] *Otherwise than Being*, 10 (12) and 11 (14).
[22] *Otherwise than Being*, 166 (211).
[23] *Ethics and Infinity*, 99(106).

denotes an extreme amplification of the role of others. It is no surprise that this emphasis elicited its own counterweight, namely, the taking into consideration of the third man who has just left the scene. Taking the third into account resulted first of all in a clear-cut differentiation between the notions of charity and justice but above all, secondly, by the emergence in Levinas' thought of a truly political horizon.

Charity and Justice

As we have seen, in *Totality and Infinity* the notions of charity and justice are used interchangeably and are both subordinate to an ethical relationship where precedence is given to the right of the Other, either directly or after investigation. In fact, this quasi-identification is a digression in the path taken by Levinas since a distinction between charity and justice is clearly posited in his earlier writings, both philosophical and "confessional", but this distinction only finds its real place much later.[24]

Levinas is thus very familiar with the distinction between justice and charity, which is merely blurred in *Totality and Infinity.* The charity relationship is dissymmetrical and takes place between I and the Other. In contrast, the notion of justice causes a third to intervene, and the dissymmetry yields to equality.

The ethical relationship means responsibility for others. I need to justify myself and I am bound by obligations and a responsibility which extends to infinity. Pushed to its limit, I owe him everything. Let us accept this provisionally, at least as a hypothesis. However, at this juncture I encounter the third, the second Other. To him as well, I owe everything. Alongside others facing me, the third emerges who is no less worthy, and who is no less infinite. The appearance of the third changes the givens. It introduces an element of equality where dissymmetry once reigned alone.[25]

[24] *Time and the Other*, 84 (76).
[25] *Otherwise than Being*, 158 (201).

When there is only the Other, I can imagine that I give him everything, but when the third, when a second Other appears, things become complicated. Generosity and the gift of self are no longer sufficient. What we need is justice. First of all, we need to think, compare the rights of each and everyone, weigh what each person is due. Ethics is insufficient, we need wisdom. Not only a theoretical wisdom but a political wisdom, which Levinas calls Greek wisdom. Political wisdom means institutions, a State, if necessary, violence. Once again, but in a different perspective, Levinas is not an anarchist.[26]

Nevertheless there is a problem. This State and these institutions deriving from an ethical necessity can in their rationality and their universality be in contradiction with their ethical justification. As we have already seen, rationality and universality make poor bedfellows with the uniqueness of each person. Once they have become citizens of a State, the Other and the third run the distinct risk of losing their irreducibility. The State at every instant is threatened by the totalitarian temptation. The State must thus be preserved from forgetting the impetus that gave birth to it. Levinas takes his thoughts to their conclusion. Justice, universality proceeding now from the infinity of the Other must constantly perfect itself, doubt itself, attenuate its rigors. In short, justice, the rigor that emerged from an initial goodness, needs to be brought back to its point of origin, i.e. to be moderated by a final goodness. Ethics yields its place to politics but reappears in the last instance.[27]

Conclusion

There is an important corollary that emerges from this ethical requirement: Types of States are not equivalent. One of them is preferred, the liberal State and democracy. But we need to pay attention to the origi-

[26] *Alterity and Transcendence*, 101 (112). *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith, London, 1994, 134. (*A l'heure des nations*, Paris, 1988, 156.)
[27] *Entre nous*, 229 (260).

nality of the perspective. Levinas does not justify democracy because it is the government of the people, or liberalism through considerations of economic efficiency. Democracy is superior because it has internal mechanisms of correction, improvement, and checks on its own legislation.[28]

At the end of its itinerary, Levinas' concept of politics is thus the opposite of that of Hobbes "in which the State emerges not from the limitation of charity, but from the limitation of violence".[29] The liberal State is "an ethical category", it allows men "to keep the sense of their responsibility, that is to say their uniqueness as elect to answer."[30]

[28] *Entre nous*, 229-30 (260).

[29] *Entre nous*, 105 (123).

[30] *Autrement que savoir*, Paris, 1988, 62, (translated by Michael B. Smith).

NECESSITY AND LEGITIMACY OF THE STATE[1]

Pascal Delhom

1. Practical and Political Relevance of Levinas' Philosophy

Although Emmanuel Levinas has nothing resembling a political philosophy nor anything like a morals in the sense of a positive system of values, of rules and of prohibitions, his philosophy certainly has practical and political relevance.

This means that the philosophy of Levinas cannot be reduced to the thinking of the absolute alterity of the other and to an ethics of unsharable responsibility as an answer to the call of the other. It is certainly true that the other calls me from beyond the world and disturbs my being in the world. But she calls me in the face of the other human being, of elsewhom (an (im)possible translation of the French "autrui") in the world. And the other does not command me to leave the world in a movement of pure desire, but to care for the other human being, for elsewhom, in the world.

Moreover, I do not hear the call of the other in the immediacy of her proximity, but as a trace on the face of elsewhom and as a trace in my action for her. The ethics of Levinas is an invitation to be attentive in the world to the alterity of the other, to the call of the other, which I can only hear in acting for elsewhom.

Levinas writes: "Desire, or the response to the enigma, or morality is a plot with three characters: the I approaches the Infinite by going generously toward the you, who is still my contemporary, but, in the trace of illeity, presents himself out of a depth of the past, faces and approaches me."[2]

[1] I would like to thank Donald Goodwin for having revised this text.

[2] Levinas, "Phenomenon and Enigma", in: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, 1987, 72.

This generosity of the I toward the you, which is the genuine approach of the infinite, is attention and action for elsewhom in the world. "Attention and action", writes Levinas in "useless suffering", "which devolve so imperiously and directly upon human beings—upon their *ego*—that it is not possible for them without debasing themselves to expect them from an omnipotent God."[3]

But if the genuine way to answer the call of the other is my attention and my action for elsewhom in the world, one question becomes essential: who is elsewhom?

Is it my brother or my sister? Is it my family, my people? Is it the stranger who needs my help or the powerful man who despises me? The question is necessary because there is a plurality of human beings living with me in the world. If I were alone with the other, there would be no question. I would be responsible for her without any restriction. But I am never alone with my neighbour. There are always other people in addition to my neighbour. They are what Levinas calls the third person or the third party.

2. The Third Person or Party

These people called the third party may be physically present to our encounter or they may not, this point is not important. They are the people who live with us in the same society, who speak the same language and who could address us. They are also the people who happen to be where we are at the same time as we are, the people we are talking about, or even people we do not know and whom we would not understand if they spoke to us, but whose hunger should not leave us indifferent. All these people, in a certain way, are present to my encounter with my neighbour and qualify my responsibility. For if my responsibility only commanded me to be attentive to my neighbour and to act

[3] Levinas, "La souffrance inutile", in: *Les Cahiers de la nuit surveillée, no.3, Emmanuel Levinas*, texts collected by Jacques Rolland, Verdier 1984, 332 (my translation).

for her, it would mean the exclusion of the third party, that is, of all other people, from my responsibility. And this exclusion would be a form of terrible violence. Hence, for Levinas, there is no exclusivity and there cannot be any exclusivity of my responsibility for my neighbour. The third party, each third person is also my neighbour, and I am also responsible for her.

The qualification of my responsibility in the presence of the third party does not only signify the multiplication of my responsibility in the sense that I am responsible for my neighbour and for the third person. It means at the same time a certain transformation of this responsibility. This transformation occurs because my responsibility cannot simply be shared like a piece of cake. As an answer to the call of the other in the face of other people, my responsibility must take the various claims of these people into consideration. And these claims are not uniform. They are different and sometimes contradictory and incompatible. What do I have to do if my action has to be an answer to these diverse claims?

Moreover, while my action is an action in the world for people living in the world, it has to take into consideration not only the claims of the others, but also their situations in the world: who is more in need of my action than these others, and who is prepared to accept it? What is the relationship between my neighbour and the third person? Are they friends, enemies, is the one the victim of the other's violence?

The transformation of my responsibility in the presence of the third party is bound to the necessity to compare the others, their claims and their situations, for the sake of justice. This comparison does not mean that the others are reduced to comparability. Even in the comparison they remain incomparable. But in the name of my responsibility for my neighbour and for the third person, the incomparable must be compared. This is the whole difficulty of justice: that it does not just command me/us to share what we have or what we produce, but to compare the incomparable who remain incomparable in the comparison.

If the others lost their incomparability in the comparison, that is, if they lost the uniqueness of their otherness, it would mean the end of my responsibility for them. For my responsibility is an answer to the call of the other addressed to me from the depth of her otherness. But if the incomparable others were not compared, justice would be impossible. I would only be responsible for my neighbour and exclude all others from my responsibility.

In the presence of the third party, my responsibility must become a claim to justice, and its first appearance is a question: "What do I have to do with justice?"[4]

There is yet another qualification of my responsibility in the presence of the third person. Levinas writes in *Otherwise than Being*: "The third party is other than the neighbour, but also another neighbour, and also a neighbour of the other and not simply her fellow." The fact that the third party might be not only my neighbour, but also the neighbour of my neighbour opens the possibility of an equality between my neighbour and me in the service of the third party. This equality is the beginning of a community of brothers and sisters in the service of the third party or person before any question and before any comparison. And because the third person might also be responsible for my neighbour, it is the beginning of a community with the neighbour and the third person as well. This conception of the transformation of my responsibility in the presence of the third person is introduced by Levinas in the early text "the ego and the totality"[5] (1954) and is prevalent in *Totality and Infinity.* I quote from *Totality and Infinity*:[6]

"The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal. His equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the *third party*, thus present at the encounter, whom in the midst of his destitution the other already serves. He comes to *join* me. But he joins me to himself

[4] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, 1981, 157.

[5] Levinas, "The Ego and the Totality", in: *Collected philosophical papers*, op. cit., 25-45.

[6] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1969, 213.

for service". This equality in the service of the third party is a form of justice before any question and before any comparison. But this justice is not in contradiction with the necessity of comparison. On the contrary, it is presupposed by the comparison. For if the third party were not also my neighbour before any comparison, that is, if I were only responsible for my neighbour, I would not have to compare.

But the fact that the third person might be the neighbour of my neighbour does not only open the possibility of a humanity as brotherhood and sisterhood. It also limits my responsibility. For it is true to say with Levinas that I am responsible for my neighbour and for the third person. But I am not responsible for the responsibility of my neighbour for the third person. The responsibility of my neighbour does not depend on my responsibility for her or for the third person. This is her own concern. I cannot command it and I am not responsible for it, even though I am responsible for the other independently of her responsibility for me or for my neighbour.

This limitation of my responsibility is specially perceptible in the question of forgiveness. My responsibility is an ethical obligation to forgive the other who hurts me. But I cannot forgive the other who hurts my neighbour. Only my neighbour can do it. And I cannot command my neighbour to forgive the person who hurts her: this is her own concern.

There is a radical difference here between Levinas and Kant. For Levinas, it is not possible to universalise the ethical imperative. The claim of the other is addressed to me in the second person singular, and I answer it by virtue of my responsibility for elsewhom; it obliges me alone and no one else. In this sense, Levinas speaks of responsibility as a principle of individuation.[7] My responsibility obliges me alone, and my neighbour's responsibility is absolutely distinct from mine. Even if my neighbour joins me in serving the third party, we can share the service, but not the responsibility. And my responsibility, which is absolutely mine, and that of my neighbour, which is absolutely hers,

[7] See Levinas, "Philosophie, justice, amour", in: *Entre Nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, Paris, 1991, 118 (my translation).

cannot be subsumed under a universal norm of responsibility for elsewhom. They are absolutely singular, unsharable and only expressible in the first person singular: "here I am".

The singularity of my responsibility has tremendous consequences for the possibility of establishing a social order in the world. If an ethical commandment can be universalised as a form of practical reason or in a process of communicative reason, it has validity for everyone and obliges everyone in the same way. It can be used as an ethical foundation for a social order. An example of such an ethical commandment is respect for human rights.

But if an ethical commandment cannot be universalised, if it obliges me alone, how can it have any social and political relevancy? Even human rights are for Levinas the rights of other human beings, the rights of elsewhom, and my duty. They oblige me and only me. And if they oblige others, this obligation does not depend on my responsibility, but is their concern.

3. The Necessity of the State

Nevertheless, according to Levinas it would be wrong to separate the domain of ethical responsibility and of political action. Certainly, the claim of justice concerns primarily the justice of my actions for others. The first question of justice is: "What do I have to do with justice?" But my claim to justice cannot be reduced to my own actions. Its meaning cannot be reduced to the limitation of my own violence. In a world in which there is violence, wars and oppression, it is not enough to assist the victims and to be attentive to their suffering. One has to put an end to violence against human beings, or at least one has to try to reduce it.

What do I have to do if a third person hurts my neighbour? I cannot oblige the victim to forgive, for according to Levinas[8] this would be an exhortation to human sacrifice. Nor can I command the person who is hurting my neighbour not to do this, because an ethical com-

[8] See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 126.

mandment cannot come from outside of the relationship. But I also cannot be indifferent to the injury of the one who is being hurt. What do I have to do? In an interview published in *De Dieu qui vient à l'Idée*, Levinas says: "It is the third party who is the source of justice, and hence of justified repression: the violence suffered by the third party justifies using violence to put an end to the other's violence."[9]

The necessity of using violence to put an end to the other's violence against the third person is the ethical foundation of the necessity of the State. For repressive violence cannot only and not even primarily be mine, except perhaps in special cases of immediate defence of the person attacked. Self-defence is problematic for Levinas, but the defence of the other might justify my violence in cases which are similar to cases of self-defence. But these cases are exceptional and have to remain the exception. Generally, repressive violence has to be that of a State.

There is here a certain proximity to Thomas Hobbes in the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. Even if the necessity of a State is based upon a claim to justice and presupposes the brotherhood and sisterhood of human beings, the state must react with violence to the violence of human beings. Levinas writes: "Already the City, whatever its order, guarantees the right of humans against their fellow-creatures, imagined as still in a state of nature, men as wolves to other men, as Hobbes would have had it. Although Israel sees itself born of an irreducible fraternity, it is not ignorant of the temptation, within itself and surrounding it, of war between all."[10]

As I said, there is here a certain proximity between Levinas and Hobbes, but there is also a decisive difference: for Hobbes, the necessity of the State is a consequence of everyone's fear of their own death and of a rational and reasonable decision to live in a commonwealth in order to protect their own lives. For Levinas, the necessity of the State is for me a consequence of my fear of the death of my neighbour. It is a

[9] Levinas, "Questions et Réponses", in: *De Dieu qui vient à l'Idée*, seconde édition revue et augmentée, Paris, 1986, 134 (my translation).

[10] Levinas, "The State of Caesar and the State of David", in: Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford, 1989, 273f.

consequence of my claim to justice for my neighbour and for the third person for whom I am responsible before any contract and covenant. The question of justice does not arise after the conclusion of the contract as it does for Hobbes. On the contrary, the claim to justice is prior to any contract and to the State and founds the necessity of the State. For this reason, institutions and the State should be in the service of justice and not beyond it. And the state should be evaluated and judged according to its justice.

But in what sense can one say that a State is just?

The State is in the service of justice insofar as it is the instance that represses the violence of human beings towards other human beings. It is hence a practical answer to the singular claims of justice. But the State answers these claims firstly by using violence or by threatening to use violence, and secondly by introducing the element of universality which is not included in the singular claims. The State tries to avoid discriminating against anyone by treating all human beings equally. It pronounces laws which are equally valid for everyone. The justice of the State is based on the universality of its laws and on its potential use of violence in order to enforce them.

These two elements, the universality of law, which for Levinas is always bound to a certain universal reason that establishes and justifies it, and the power, that is, the potential or actual violence to enforce the laws, these two elements are the means by which the State answers the singular claims of justice.

Through the universality of its laws and through its power to enforce them, the State ensures a certain peace among the people and secures for everyone freedom of existence and of action, thus also the freedom to act with justice towards others. Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*: "Hence freedom would cut into the real only by virtue of institutions. Freedom is engraved on the stone of the tablets on which laws are inscribed—it exists by virtue of this incrustation of an institu-

tional existence… Human freedom, exposed to violence and to death, does not reach its goal all at once, with a Bergsonian élan; it takes refuge from its own perfidy in institutions."[11]

As Catherine Chalier suggests, "inward freedom is not sufficient, because suffering, hunger and thirst can quench its flame, even in the strongest person…".[12] And she quotes Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*: "Apolitical freedom is to be explained as an illusion due to the fact that its partisans or its beneficiaries belong to an advanced stage of political evolution."[13]

This affirmation of the impossibility of freedom outside of a political institution must not only to be understood within the frame of a political philosophy. It is the concrete experience of millions of people living under totalitarian regimes, excluded from political life and from the protection of these regimes. It is in particular the experience of the Jews and of all the persecuted people during the Third Reich. Catherine Chalier quotes in this regard a passage from Levinas' text "Sans nom": "Who can express the solitude of those who thought that they would die at the same time as Justice, at a time when the vacillating judgements on good and evil only found a criterion in the hidden recesses of subjective consciousness, when no sign came from outside?"[14]

The State, with its universal laws and its capacity to enforce them, is necessary for human freedom and for justice. Hence, in a Talmudic lecture entitled "Les nations et la présence d'Israel"[15] as well as in the text I have already quoted, "The State of Caesar and the State of David", Levinas mentions a commentary on Genesis I, 31: "God saw

[11] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 241 (slightly modified translation).

[12] Catherine Chalier, "Exposé", in: Jean Halpérin and Nelly Hansson (eds.), *Difficile Justice. Dans la trace d'Emmanuel Levinas*, Colloque des intellectuels juifs, Paris, 1998, 113 (my translation).

[13] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 241.

[14] Catherine Chalier, "Exposé", 113 (my translation).

[15] Levinas, "Les nations et la présence d'Israël", in: *A l'Heure des Nations*, Paris, 1988, 115.

everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." For the rabbinical doctors, this "very good" would mean Rome, "because the rule of the Romans asserts the Law and the rights of persons."[16]

However, one could ask whether the State is the only possible answer to the claims of justice. Is it impossible to conceive a social order which would not need the State's violent repression? It seems that justice and peace would be possible in a society without a state if everyone were prepared not only to be responsible for her neighbour and for the third person, but also to forgive the violence that she is subjected to. This would correspond to the description of the messianic era in Schmouel's terms, which Levinas quotes in a Talmudic lecture on justice, in *Difficult Freedom*: "There is no other difference between this world and the messianic era than the end of the 'yoke of nations'—of political violence and oppression."[17] Accordingly, the messianic era would be an era of the brotherhood and sisterhood of all human beings joined to each other in the service of others. There would be no need for a State's repressive violence.

But in another Talmudic lecture Levinas comments on the story of a failed attempt at forgiveness, writing: "Humanity extends over different levels. It consists of many worlds which are closed to each other because of their unequal elevations; human beings do not yet form a humanity."[18] We are not yet in the messianic era. The opening of human brotherhood and sisterhood through the commandment of the other who links me to her in the service of the others, as described in *Totality and Infinity*, is not a description of human relationships as they are now in the world, for it seems that many people in the world do not hear this commandment.

Whereas the opening of human brotherhood and sisterhood is a prophetic word, the temporality of this prophecy is not a historical, but an ethical one. It is a reference to the temporality of ethics in which the future and the past converge without being separated by the present of

[16] *Ibid. (*my translation).

[17] Levinas, "Textes messianiques", in: *Difficile Liberté, Essais sur le judaïsme*, troisième édition revue et corrigée, Paris, 1976, 92 (my translation).

[18] Levinas, *Quatre Lectures talmudiques*, Paris, 1968, 51 (my translation).

history. It is a reference to the possibility of a justice before any question and comparison, a justice that does not come from the world, but can be heard in the world, in my attention and in my actions for the others.

As long as human beings do not hear the commandment of the other, that is, the opening of the dimension of human brotherhood and sisterhood, as long as human beings do not form a humanity, as long as there is violence, wars and oppression in the world, the State is necessary to ensure justice and peace.

4. Critique of the State

But even if the State is necessary for the sake of justice and of a certain peace, it must be subjected to criticism. The danger of the State is bound to the fact that it uses violence to repress the violence of human beings against each other. Indeed, there are at least two forms of violence in the State which can be considered to be necessary, but which are nevertheless violent.

The first is the violence of punishment. It is necessary to enforce the law and to ensure that no transgression of the law is more profitable than respecting the law, for this would be a form of injustice towards the victims of this transgression and towards those who respect the law.

The second element of violence is the anonymity of the State and the universality of its law. Anonymous universality is a condition of the equal treatment of everyone in the State. But it also means that the state is oblivious to the uniqueness of each person, that is, to their otherness, to their singular claims and to their unsharable vulnerability. Levinas once said in an interview: "For me, the negative element, the element of violence in the State, in the hierarchy, appears even when the hierarchy functions perfectly, when everyone complies with the

universal ideas. There are cruelties that are terrible because they proceed precisely from the necessity of the rational order. There are, if you will, tears that an official cannot see: the tears of elsewhom."[19]

Hence, the two elements through which the State secures justice and a certain peace, the universality of the law and the power to enforce it, are also two main elements of the violence of the State. And it seems that this violence is unavoidable because it belongs to the very structure of the State. According to Levinas, there are ways for individuals to reduce this violence of the State, but not to eliminate it. Punishment cannot be abolished, but in certain cases it is possible for the judge after passing judgement to show compassion for the person who has been justly condemned and to moderate the consequences of punishment. Similarly, the universality of law cannot be put into question, but it has to be questioned by everyone in terms of its justice.

For Levinas, a State that avoids the question of justice and sees in its own power and universality the only sources of its necessity is a totalitarian State. It might secure a certain peace and its laws might establish a certain order among the people. It might present this peace and order as arguments for its necessity and as a justification of its power and of its potential violence. But this justification and this necessity do not constitute legitimacy.

5. Legitimacy of the State

The legitimacy of the State goes beyond its justification and its necessity. It depends on the State's recognition of a claim to justice that is prior to it and on which it has to be measured. And this claim to justice that is prior to the State is my singular answer to the call of the other in the faces of my neighbour and of the third person. For Levinas, "there is a certain measure of necessary violence stemming from justice; but if one talks of justice, one has to admit judges, one has to admit institutions with the State; to live in a world of citizens and not

[19] Levinas, "Transcendance et Hauteur, Discussion", in: *Liberté et commandement*, Montpellier, 1994, 80 (my translation).

only in the order of the face to face. But in return the relation to the face, the fact of my facing elsewhom is the point of departure from which it is possible to speak of the legitimacy and the non-legitimacy of the State. A State in which an interpersonal relationship is impossible, in which from the very beginning it is subject to the State's own determinism is a totalitarian State. Hence there is a limit to the State."[20]

The limit to the State is set by the singular claims to justice on which the justice of the State has to be measured. As far as these singular claims are concerned, this means that they should not deem themselves independent of the law; rather, they are on the one hand a claim on the law and on the other hand a necessary correction and limitation to the law. "To recognise the necessity of a law—that is to recognise that humanity cannot save itself by negating immediately and magically its condition. The faith that moves mountains and conceives a world without slaves transports itself immediately to Utopia, it separates the reign of God from the reign of Caesar. Reassures Caesar."[21] But the claim of justice should disquiet Caesar.

Concerning the State, this means that the criterion of its justice is its openness to singular claims. Levinas mentions (at least) three forms of this openness.

The first form is the recognition of human rights as rights that are more fundamental than all rights that can be established by political legislation. As already mentioned, human rights are not conceived by Levinas as universal rights. They are always regarded, in the singularity of my responsibility, as the rights of the others and as my duty. As such, they are "more legitimate than any legislation, more just than any justification. They are probably … the measure of all law and doubtless of its ethics."[22]

[20] Levinas, "Philosophie, justice, amour", 115 (my translation).

[21] Levinas, "Le lieu et l'utopie", in: *Difficile Liberté*, 146 (my translation).

[22] Levinas, "Les droits de l'homme et les droits d'autrui", in: *Hors sujet*, Montpellier, 1987, 175 (my translation).

A second form of the openness of the State for the singular claims of the people is the fact that it is prepared to reverse a decision in consideration of the claims of its citizens. For Levinas, this possibility is indeed the very foundation of democracy.[23]

A third form is the openness of the State for increasing justice. For a State that pretends to be just cannot uphold laws and institutions that could be improved or replaced in the name of justice. In this sense, Levinas speaks of democracy as a "State which is open to the better (ouvert au mieux)". Similarly, he speaks of the liberal State as a State "in which, *de jure*, justice always wants and endeavours to be better. The liberal State is not a purely empirical notion—it is a category of ethics in which human beings, placed under the generality of laws, retain their sense of responsibility, that is, their uniqueness as those elected to respond."[24]

More generally, one can say that a State is legitimate and not only necessary when it does not forget that the source of its justice is the singular claims of its citizens. In the same way as the prophetic word of justice is not a reference to the future of history, but to the ethical responsibility for the neighbour and for the third party, this reference to the source of justice is not a memory of the past, but an openness to the ethical dimension of humanity beyond politics. As soon as the State forgets this reference, it becomes totalitarian, for it looses the possibility that it can be limited by a judgement that does not stem from itself.

Levinas writes in *Otherwise than Being*: "It is then not without importance to know if the egalitarian and just State, in which man is fulfilled … proceeds from a war of all against all or from the irreducible responsibility of the one for all and if it can do without friendships and faces. It is not without importance to know that, so that war doesn't become the establishment of a war in good conscience."[25] In

[23] See Levinas, "Entretien avec Roger-Pol Droit", in: *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, Montpellier, 1994, 205 (my translation).

[24] Levinas, *Autrement que savoir*, Paris, 1988, 62 (my translation).

[25] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 160.

the text "Paix et proximité", Levinas repeats this passage in a very similar wording, but with an addition at the end: "it is not without importance to know that, so that war does not become the establishment of a war in good conscience in the name of historical necessities."[26]

I would like to underline four elements of this passage. The first is the opposition to Hobbes, expressed here with more strength than anywhere else. The necessity of the State, if it is to be just, does not stem from the individual fear of one's own death, but from singular responsibilities for others.

This means secondly that there is a difference between the necessity of the State and its legitimacy. Historical necessities can be an argument for the necessity of the State and of its violence. But if the just State stems from the singular responsibilities of human beings for others, this necessity has to be limited by the responsibility for those who endure the violence of the State. The question of legitimacy is not a question of necessity, but of conscience. And there cannot be a good conscience for those who perpetrate violence for the sake of justice.

Thirdly, the question of legitimacy, which is the impossibility of a good conscience, introduces a certain weakness to the force of the State. For the limitation of the State is not a limitation derived from another force, but from a hesitation of the force itself, in the name of justice, at the very moment when it should use violence for the sake of justice. The legitimacy of the state is impossible without this moment of weakness, without this hesitation of conscience that puts a limit to force. Even God, according to Levinas in a Talmudic lecture on messianism,[27] even God, when it is time to judge human beings and to separate the good from the bad, hesitates in the face of the violence of his judgement, although it is just, or perhaps because it is just.

And fourthly, the hesitation of conscience is bound to a knowledge about the foundation of the State. "It is important to know", says Levinas. This knowledge is not an objective knowledge about historical necessities. It is the consciousness, within the State, that its legitimacy comes from beyond it, from the claims of others and from my respons-

[26] Levinas, "Paix et proximité", in: *Les cahiers de La nuit surveillée*, 346.

[27] Levinas, "Textes messianiques", 117.

ibility for them. It is a knowledge that disquiets the State and that appears in the form of the question of justice and of a hesitation to use violence. Levinas sees the source of this knowledge in the call of the others and in their teaching. And he sees the practice of this knowledge in the study of the Thora, but also in philosophy, which is never definitive and always unsettled, because it is the wisdom of love.[28]

In this sense, the philosophy of Levinas might be the kind of knowledge that disquiets the State by associating its legitimacy with a certain weakness. And for Levinas, this weakness is not only a source of legitimacy and of justice, but also the condition of peace. At the end of a short text, "Politics, After!", he mentions the journey of Sadat to Israel in 1977, and writes: "As we have said, Sadat's journey has opened up the only way to peace in the Near East, if that peace is to be possible: what is 'politically' weak about it is probably the expression of its daring and, in the end, of its strength. And perhaps of what, everywhere and for everyone, it brings to the very idea of peace: the suggestion that peace is a concept that goes beyond purely political thinking."[29]

The philosophy of Levinas might be the kind of knowledge that disquiets the State in manifesting the strength of a certain weakness as a condition of the legitimacy of the State, that is as a condition of justice and of peace.

[28] See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 162.

[29] Levinas, "Politics, After!", in: *The Levinas Reader*, 283.

JUDAISM, THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE STATE
A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas' Talmudic Commentary "Judaism and Revolution"

Annette Aronowicz

Introduction

It is well known that Emmanuel Levinas' talmudic commentaries were born out of the yearly colloquia of French Jewish intellectuals, in which it was his allotted task to choose a talmudic passage that would illuminate the topic under discussion. The text he interpreted was always meant to speak into the times, illuminating them and in turn being illuminated by the concerns of the present. It is with this in mind that I turn to "Judaism and Revolution." I too would like to make it speak into the times. It might seem a strange choice, given its original context, the events of May 1968. Surely, the interlocutor Levinas wished to face then, the Jewish left, which identified Jewish teachings with Marxism or the causes of the Left, no longer dominates today, either in France or elsewhere. Levinas' concern to disentangle Judaism from such an identification hardly seems urgent to us today. Yet in the process of responding to that historical context, Levinas lays bare the contours of a question whose relevance extends way beyond the events of 1968: the relationship of Judaism and the Jewish people to the State.

What I propose in the following pages is a reading of Levinas' own reading of Tractate Baba Metsia, 83a-83b.[1] This reading does not pretend to be a full exposition of what he had to say about religion and politics in the entirety of his writings, just as his own individual commentaries did not pretend to explicate the entire rabbinical tradition's

[1] All references in this essay are taken from Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings by Emmanuel Levinas*, translated and with an introduction by Annette Aronowicz, Bloomington, Indiana, 1990 (henceforth: *Nine Talmudic Readings*).

positions on a given topic. Still, just as he claimed to convey some of the rabbis' central emphasis each time he interpreted so too I wish to suggest an emphasis here that is characteristic of Levinas' concern as a whole, even if its modulations differ from text to text.

A final preliminary remark is in order. A commentary is not a linear exposition in which a theme is gradually clarified and systematically developed. It is, rather, a series of interruptions and digressions, because the voices in the text, in this case the Talmudic text, force the interpreter into diverse directions. Thus, there is no gradual unfolding, either in the mishna and gemara, or in Levinas' reading, of the idea of the State or of the Jews' relationship to it. There are many observations, seemingly unrelated. Yet there is a common thread, which it is precisely the task of the interpreter to discover. The common thread in this case has to do with a certain irreducible tension. In this commentary, we find both a movement away from politics and a movement towards it. This tension corresponds to the tension between the particularity of the Jewish tradition—its irreducibility to a common truth—and its universality—precisely its application or relevance to all human beings.

Because "Judaism and Revolution" is a text commentary, we, the readers, cannot get our insights into its meaning without also first meandering in many directions, the directions in which Levinas' own following of the branches of the discussion take us. This un-linear, seemingly awkward way of proceeding, is, it seems to me, not unrelated to the topic of the text of the question—the relationship of the Jewish people to the State—a point we will come back to in the conclusion. In that conclusion, we will also take a step back and reflect briefly on the portents of this text.

Part I—The Mishna: "The Descendants of Abraham"

The mishna with which Levinas begins his reading seems at first to be far removed from the problems of Judaism and the State. It discusses the obligations of an employer to his workers. The first two paragraphs speak about the length of the workday, whether the employer has to

provide food and, if so, how much and of what kind. According to this mishna, all these matters are determined by local custom. Levinas stops to comment on many of its details. The third paragraph of the mishna draws his protracted attention. It reads as follows:

> One day Rabbi Johanan ben Mathia said to his son: go hire some workers. The son included food among the conditions. When he came back the father said: My son, even if you prepared a meal equal to the one King Solomon served, you would not have fulfilled your obligation toward them, for they are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As long as they have not begun to work, go and specify: You are entitled only to bread and dry vegetables.[2]

Rabbi Johanan ben Mathia is obviously afraid that his son, by not limiting the kind or quantity of food he will serve his workers, has opened himself up to infinite obligation. Levinas pauses at many points in these few lines but one of his central reflections revolves around the expression "descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Would this mean, he asks, that the Jewish employer has obligations only to other Jews? He answers thus:

> We are not in the presence of a racist idea here. I have it from an eminent master: each time Israel is mentioned in the Talmud one is certainly free to understand by it a particular ethnic group that is probably fulfilling an incomparable destiny. But to interpret in this manner would be to reduce the general principle in the idea enunciated in the Talmudic passage, to forget that Israel means a people who has received the Law, and, as a result, a human nature which has reached the fullness of its responsibilities and its self-consciousness. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are human beings who are no longer childlike. Before a self-conscious humanity, no longer in need of being educated, our duties are limitless. Workers belong to this perfected humanity, despite the inferiority of their condition and the coarseness of their profession.[3]

We see clearly in these lines the appearance of a tension between particular and universal. Levinas fights off the suggestion that the particularity of the Jews lies in their being concerned only with other Jews, in

[2] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 98.
[3] *Ibid.*

their having a teaching applicable only to their own group. The Talmud, in Levinas' reading, intends to illuminate what it means to be human as such: It is to be responsible to others and to know one is responsible. It is to agree to live according to an order beyond one's own immediate whims and satisfactions, in other words, to live according to the Law. Anyone who consciously accepts this obligation, this order beyond his private interest, is of "the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

One might ask whether it is appropriate to refer to a *tension* between the particular and the universal in the above passage. Would it not be more accurate to speak of the universalizing of the particular, leaving the latter behind? After all, if people who bind themselves to obligations exist all over the world, what is specific about the Jewish tradition? Two answers suggest themselves.

The first is that, although there may be individuals conscious of their responsibility all over the world, the ability to recognize this behavior as the fulfillment of our humanity stems from Jewish teaching. Without the Torah, what it means to be human would not have received the centrality and the articulation necessary for preserving it not as something accidental but as something essential. The second defense of particularity comes precisely when Levinas reflects about politics, in the lines following the above passage. If to be human, he begins, is to be responsible to others across all differences, would not a revolution meant to break down all barriers between people be a true realization of Jewish teaching? Would not Marxist principles meant to eliminate class structures, claimed to be the essential divisive force among men, be the true expression of the Jewish vision of the human being? Levinas answers in the negative and it is in his elaboration of that answer that Jewish particularity emerges.

A communist or socialist revolution, he says, could never go far enough in restoring our humanity because, in the very violence of the struggle, one becomes blind to the humanity of friend and foe alike, alienating oneself from one's very self in the process. Besides, even if he exploitation of the workers subsides, other forms of exploitation exist. The particularity of the Jewish tradition, then, its irreducibility to Marxism, lies in that its universalism is more encompassing than the

notion of class would allow: "…as if revolutionary consciousness were not sufficient for disalienation; as if the notion of Israel, people of the Torah, people as old as the world and as old as persecuted mankind, carried within itself a universality higher than that of a class exploited and struggling; as if the violence of the struggle were already alienation."[4]

On the very next page Levinas deepens this tension, making the universal yet more universal and the particular yet more particular. He amplifies on what it would mean to be a descendant of Abraham:

> What else could descent from Abraham mean? Let us recall the biblical and talmudic tradition relating to Abraham. Father of believers? Certainly. But above all the one who knew how to receive and feed men: the one whose tent was open on all sides. Through all these openings he looked out for passersby in order to receive them. The meal offered by Abraham? We know especially of one meal he offered to the angels—without suspecting their condition as angels; for to receive angels worthily even Harpagon would have bent over backwards. Abraham must have taken the three passersby for three Bedouins, from three nomads from the Negev desert—three Arabs, in other words! He runs toward them. He calls them "Your Lordships." The heirs of Abraham—men to whom their ancestors bequeathed a difficult tradition of duties toward the other man, which one is never done with, an order in which one is never free. In this order, above all else, duty takes the form of obligations toward the body, the obligation of feeding and sheltering. So defined, the heirs of Abraham are of all nations: any man truly man is no doubt of the line of Abraham.[5]

This passage spells out what Levinas had meant by the responsibility that defines the human, spoken of in the previous paragraph. It is not an abstract list of duties but, as with Abraham and the three strangers, an irrepressible movement toward the other in one's path, inseparable from the gesture of hospitality. To receive another is to respond to him as "Lord," to serve him, a concern expressed first of all in regard to basic needs. Abraham, the great patriarch, would thus embody the Jewish way of being, but that way is the equivalent of the human way. If

[4] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 98.
[5] *Ibid.*

that is so, we are back to our question. What is particular about the Jews? It is once again in the context of politics that that particularity comes back.

Levinas goes back to the mishna's reference to King's Solomon's meals. As we recall, the father had told his son that even if he served his workers meals the size of King Solomon's, they would not suffice because they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Levinas reads the allusion to King Solomon as an allusion to the State. There are certain things it is incapable of providing for people were it to be as wealthy as King Solomon.

> All the splendor of King Solomon would not suffice to guarantee the dignity of the descendants of Abraham. There is more in the family of Abraham than in the promises of the State. It is important to give, of course, but everything depends on how it is done. It is not through the State and the political advances of humanity that the person shall be fulfilled—which, of course, does not free the State from instituting the conditions necessary for this fulfillment. But it is the family of Abraham that sets the norms. The idea is worth what it is worth. It is suggested by the text. Let not the worshippers of the State, who proscribe the survival of Jewish particularism, be angered![6]

One of the key sentences of this passage, the one claiming that there is more in the family of Abraham than in the promises of the State, immediately points to Jewish particularity. One way of understanding what Levinas means here is that, although the State can provide many services—soup kitchens, subsidies, housing, security—only the gesture of responsibility of one person for another humanizes both parties. Therefore, there needs to be a tradition, the Jewish tradition, which reminds people of these gestures, gestures whose origins lie outside the directives of the State. Those who deny that external origin, who think the proper distribution of power and wealth alone are sufficient to ensure just human relations are thus idolaters.

Given this reading of the State, one might get the impression that Levinas is arguing against political activity altogether. If dignity comes from the face-to-face gesture of responsibility, the sort of humanity

[6] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 99-100.

that Judaism represents would best be embodied in private exchanges, rather than in a struggle to control the State. Yet in this very passage, we can also see a pull in the direction of politics. After all, Levinas says that the State is obligated to create institutions that make possible the fulfillment of the human. In other words, certain social conditions might be prerequisite before the gesture of responsibility can manifest itself. We will hear more about this shortly. But also, if, as he says, the Jewish tradition sets the norms for the State, does it not mean that it actively judges its institutions, thus participating in the larger political life, if only as the standard by which its achievements are weighed?

Levinas' statements about the disparity between King Solomon's meals and the family of Abraham, like several others we quoted, retain some of the same elliptical quality as talmudic speech itself. One can take them in several possible directions. Yet whatever that direction, one cannot escape the cycle of Jewish particularity metamorphosing into universality, and going back to particularity once again. This cycle is closely related to the movement toward the State and a movement away from it. All of these dialectics are going to reappear in the gemara, bringing with them new aspects of the problem. The first half will draw upon images of the universally human. The second will focus on the nature of political activity. Does political activity help to bring about our full humanity or does it not? The answer to this question will, of course, once again appear in the course of many meanderings through seemingly unrelated topics.

Part II—The Gemara: "Vinegar, Son of Wine"

The gemara does not begin with a discussion of politics but rather goes back to the topics of the mishna—wages, working hours etc. In Levinas' reading, it soon becomes apparent that at issue is the place of custom. As we recall, the mishna had indicated that all working conditions are bound by local tradition. The gemara, in the person of Resh Lakish, challenges this understanding.

> Resh Lakish said: the hired worker is on his own time going home; going to work is on his employer's time, for it is written (Psalm 104:22-23): "When the sun rises, they leave and go hide in their lairs, man then goes to his work, to his labor until evening."[7]

Resh Lakish's challenge to custom lies precisely in that he quotes the Torah, Psalm 104, in order to establish the length of the working day. Why bother if all conditions are determined by custom, as the mishna had stipulated? This is exactly what the rabbis ask. The answer they themselves give is that Resh Lakish is talking about a new city, about a condition that would affect a population coming from diverse origins. Levinas explains that custom is all very well if one lives tied to a specific locality, within the age-old protection provided by the group to which one belongs. In that case, custom protects the person from arbitrary impositions. But what happens when individuals are thrown together with many others from diverse places, removed from their local ways? That indeed is the situation of the inhabitants of a modern city: "Within them, populations coming from everywhere are mixed together and individuals so dispersed that all traditions are lost. Beings without history do exist. Does the fact of no longer having a history transform human beings into inferior beings?"[8]

Levinas interprets Resh Lakish's reliance upon Psalm 104 thus: "Let us free humanity from traditionalisms. Let us no longer attempt to save it through the patriarchal virtues of the group. Resh Lakish wants the Law of the Torah to be independent of places and times: an eternal law attached to the person as such, even in his individualistic isolation."[9] In his reading, Resh Lakish's insistence on hiring according to the Torah is a way of recognizing the human beyond any specific group identity. One law applies in all times and places. But is not this kind of refusal of custom precisely the mentality that makes revolution possible? For what is revolution if not an attempt to go beyond custom, a break with it rather than a reinterpretation? Political action to transform society at

[7] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 102-103.
[8] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 105.
[9] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 106.

its root comes into being precisely because one refuses custom. Resh Lakish's quoting of Psalm 104, in appearance so innocuous, therefore has wide ranging political implications.

The revolutionary potential in seemingly innocuous rabbinic statements also comes to the fore in Levinas' reading of the next section of the gemara, which presents the position of Rav Zera.

> Rav Zera taught (other say it was Rav Jose): it is written: "You bring on darkness and it is night." (Psalm 104:20) It is this world which is like night, "the night in which all the beasts of the forest stir." (Psalm 104: 22) Those are the evil doers in the world, who are comparable to the beasts of the forest.[10]

Rav Zera is taking Psalm 104 in a direction different from that of Resh Lakish. He wants to underscore that the world is full of evil. It is night, in which wild beasts roam. There is something profoundly wrong in the world of work, for in the dark people are threatened by beasts. What will the world look like when night lifts, when evil disappears? Rav Zera describes it as follows:

> When the sun rises, they go away and hide in their lairs. When the sun rises for the just, the evil-doers withdraw to hell, "They go away and hide in their lairs." (It must be read "hide in their houses", and it is the just who are spoken of here: there is no just man who does not have a home corresponding to his dignity.)[11]

What catches Levinas' attention in Rav Zera's description is the reference to home. He pauses to reflect on what it means to be homeless.

> Isn't the proletarian condition, the alienation of man, primarily the fact of having no home? Not to have a place of one's own, not to have an interior, is truly not to communicate with another, and thus to be a stranger to oneself and the other. After the world of night, after existence as wild beasts, not only threatening but also threatened, after fear and anxiety, what is announced here as the triumph of the just is the possibility of a society in which everyone has his home, returns home and to himself, and sees the face of the other.[12]

[10] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 106.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 107.

In this passage there is a dialectic between home as a physical place, in which one eats and sleeps undisturbed by others, and home as an interior life in which one's impulses can develop undisturbed by fear. To be a proletarian is not to have this *chez-soi* in either sense. One's ability to eat and sleep is not guaranteed but always subject to the caprices of another. Therefore one has no inviolate area in which to replenish oneself, at the arbitrary command of no one. Without such a place, Levinas claims here, the self cannot truly be itself because it comes into being in the movement toward the other person. Without an inviolate realm, however, the terror of existence becomes too great, suppressing the gesture toward the other.

Now we can understand better Levinas' earlier claim that the State is obligated to create institutions that make possible man's fulfillment. A certain material security (it is never spelled out in quantitative terms) conditions the possibility of the truly human way of being. A full-blown humanity does not manifest itself among people who are starved, worked to death or perpetually threatened.

In both his reading of Resh Lakish and of Rav Zera, Levinas brings out how the image of the ideal human condition the rabbis propose suggests possible political engagement. If the human condition requires protection of the "city person," the one shorn of all local custom, and if it requires that each have a home of his own, with all that a home implies, the goals for political action have been set. They judge contemporary reality and induce action, either for or against the State. In neither of these readings, however, does Levinas address directly the question of whether Jews themselves should become involved, and if so, how? This topic will inform the final section of our gemara.

This last section focuses on the activities of Rav Eleazar ben Simeon bar Yochai, who ends up cooperating with the Roman State. Levinas will often substitute the word "collaboration" for cooperation, for reasons that will soon become clear. His political activity consists in handing over thieves to the Roman authorities. He got into this occupation through a certain encounter with a Roman official who himself caught thieves.

Rav Eleazar asks the official how he knows whom to catch. Does not evil hide itself, passing itself off as good? Could one not mistake an innocent man for a guilty one? In any case, do we not often harm innocent people in the process of arresting guilty ones?[13] The answer of the official is that he does not worry about such things. He simply obeys the order of the king.

At this point, Levinas makes a crucial distinction—between police work and political involvement of another kind. What the officer does is clearly police work: he follows an order, that of the king, that of the leader of the opposition, it does not matter. His activity is characterized by an utter unwillingness to characterize evil for himself. It is defined for him, according to the interests of a particular group, in this case the Roman State. He merely carries out the decisions of those in authority. When Rav Eleazar enters politics, on the other hand, he comes with his own understanding of what evil is and where to find it. In fact, his way of identifying thieves, as the gemara describes it, is highly idiosyncratic. He goes to the taverns of the city and arrests anyone who is there early in the morning but who is neither a night shift worker nor a writer. Levinas, in a passage that has become well known, interprets this to mean that for Rav Eleazar evil is embodied in the very institution of the tavern or café. In its essence, it is a place in which people have no responsibility for others, in which relaxation means the relaxation of the command imposed by specific faces. Evil would be this complete closedness to others while in the process of relating to them. It would be to refuse to receive them, because the basic mode of the café is not hospitality but play.[14]

Whatever one may think of Rav Eleazar's detective methods or Levinas' interpretation of them, the point is nonetheless that Rav Eleazar relates to the State in a very different way from the government official. He does not merely obey the order of the king. When arresting evildoers, he looks for evil in such a way that it could emerge in any camp.

[13] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 108.
[14] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 111-112.

Although he turns over thieves to the authorities, his judgment regarding the nature of evil and where to find it remain independent of the State.

This fails to impress some of his contemporaries. They criticize him severely for his political work, as the following passage from the gemara makes clear: "Rav Joshua bar Karha relayed to him: Vinegar, son of wine, how much longer will you deliver unto death the people of our God?"[15]

Levinas reads this reproach in many different ways. The most obvious would be that Rabbi Joshua bar Karhah is opposed not to political activity as such but to political activity on behalf of the Roman State, for the Roman State is the occupier, the subjugator, the persecutor of the Jews. To hand thieves over to the authorities is to hand Jews over to the enemy, collaborating with him against your own. The criticism is made even more pointed by the fact that Rav Eleazar is the son of Rav Simeon bar Yochai, who is credited as one of the founders of the mystical tradition and who resisted the Romans by continuing to study Torah despite their prohibition, by spending thirteen years hiding in a cave (along with Rav Eleazar himself.) The contrast in activities could hardly be more striking. The father resists while the son collaborates. From the point of view of many in the Jewish community, what had been wine in the father had turned to vinegar in the son.

Levinas suggests, however, that there is another way of reading Rav Joshua bar Karhah's accusation. What he is condemning is not cooperation with an occupying power but cooperation with any State. This would already be a betrayal of the Jewish tradition for, no matter how well-intentioned the action, it will inevitably turn sour if it allies itself with violence, and the State as well as those who wish to overthrow the State, ultimately rely on violence. "Doesn't political action, be it revolutionary, turn against the people of God, against the persecuted, against the non-violence which it wishes for and for which a revolution is attempted? Doesn't political action turn against the non-violence that alone can end all persecution?"[16] The people of God in the previously

[15] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 113.
[16] *Ibid.*

quoted gemara is an expression, Levinas tells us, that does not necessarily refer to the Jews alone but to anyone exposed and vulnerable, a condition which the Jews have embodied throughout history. Fighting evil through violence ultimately brings about the very evil it fights against, thus betraying the responsibility to the other at the center of Jewish teaching.

But the charge of collaboration against Rav Eleazar can be read in yet another way. The condemnation would not be against violence per se but against forgetting the true difference of the Jewish people. It, as a people, was not given the same means of fighting evil as others. Its means are the commandments. To participate in structures outside those of the community that follows these commandments is to thwart the Jews' special relationship to God, man and world. It is through that special relationship that evil is removed from the world. For a Jew to participate in the State is precisely to collaborate with evil rather than work for its eradication.

To all these possible objections Rav Eleazar replies: "I remove the thorns from the vineyard." Levinas takes this to mean that, even if, in fact, it is through staying a community apart that the Jews fight evil, how can they fight this evil, if there is evil rampant in their very community? How to be good wine, fit for the world to drink, if the vines are prevented from growing because of thorns? If Jews are to be a model of a different way of being in the world, how can they be this model if there is corruption in their very midst? The next sequence of the gemara illustrates this very corruption. One of the people Rav Eleazar arrests is a laundryman who, it turns out, has done violence to a young woman. Are Jews simply supposed to let such actions go unpunished, not rely on the State and simply wait for Messianic times? How will those Messianic times come about in the first place, if one does not react to such acts, with violence, if necessary?

Yet this sequence, which would argue for the necessity of political action, also shows the pitfalls involved in it. Rav Eleazar had originally arrested the laundryman because the latter insulted him. The verbal violence was to him a sign of underlying criminality, but at the time of the arrest he knew nothing of the violence that the laundryman had perpetrated against the young woman. Soon afterward, still without

knowing the crime perpetrated by the laundryman, Rav Eleazar forgives the insult to himself and wants to extricate the man from the machinery of State. But it rolls relentlessly onward. The political process has its own logic, which does not make room for individual forgiveness, for the face-to-face relation. Once enmeshed in activities for or against the State, one loses the possibility of that truly human gesture. Thus once again the very evil against which one is fighting, violence done to the other, reemerges in the very act of fighting it.[17]

What to do? The last lines of the gemara seem to opt against political action altogether:

> The same thing happened to Rabbi Ishmael ben Rabbi Jose (as to Rav Eleazar.) One day the prophet Elijah met him and said: How long will you deliver the people of our God to execution? He answered: What can I do? It is the order of the king. Elijah said to him: Your father fled to Asia; flee to Lakedamon.[18]

The point, Levinas tells us, seems clear. Move to a place in which you are not forced to engage in politics. But Levinas does not read this last passage as a blanket refusal of political activity, of the fighting against evil by relying on State power. After all, Rabbi Ishmael is merely obeying the order of the king. Would Elijah's answer have been different if Rabbi Ishmael had not tied his conscience to State orders, exhibiting rather the independence of Rav Eleazar? And, he muses, do Elijah's words, coming from the one who is supposed to usher in the Messianic era, have the same authority before the end of history? Prior to that, despite the evil that it brings along in it train, can we refuse participation in politics?[19]

With such questions does Levinas' talmudic commentary end. It is, of course, neither possible nor desirable to summarize it. I would like merely to come back to the tension between particular and universal running through the entire essay. It turns out, paradoxically, that Jewish particularism, its refusal to identify itself completely with political activity on behalf of a just State, its refusal to dissolve itself into a party

[17] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 113-114, 116
[18] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 118.
[19] *Ibid.*

or a government, its insistence on remaining a distinct unit apart from it, is done for the sake of that very universalism that modern States claim to embody in their institutions, for does not the State claim to be above the interests of any particular entity, representing the interests of the whole and of each? To tie universalism to the State or to any group that functions as a party wishing to take over the State is inevitably to reduce the universalism of the Jewish tradition. That universalism insists on the responsibility of one to the other, beyond any party or national affiliations. This form of universalism inherently makes one vulnerable to persecution, since one is always outside the interests of groups as such. But it is the price one pays to preserve a universalism more universal, as Levinas puts it, than the universalism of the most enlightened politics.

To refuse politics altogether, however, is to refuse the embodiment, even if partial, of certain conditions that make the responsibility to the other, in his uniqueness, a reality. In short, one can neither wholeheartedly participate in politics nor wholeheartedly refuse to participate. This is not the dilemma of the uncommitted but of the one who "plans revolution not only in danger but also in the agony of conscience—in the double clandestinity of the catacombs and of conscience. In the agony of conscience which risks making revolution impossible: for it is not only a question of seizing the evil-doer but also of not making the innocent suffer."[20]

Conclusion

Although "Judaism and Revolution" has many more dimensions and possibilities of interpretations than this commentary on Levinas' commentary could bring to light, it should at the very least, have given a taste of his way of interpreting and of some of the running tensions and recurring questions that preoccupy him. I would like to conclude with a word on that manner of interpreting. Included within that will be some reflections on the implications of this essay for us today.

[20] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 110.

At the end of this reading, a statement we had made at the beginning should have become clearer. A text commentary is not an expository essay and thus Levinas' thought does not amount to a systematic treatment of a problem but to a series of digressions cohering around central questions. This kind of reflection can never be summarized. The gemara does not summarize the mishna. Levinas does not summarize the gemara, and the last interpreter in the chain cannot summarize the previous one. The aim is to add one's own voice, without suppressing the multitude of prior voices, each new voice rearticulating the central concern in a new way.

We had mentioned earlier that this manner of proceeding is not unrelated to the content of this particular talmudic reading. It is a transposition of what has been said about politics to the domain of the intellect. We recall that in this reading, the universality of the State, its pursuit of the common good, always needs to be challenged by the universality of the Jewish tradition, whose common good is always the response to the other beyond the political divisions that the State creates. One could claim that in a similar way the universality of expository thought, of systematic exposition, needs to be challenged by voices that cannot be reduced to one logic. Thus the universal is never acquired once and for all, but is always in the process of being discovered, called into expression by the new voice interrupting one's own. If this is so, the hermeneutic, Levinas' insistence on preserving the multiplicity of directions in the text, without reducing them to one line of thought, is of a piece with the tension between the State and Judaism he spoke of in his commentary. Something external to the whole intrudes. That something is the specific person, the confrontation with whom allows for the reassembling of meaning or responsibility, each time in a different way.

But, as has been mentioned, this also means that the last interpreter in the chain needs to add his voice in such a way that it too is not a mere merging with what has been said before but a genuine response and interruption by that prior expression. It is, of course, at this point that some observations are in order about the way "Judaism and Revo-

lution" speaks into the present. What follows is not a summary, then, but an attempt to go back to the central tension running through Levinas' essay in a more pointed way.

We know that one pole of that tension is a movement away from political activity, or at least from political activity of a certain sort. In Levinas' reading of this mishna and gemara, a State, any State—which would include a State controlled by Jews—embodies a universality that is less universal than Judaism itself. While before Messianic times he concedes that States are no doubt necessary, one cannot participate in the life of the State, in political activity, on the basis of "it is the order of the king." One has to forge an understanding of evil that allows one to locate it wherever it should appear, in any manifestation whatsoever. If one becomes unable to perceive it in all camps, one becomes a worshipper of the State for the good of the State has replaced a source of conscience outside it. That conscience, if one is Jewish, Levinas tells us, is formed by the responsibility to the other person. We know that there are many others and that all those responsibilities must be weighed against each other. But no matter how that balancing act takes place, the weight cannot fall solely in favor of one's own group. If a State blocks the gesture of responsibility to specific others or takes command over its expression, it is idolatrous, having usurped the place of conscience. And does not Levinas tell us elsewhere that the responsibility to the other is the inability to escape from God?[21]

But if the first pole of the tension is to distance the individual from identifying with the State, the second pole affirms the necessity of a State and of political activity. The State, in this commentary, is seen as the guarantor of the minimal conditions that make truly human interaction possible. Levinas tells us that while the services the State provides cannot humanize contact—only the face-to-face relation can do that—they are necessary to provide the basic security, the basic control over one's material needs that human beings require in order to enter into a face-to-face relation to begin with. The State, in fact, is the guarantor of a home, without which human beings are reduced to their animal instincts, either becoming beasts of prey or victims of beasts of

[21] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 50.

prey. One can deduce, given this fact, that it is impossible to expect a true reaching out from people who are deprived of a home. The home has to be there first, and by home, it is clear that what is meant is a place in which one can retreat sufficiently not to be perpetually threatened by material need or fear, at once prequisite and locus of the truly human gesture.

For me, the conclusions regarding the present day are clear. The Jewish tradition and the Jewish people cannot be identified with any State, including a Jewish State. The role of the Jewish tradition is to remind all States, including the one controlled by Jews, of a responsibility beyond the interests of just one group. In this case, it would mean the responsibility to ensure a home for those who do not have one, with the trust that with time, the truly human gesture, conspicuously missing at the moment, will reemerge. But one cannot expect the truly human gesture—the face-to-face gesture of hospitality—unless certain minimal material conditions, which are its precondition, are met. At stake is not only a viable political solution but also the very essence of the Jewish tradition itself.

POLITICAL REASON AND PROPHETISM
How Is the Other Ordered to Me?

François Coppens

Introduction: The Sacrificial Reading of Levinas' Dis-Interested Subjectivity

There is a striking contrast between the extremely precise and relentless philosophic endeavour of Levinas' thought and what has been made of his teaching in common knowledge or even in non-specialized academic circles. Undoubtedly, simplification is unavoidable for any philosophic teaching to exert some influence. Undoubtedly, in the case of Levinas, philosophy is not meant to be an exclusively theoretical pleasure. It has also—if not primarily—to have some practical influence and to improve human ways of life, regimes and devotion to justice. It appears, though, that the above-mentioned contrast might be closer to a denial or a reversal of his main issue than to this required simplification. For this reason, some people might be quite reserved where others will be simply optimistic or even enthousiastic, when considering the growing extent of references to his name and work. That reserve is not due only to theoretical or even academical restrictions, as an eyed-browed scholar pretending to be tortured by any simplification. It is due also to the perception that the simplified teaching often attributed to Levinas can lead to increased injustice, not only with regard to Levinas' genuine work, but for humans in general. That teaching has been rightly denounced by Daniel Sibony in his powerful charge against Levinas[1]—though he is mistaken in attributing it to Levinas himself. Levinas, or so it is said, is calling for a kind of annihilation of the subjectivity in front, or in the face, of the other. This is what might be called the *sacrificial* reading of his teaching.

[1] D. Sibony, *Don de soi ou partage de soi?* Paris, 2000.

That reading of Levinas' teaching is surprising for two reasons. First, does he really advocate or plead for anything? It could be legitimately argued that he does not prescribe nor recommand anything. He describes and questions what he discovers to be the significance of human subject, the meaning of human reality and experience, as does a philosopher and in particular a phenomenologist. Indeed, what he considers to be human reality and experience may and must be questioned. Indeed, what he describes can be considered as an appeal, and that phenomenological description is forced into some discourse where the quiet bringing to light is interrupted and can not rest satisfied with itself. Still, that does not mean that he simply quits bringing to light and phenomenology. Added to that, and this is the second reason announced, it can be doubted whether that to which the subjectivity is called, according to Levinas, is to sacrifice to the other, to annihilate for the sake of the other—or in order that the other, as it were, might take place. For these reasons, the sacrificial interpretation has to be denounced as a powerful turn up or reversal of his thought. To put it roughly: Levinas is not a moralist nor a preacher, but a philosopher—and what he tells us has nothing to do with any appeal to annihilate one's self for the sake of the other.

Be that as it may, it can not be denied that the sacrificial reading is now part of what is made of his teaching when one doesn't try any more to understand it, as does secondary literature, but when his striving thought has become a sort of "Levinassian vulgate". That mistaken understanding usually presents itself on three different levels. First, it is said that Levinas condemns the subject and its identification to itself, and summons the self to sacrifice to the other.[2] Second, he is reputed to condemn ontology and to summon to replace it by ethics or to subordinate it to ethics. Last, but not least with regard to the place where this conference is held, he is exalted for his alleged condemnation of political reason and summoning to replace the symmetry, supposed or imposed in the political order, by the a-symmetry of disinterested relation to the other.

[2] *Ibid*, 10.

Something more might be worth noticing, regarding the manner in which that vulgate presents itself. It often happens that, in the same movement, one strengthens that sacrificial interpretation and takes it to be the highest interest of Levinas' teaching, *and* reproaches him to exaggerate, to neglect the fact that the self cannot and should not annihilate himself if any relation is to be. That leads to amazing comments on Levinas' work, often mixed with religious misunderstandings. Sometimes, it will be said that he yields to the Christian teaching on sacrificial love. Sometimes, on the contrary, it will be said that, being a Jew, he simply holds to the heteronomous conception of the law. He holds to the obligation which is imposed by the law on the subject—he doesn't take into account, "yet", the Christian teaching on the reciprocity of love.

That vulgate also leads to surprizing judgments on another level. Some of those who share that sacrificial reading, who at once appreciate him for his high ethical teaching and criticize him for that same teaching, will refer to it when condemning the politics of the State of Israel. It may be pretended, with due reference to his name, that what could be accepted from any other state can not be accepted from the State of the Jews. What might be acceptable from other peoples is not granted to the people who teaches, as does Levinas in such an excellent manner, that ethics has to substitute for politics and that ethics means "thou shall not kill". Whatever be the judgment on Israeli politics, as on any politics, Raphael Drai has rightly called this powerful reversal of Levinas' teaching "la seconde mort de Lévinas",[3] the second death of Levinas.

We must probably take for what they are the passions—religious, political or other—which may explain that kind of judgments on Levinas' thought as well as the misuse that can be made of it. But it is also decisive that we shall be conscious of the theoretical or philosophical stakes appearing in those misunderstandings and giving them their full impact. What will be said here can be understood as motivated by the conviction that those misunderstandings are not accidental, but that they conceal or even deny what precisely our philosopher relent-

[3] R. Drai, *Sous le signe de Sion*, Paris, 2001, 33.

lessly attempts to grasp or to bring to evidence. That is, the elusive or enigmatic ambiguity which is meant by the notion of *an-archy*, which is not a being, nor a moment, nor a beginning—nor, even less, a morality.

1. The Problem: An-Archy

If we give some attention to the way people talk and think around us, we can notice that contemporary thought is powerfully tempted to dissociate political reason, on the one side, and prophetism, on the other —whenever at least it takes both of them into account. Either we have political reason. That means order, the implementation of law for the good of the state, easily identified with cynicism or Realpolitik. Or we have prophetism, identified for instance to ethical values or to the absolute concern for the victim, contradicting or denying that political order.

It seems that the work of Levinas has been received and interpreted on the background of that temptation. It has also, as a way of consequence, reinforced that temptation. That is amazing, since he compels us in fact to question that alternative and to think the ambiguous articulation of prophetism and political reason. But his influence has reinforced the temptation to avoid that difficulty and to separate them as an alternative. Is he not, indeed, teaching that political reason is but a totalitarian reduction of the absolute or ethical concern for the other?

And that understanding of political reason and prophetism as an alternative will be strengthened by his bringing back Jerusalem next to Athens. Athens is identified with political reason, order and law, ontology and archè—and Jerusalem (or religion, or humanism) is reduced to disintersted ethics, absolute concern for the other, self-sacrifice and an-archy. According to this understanding, the other would be "ordered to me" in two different and exclusive meanings. In Athens, the other is ordered to me in the sense that I subject him to myself or to the order of my reason or that he and myself are brought inside the

same order of reason. In Jerusalem, the other is ordered to me in the sense that I am summoned to sacrifice for him. And both of those meanings remain external or contradictory one to the other.

Amazingly, that dissociation often seems to be the legacy of Levinas, leading to the understanding that he summons us to substitute an-archy for archè, prophetism for political reason.

Such a dissociation, however, completely misses what is at stake in political reason *and* in prophetism, as well as what is at stake in Levinas' philosophy.

As for political reason, it can not be reduced to totalitarianism, especially under the name of "Athens", i.e. Greek philosophy. The Greek philosophers understood political reason, as distinguished precisely from "the Graeco-Roman state", as, in its essence, a *tension* from practice beyond itself. Towards theory, indeed. But Levinas is all too conscious that Plato's concept of theory and eros can not be identified to Hobbes political philosophy nor to ontological dogmatism.

It can be taken for granted that Jerusalem is not a place where it is necessary to insist on the fact that prophetism, on the other side, can not be simply reduced to love and care as *opposed* to law, politics, and the necessity of justice.

As for what Levinas describes as an-archy or prophetism, it cannot be understood as something (place, way of life or moment) that has to substitute for archè. That will be the focus point, limited but crucial, of the present lecture. It must be emphasized here that, as was said before, what is a stake is not only the question of a "correct" interpretation of his teaching, and, in particular, of the way we have to understand together *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. Nor is it only, though it is much, the pleasure of thought, the exciting wonder of a whole horizon of problems and subtle notions which opens itself before the eyes when one comes close to what is meant by a thinker such as Levinas—and which totally disappear in the sacrificial reading.

To put it in a wide way—or in a wild way?—, it could be said that the whole future of our civilization depends on our capacity to understand properly what is meant in Levinas by the simple notion of *an-archy*. Or, to understand properly this brief footnote in *Autrement qu'être:*

> If the anarchical was not signalled in consciousness, it would reign in its own way. The anarchical is possible only when contested by language [*discours*], which betrays, but conveys, its anarchy, without abolishing it, by an abuse of language.[4]

What Levinas writes there can be seen as a key that could open his teaching, if it were to be adequately understood. At least, to be sure, it offers an adequate answer, on the three levels mentioned before, to the incriminated sacrificial interpretation of his teaching. It combines, indeed, what can be considered as the three major lines of inquiry of his philosophical work:

1) the question of subjectivity and consciousness;

2) the question of philosophy and discourse;

3) the question of government, since the word "régner", given the context, has also to be taken literally.

It is worth focusing on the three lines of inquiry which are tied in this short but intriguing phrase. It will allow us to come close to what is meant by the ambiguous notion of an-archy.

2. "Whether the anarchical were not signaling itself inside consciousness..."

Without any doubt, Levinas draws us apart from any theory that would consider that the ultimate horizon is the identification of the subject to itself—be that subject the individual self, the absolute Mind or the transcendental Ego. As against such an understanding, he insists on a

[4] *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, 1981, 100. (*Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence*, The Hague, 1978, 127.)

signification that cannot be reduced to that self-identification: the infinite responsibility for the other, before any decision of my liberty and beyond any pretension to satisfy that responsibility.

Does that mean, though, that the movement or process of identification of the self is denounced? Second question: does that mean that we, or I, *have to* substitute, for that process of identification, a reverse movement of infinite or relentless devotion to the other? Does *vulnerability to the other* have to substitute for *identity of the self*, or *Infinity* for *Totality?*

It seems that the answer to both questions is positive. Levinas, or so it is said, pretends to show that the process of identification of the self to himself cannot but be an undue, abusive or illusory, attempt to found himself. The self believes that he is his own beginning, and that he is responsible only for those actions that he committed out of his liberty. But in fact I am infinitely responsible for a suffering that I didn't even provoke. The belief to be my own beginning, to be a separated self posing himself as principle and archè of anything that happens to him, *is shown* to be illusory—and abusive. I must recognize that in reality I am determined by the other, that the other is my origin as responsible, and not myself.

This seems to be the reading of Paul Ricoeur in *Soi-même comme un autre*, where he presents Levinas' thoughts in the following words: "It is in me that the movement that started in the other ends its trajectory: the other makes me responsible, i.e. able to respond. Thus the speech of the other comes and sets itself at the origin of the speech by which I attribute to myself the origin of my actions".[5]

According to this reading, the whole section of *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas describes the separation of the self is but a description of the illusory and abusive closure of the self, "incapable of the Other",[6] as the polar opposite of the infinitely responsible I.

[5] P. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, 1990, 388 (my translation).

[6] *Ibid*, 389 (my translation).

According to this reading, again, the pages of *Otherwise than Being* about the "reduction" are but a denunciation of the attempt to maintain the capacity of representation. "A whole preparative work of demolition", writes Ricoeur, "consummates the ruins of the 'representation', the 'theme', the 'said', to open beyond the 'saying' the era of the 'unsaying'".[7]

The relation between an-archy and the self is thus understood as being only privative or negative. An-archy is but the defeat of archè and representation. Indeed, Levinas says that responsibility does not stem from my archè and can not be reintegrated in my archè—be it by the means of representation. It is, in his own words, a past beyond any memorable past. But something more is here added. Being defeated, archè would have to be renounced, as well as representation: both of them would appear to be abusive.

The meaning of "an-archy", though, far from being only privative or negative, is positive. Indeed, the an-archic can not, without abuse, be adequately remembered and brought back to the archè. However, at the same time, it cannot but "signal itself inside consciousness", as was said in the footnote that we are trying to understand. And consciousness is archè.

The section on "separation", in *Totality and Infinity*, is not a description of the "bad" self, that will have to be denounced and renounced once it has appeared that I am responsible for the other beyond any decision that I would be taking on my own. On the contrary, the different moments of the process of identification, leading from "jouissance" to "travail", "demeure" and "representation", are required, in a minimal measure and to the greatest possible extent,[8] for the Infinity to be possible. They are, in fact, a generous description of the subjectivity—and not a virulent condemnation of egotism. Levinas describes every moment of that process of separation, including the closure of the separated self, as being "ambiguous". That does not mean that while the self poses himself as his own origin, he will have to give that up when

[7] *Ibid*, 390 (my translation).

[8] See the remarkable—if terrible—balance in the last chapter of *Noms propres*, "Sans nom".

he discovers that he is in fact determined by another origin. Contrary to what we read in Ricoeur, the "assignment to responsibility" *is not an origin*: it is, precisely, an-archic and thus *requires the archè to be*.

To turn now to the pages of *Otherwise than Being* which were alluded to by Ricoeur's presentation of Levinas' use of "dire" and "dédire": is it accurate to understand them as an attempt at "opening beyond the 'Dire' the *era of the 'Dédire'*"? In fact, what is at stake in those pages is not any attempt at substituting an era for an other, at substituting a real, ethical origin for the abusive illusion of the self who poses himself as origin. What is at stake in that book, especially in those pages, is to seize the *pre*-original as being possible only inside the origin. What is at stake is to describe the ambiguity of the self who, being an origin, being an archè, is *"prophetic". That* is the problem.

This ambiguity is exactly, indeed, what is defined later in *Otherwise than Being* as the prophetism of the subjectivity: "The appeal is understood in the response",[9] writes Levinas—the appeal is heard in the response. We should not underestimate the importance of what is said here. It means that it is only in the response that the appeal can be heard, nowhere else and not before, not outside or before the archè—in no other era.

To put it bluntly: the pre-original is possible only if the self poses himself as archè—only, to come back to the language of *Totality and Infinity*, if the self has deployed as "jouissance", "demeure", "travail" or even, at its best, as "representation". The pre-original requires the archè, and does not substitute for it. It is generally granted that according to Levinas the assignment or the appeal is not a second moment, coming after the self, or once the archè would be able to hear it or to decide for it or to take responsibility for it. That is right, as it is right to quote among other arguments and illustrations his reference to the phrase *"na'asse venishma"*. However, it should be equally emphasized that what he means is not simply to return the sequence. What he means is not that there is, at first, the call or assignment for responsibility and then, secondly, the answer to that assignment. First is the answer, the ego, language and representation—but what is and remains first and

[9] *Otherwise than Being*, 149. (*Autrement qu'être*, 190.)

original, examining itself, discovers "après-coup" that it is a response. The whole of Levinas' philosophy should indeed be understood as the relentless endeavour to grasp, to bring to light, that ambiguity or that contradiction.

If, then, one is summoned or appealed to anything when studying the philosophic works of Levinas, it is to that relentless endeavour of philosophy to bring to light what can not be brought to light but, still, has to be brought to light. We are thus lead to what was announced as a second focus point, on the basis of the footnote that was quoted before. That footnote, if you remember, wrote:

3. "The anarchical is possible only as contested by the discourse that betrays, but translates, without nullifying it, its an-archy by an abuse of language".

It was attempted, until now, to show that what is at stake is not to substitute the assignment to responsibility for the self identifying himself to himself, but to describe the ambiguity of a prophetic self, i.e. at once archè and response.

In the same manner, it will be insisted now that what is at stake is not to substitute ethics for representation, but to describe the ambiguity of representation as at once betraying and translating, "trahissant et traduisant", the an-archic.

To introduce that second point, let us read a few lines in *Otherwise than Being:*

> But is it necessary and is it possible that the Saying on the hither side be thematized, that is, manifest itself, that is enter in a proposition and a book? It is necessary … the gratuity nonetheless required of substitution, that miracle of ethics before the light, this astonishing saying, comes to light through the very gravity of the questions that assail it. It must spread out and assemble itself into *essence*, posit itself, be hypostised, become an eon in consciousness and knowledge, let itself be seen, undergo the ascendancy of being. Ethics itself, in its saying which is a responsibility, requires this hold. But it is also necessary that the saying call for philosophy, in order that the light that occurs not congeal

> into essence what is beyond essence, and that the hypostasis of an eon not be set up as an idol. Philosophy makes this astonishing adventure—showing and encountering as an essence—intelligible, by loosening this grip of being."[10]

In the light of phrases such as these ones, it should be accepted beyond any doubt that what Levinas writes on "Said" and "Unsaid" (*Dédire*) is not just another occurrence of the fashionable rejection of philosophy. It is not a demolition of the last ruins of archeologic representation—it is not a rejection of the "Said" to open the era of the "Unsaid". "Said" and "Unsaid" are the relentless life or breathing of philosophy. Something decisive has here to be noticed: the whole description of the accused or reverted subjectivity, i.e. almost the whole body of that book until page 153 (page 195 in the French text), has to be understood in the light of what Levinas tells us, in its earlier pages, about "reduction". Those pages are not describing the "bad" philosophy or denouncing ontology for being totalitarian. Levinas describes there, indeed, what he is doing, how we have to understand the following description of subjectivity—and that is philosophy:

> A philosopher's effort, and his unnatural position, consists, while showing the hither side, in immediately reducing the eon which triumphs in the said and in the demonstrations, and, despite the reduction, retaining an echo of the reduced said in the form of ambiguity, of diachronic expression. For the saying is both an affirmation and a retraction of the said.[11]

In that way, *Otherwise than Being* reformulates, more than it contradicts, what was said in *Totality and Infinity* on "representation" as the ultimate moment of the separation of the self. Levinas insisted there on the genius of representation, which is able to grasp its own conditions, as the idealist subject who poses himself as archè. That means the fact and possibility of a self-foundation that *at once* means the forgetting of the conditions of its appearing *and* accomplishes itself as "critique", as

[10] *Otherwise than Being*, 43-44. (*Autrement qu'être*, 56.)
[11] *Ibid. (Ibid.)*

going back up that self-foundation. Representation at its highest was described as ambiguous: at once theory and, *as such*, critique. Those are also the last words of *Of God who comes to mind*:

> It is in this alternation that the enigma of philosophy resides, relative to ontological dogmatism and to its unilateral lucidity. But it is there also that the permanence of philosophy's crisis resides. This signifies, concretely, that for philosophy the ontological proposition remains open to a certain reduction, disposed to unsaying itself and to wanting itself wholly otherwise said.[12]

Philosophy is not identified with the "unilateral lucidity of ontological dogmatism". It is also or at once critique. That critique is exactly what is done in *Otherwise than Being*. Philosophy is shown to be necessary. Manifestation is necessary as well as its reduction, which in its turn, though, is still manifestation... That is what was announced in the first pages of that work:

> Being, its cognition and the said in which it shows itself signify in a saying which, relative to being, forms an exception: but it is in the said that both this exception and the birth of cognition show themselves. … For thematization in which being's essence is conveyed before us, and theory and thought, its contemporaries, do not attest to some fall of the saying. They are motivated by the pre-original function of the said, by responsibility itself.[13]

"We will see more of this further", adds Levinas, indicating in a footnote that "further" means from page 153, precisely the section entitled "From Saying to the Said, or the Wisdom of Desire".

We should not neglect that insistance on the necessity of philosophy or give our whole attention only to what is said about the defeat, as it were, of representation. Everything that will be said on subjectivity as vulnerability, having been introduced as a "reduction", has to be understood as such a reduction, in the phenomenological meaning of the word. What was said about reduction was not just one moment that was gone through toward the description of the subjectivity. Levi-

[12] *Of God who comes to mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo, Stanford, 1998. (*De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Paris, 1982, 270.)

[13] *Otherwise than Being*, 6 (*Autrement qu'être*, 7.)

nas himself calls our attention to the fact that it determines everything that will said in the book, until he brings back what had been put into brackets when he deals with "the wisdom of Desire". That "description" of the meaning of subjectivity has to be understood in the light of what is said of the ambiguity of philosophy.[14] That means that it is not to be taken, as is often the case, as a psychological description or a moral prescription.

While bringing to evidence that the evidence can not rest satisfied with itself, Levinas powerfully insists that we have to search for that evidence or for manifestation, conscience, representation. We do not have to substitute ethics for ontology: we have to search for ontology *and* to criticize that ontology—that means also to criticize that critique, which unavoidably turns itself to ontology... To neglect that demand for philosophy would mean, according to him, to confuse the an-archic with an impersonal origin.

4. "It (the anarchical) would reign in its way"

We will now return briefly to the problem of political reason and prophetism. It was stated earlier that that problem is often understood as an alternative, dissociating both of them as exclusive possibilities between which we would have to choose one or the other. It was also said that this dissociation is often at the background of interpretations that are made of Levinas and that, amazingly, the reference to Levinas often reinforce that understanding.

It was said in the preceding section that we do not have to substitute ethics for ontology. In the same way, it should be considered that we do not have to *substitute* what is (wrongly) understood as prophetism for political reason.[15] We do not have to *substitute* a pure sacrifice

[14] See also *Otherwise than Being*, 155. (*Autrement qu'être*, 198.)

[15] Would this by any chance be the miscomprehension at the basis of Belgian foreign policy, which presents itself, with much public success, as an "ethical diplomacy"? It would be a rude irony to discover that what we described as the Levinassian vulgate has some responsibility in that confusion.

to the other for the political order where me and the others are all equals and where I could have, alas, to kill another man. What must be noticed is that Levinas does not simply reject the political order that would be based on the identity between myself and the others: he criticizes it but, in so doing, he also legitimizes that order. The reign has to be ensured by that order, and not released to an-archy. The reign of anarchy would be a contradiction in terms and, indeed, a horror. Levinas legitimizes the political order but in an ambiguous way: that order is necessary *but* we must not be taken in by that order. That order is necessary, but not ultimate.

This articulation between ethics and justice has been developed with utmost accuracy by other speakers in this colloquium. It will only be emphasized here that what has been said earlier about the "reduction" is here of a decisive importance.

To draw the pertinent implications of what was said before, we should simply notice that what is said by Levinas is not to be understood in the following manner: *at first* I would be vulnerable to the other, totally devoted to him or hostage, *then* I would have to compromize if a third person has to be taken into account. When in *Otherwise than being*, under the title "Witness and Prophecy", Levinas continues to describe my *"preoriginal sincerity"* towards the other, that description is still to be understood inside what was announced before as "reduction". He does not describe there a situation that could be actual at any moment, at any "first" moment. On the contrary, as was stated before, what is important in that description is the ambiguity of an origin that, while being an origin, is already a response to the pre-original. Levinas insists on the fact that the pre-original, as an-archy, can not be an origin more original. Pre-original is not first. What is first is the origin, and the description of the origin is ambiguous: as reduction, it is described only as a response to the pre-original. Then Levinas endeavours to describe justice, and the problems that appear once others have to be taken into account: those two sections, though, do not articulate one to the other as successive moments or situations. They both describe what is first: but the first section still describes it in

the movement of the "reduction", while the second reintegrates what had been put in brackets for the sake of reduction. That is precisely what he had announced at the beginning of that book.

I am not *at first* prophetic or ethical, *then* political or rational when the situation asks for it, having then to compromize:[16]

> In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness. … The other is from the first the brother of all the other men. The neighbor that obsesses me is already a face, both comparable and incomparable, a unique face and in relationship with faces, which are visible in the concern for justice.[17]

This often-quoted phrase means that what Levinas describes as the obsession "with the other", or as my being "hostage of the other", is *never* intended to be a description of a situation, of what I would be in such or such circumstances, in contrast with situations which would be that of an egoist self or that of a political situation. My situation as human being is, *at first*, at once, to be with others, equal with them and compelled to comparison, reason and justice. But in that first situation resonates or resounds an "echo" that at once evades that situation and asks, demands and compels for that situation to be assumed. That situation has to be assumed *because* it is not ultimate! This is exactly what is implied by the notion of an-archy. An-archy is no factual, moral or psychological evasion out of the archè, being, reason and politics towards any other world. it is, on the contrary, the description of a way to inhabit this world as the only place, immanence, where the transcendence can happen. it can happen only as ambiguity, hesitation, enigma... Levinas' philosophic description of that enigma, far from being only negative, entails powerful or positive consequences concerning subjectivity, philosophy and political reason.

[16] "In no way is justice a degradation of obsession, a degeneration of the for-the-other, a diminution, a limitation of anarchic responsibility, a 'neutralization' of the glory of the Infinite, a degeneration that would be produced in the measure that for empirical reasons the initial duo would become a trio", *Otherwise than Being*, 159, *Autrement qu'être,* 203.

[17] *Otherwise than Being*, 159. (*Autrement qu'être*, 203.)

Conclusion: Athens and Jerusalem?

We now understand why Levinas had to speak Greek, or to say in Greek words that come from the Bible. His speaking Greek can not be reduced to convenience or ability, as if the only thing at stake was to convince Athens that Athens is wrong. If we are not mistaken in our understanding of Levinas' teaching, it must be granted that philosophy is requested by the responsibility itself. The impossible manifestation or phainomenai is required by the an-archic itself. The an-archic is possible only by that betraying—and philosophy is required in order to prevent that manifestation to rest content with itself. That would mean, surprisingly, that Athens is required by Jerusalem—and that Jerusalem is required by Athens, Athens being tempted to forget its eros, ontology being tempted to forget the metaphysical desire.

That would mean that the tension between Jerusalem and Athens is not a conflict where one or the other is right and has to survive and exclude the other. Nor does it mean only that some modus vivendi has to be found between them, both being necessary to the work of truth. It would mean much more than that: in Jerusalem as well as in Athens, without any possibility to reduce one to the other, would be present that tension which plays itself in the traditional conflict between Athens and Jerusalem. That means that both Athens and Jerusalem would have to be understood as the manifestations, or the historic deployments and realizations, of what is at stake in human being as an essentially ambiguous or enigmatic being.

LEVINAS AND BERGSON ON JUSTICE AND INFINITY*

Joëlle Hansel

To Rivka Horwitz, in memoriam

"Astonishment is the root of philosophy": in the spirit of Aristotle, I would like to begin with an experience familiar to any reader of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Any reader of Levinas' magnum opus may have felt a certain degree of perplexity in face of the striking contrast between two "orders": the order of ethics and charity to which the greater part of the book is devoted, and the order of politics and justice, which is discussed in the final pages.[1] The informed reader is aware of the way Levinas lays the groundwork for the transition from ethics to politics: through the appearance of the Third party, who states the rights of the third, the fourth, the fifth individual, who are also "my Others". But this does not entirely dissipate one's confusion when faced with two conflicting requirements: an ethical requirement which Levinas himself depicts as disproportionate and mad, a requirement which is, in the image of Cartesian doubt, excessive and hyperbolic, a responsibility for the Other which increases to infinity; another sort of requirement inherent to politics and justice: the need to measure, to weigh, to portion out, to equalize in order not to give to the other while depriving the third. Just when the ethical requirement reaches its paroxysm peaks, when it becomes the very structure of my being, the third party takes center stage and formulates the need to moderate that part of it that is excessive and truly infinite.

* Translated from the French by Esther Singer.

[1] *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, 1991.

This leads to a series of paradoxes. Whereas ethics makes each of us a being "unique into itself" the political order of justice requires us to compare what cannot be compared and to establish a common measure between them. Whereas the ethical relationship is asymmetrical and accepts no substitution, social relationships imply reciprocity between beings who are seen as interchangeable.

The question becomes even thornier if we take into account a feature which touches on Levinas' work as a whole this time: aside from the "Greek" justice presented in *Otherwise and Being*, in his earlier works there is another model of justice which excludes all measure and all proportions and includes, on the contrary, the dimension of infinity and the incommensurate.

I would like to deal with the coexistence of these two facets of the Levinasian concept of justice: the infinite or "Messianic" justice which reigns in the ethical order, and "Greek" measured justice which exists in the political order. To do so, I will describe two movements which operate in parallel in Levinas' work. The first movement begins in *Existence and Existents* and ends in *Totality and Infinity.* It deliberately situates justice in the order of the infinite and the incommensurable by excluding all notions of measure or proportion. The second movement, which is already touched upon in *Time and the* Other, is fully developed in *Otherwise and Being.* It initiates a very different type of relationship between the two facets of justice by accounting for the gradual penetration of the infinite into the order of judicial and political institutions; or, to use the language of the *New Talmudic Readings*, it is the movement by which heavenly justice descends gradually to earth to be concretized in the space of the earthly court.[2]

Levinas and Bergson

At the University of Strasbourg where he arrived in 1923, Levinas encountered mentors of exceptional stature: Charles Blondel, Maurice Pradines, Henri Carteron, Maurice Halbwachs, to name only a few. As

[2] Levinas, *New Talmudic Readings*, trans. R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, 1999.

he would say in his old age "They were men." Through them, he was initiated into the thought of Bergson. Although he had chosen the path of phenomenology, his admiration for Bergson remained steadfast. Like Vladimir Jankélévitch, he denounced the fact that Bergsonian thought had fallen into oblivion after the War, at a time when German metaphysics was enjoying its heyday in Parisian philosophical circles. He took up the defense of Bergson, who was "summarily executed" in *Sein und Zeit* by Heidegger who saw him as a theoretician of space.[3] On many occasions, Levinas expressed his affinity with the fundamental themes of Bergsonian thought: duration, intuition, and the distinction between closed and open morality.

The comparison with Bergsonism thus doubly warranted. In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas uses the Bergsonian opposition between physical time and duration to highlight the differentiation between the "time of economic life", the order of proportion and compensation, and the "time of redemption and justice," the order of the unique and the incommensurate. Prolonging a trend that was prefigured in his pre-war writings, he suggests that time—or rather the present or the instant—is not only related to being but also has an ethical significance.

The opposition between the time of economic life and the time of redemption and justice serves to make a second comparison between Levinas and Bergson. It mirrors the distinction made by Bergson in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* between the order of closed, relative justice where everything can be measured and compensated for, and the order of the absolute and the incommensurable which is associated with open justice.

Bergson and Levinas thus severed the link forged by Aristotle between justice and compensation. They promoted an ideal of infinite and absolute justice. But their proximity also has its limits. In Bergson, there is a transition from measured justice to infinite justice through a process of expansion and universalization through which justice, initially confined to the closed space of the City now extends to humanity in its entirety; in Levinas the approach is the exact opposite—there is a

[3] *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris, 1967, 100.

transition from absolute and infinite justice to measured justice via an action of limitation and restriction which, contrary to all expectations, does not abolish ethics but rather makes it possible.

Charity and Justice

In general, the notion of justice has an inherent ambiguity. On the one hand, it denotes a requirement or a moral ideal; on the other it also designates a totally concrete reality, the legal and judiciary institutions, the courts and prisons. The way in which Levinas sees justice reflects this ambiguity: in one way, it derives from the ethical order of the absolute, the incommensurable and infinity. On the other, it belongs to the political order where it is synonymous with proportion, measure, balance and equality. It is probably this ambivalence which prompted Levinas to make the following clarification in 1987 in the Preface to the German edition of *Totality and Infinity*:

> There is no terminological difference in Totality and Infinity between mercy or charity, the source of the right of the other person coming before mine, in the first case, and justice in the second, where the right of the other person—but obtained only after investigation and judgment—is imposed before that of the third. The general ethical notion of justice is mentioned without discrimination in the two situations.[4]

In this relatively late text where he asserts "his faithfulness to the innovative work of Henri Bergson", Levinas indicates the key differences between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. He also provides the reader with invaluable information on the evolution in his concept of justice. In *Totality and Infinity*, the term "justice" is still synonymous with "charity", a notion which designates, in Levinasian terminology, the ethical order in which the Other has absolute priority—the order of this initial "after you" which obligates the I to step aside and to yield to another individual—the order of the infinite inherent

[4] Preface to the German edition of *Totality and Infinity* in: *Entre nous. On Thinking-of-the-Other,* trans. M. B. Smith and B. Harshav, New York, 1998, 197.

to my responsibility for the Other. In contrast, in *Otherwise than Being* and in subsequent texts, Levinas makes a sharp distinction between justice and charity. Here, the notion of justice designates the judicial and political order where I must take the third party into account, who has at least as many rights as the Other.

The clarification provided by Levinas in his 1987 Preface signaled a turning point which was concretized with the publication of *Otherwise than Being*, where justice is no longer restricted to the ethical order and where it enters the political order. There politics is reassessed in a positive light, which contrasts strikingly with the criticism it was subjected to in *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas gave it, at best, the virtue of limiting natural animality.[5] In *Otherwise than Being* ethics and politics are no longer opposites but complementary.

This clarification also prompts the reader of Levinas to follow the chronological order by linking each of the two meanings of the word "justice" to a specific phase in his works. Ethical justice, the synonym of mercy, dominates the period which ends with *Totality and Infinity*; justice in the political sense is at the heart of Levinas' later works, and in particular, *Otherwise than Being*.

It would be erroneous to underestimate the weight of the preface mentioned above and Levinas' important clarification However, I would like to present a different version of the evolution of the Levinassian concept of justice, by referring to a much earlier text than the one I cited above. In *Time and the Other*, the following comment appears:

> Durkheim has misunderstood the specificity of the other when he asks in what Other rather than myself is the object of virtuous action. Does not the essential difference between charity and justice come from the preference of charity for the other, even when, from the point of view of justice, no preference is any longer possible?[6]

[5] See Georges Hansel in this volume.

[6] *Time and the Other,* trans. R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, 1969, 84.

This comment, which is not expanded upon in *Time and the Other*, is no accident. Like a painter carefully adding touch after touch to a picture which will only be completed years later, Levinas formulated, as early as 1948, a distinction between mercy and justice which would only be fully expressed in *Otherwise than Being*, more than thirty years later. Just as the artist paints his picture stroke by stroke, the source of the political concept of justice can be found in a series of writings that extend from *Existence and Existents* to *Otherwise than Being*.

In contrast to the astonishment or perplexity one can feel while reading *Otherwise than Being*, the emergence of justice in its political meaning is hence neither sudden, nor late. It is, on the contrary, the outcome of a gradual process whose roots can be identified as early as in *Time and the Other*. At precisely the time he was developing his ethical concept of justice in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas considered that justice could also be differentiated from mercy to designate a social order where "no preference is possible any longer." This was characteristic of Levinas' approach: his most fecund ideas are often left in the margins to let them mature better.

Given these features, I suggest we read according to the principle I outlined above: rather than corresponding to two successive phases, the two meanings of the word "justice" refer to two movements or two axes which deploy in parallel and at the same time in Levinas' work.

Justice, Ethics, Politics

The first of these two axes is the ethical notion of justice as it appeared in the last part of Exis*tence and Existents* entitled "On the way to time". This part corresponds to a critical moment in the evolution of Levinas' thought. Here he makes a transition between the topic of solitary subject found in his writings in the 1930's and 1940's, and the topic of alterity which would dominate his philosophical thought from then on. Levinas thus achieves a goal whose need was formulated as early as

1940, in "L'Ontologie dans le temporel".[7] In the internal economy of *Existence and Existents*, the movement which leads the solitary existant to the Other coincides with the movement which leads to the present instant, the instant of hypostasis, towards time. By claiming, in contrast to "traditional philosophy", Bergson and Heidegger included, that time is not the creation of the subject alone, Levinas points to the fundamental link between "time and the Other".[8]

The importance now given to this link has a direct impact on the way in which Levinas approached the notion of justice. Instead of associating justice with a place, a court, or hall of justice as is customary, Levinas links it to time and, more precisely, to one of the two types of time he deals with in *Existence and Existents*. Alongside the "time of economic life" which governs daily life and existence in the world, he defines a "time of redemption and justice". Even though the topic of Alterity only appears explicitly with death and the feminine, justice consists of a certain type of relationship with the Other. It is an encounter between the suffering I and the Other who demands that justice be rendered for an injury that is irreducible and unpardonable. It is the relationship between I and an Other who relieves me of the weight of my suffering.

The contrast between the time of economic life and the time of redemption and justice prompts us to make an initial comparison with Bergson which Levinas mentions often in the last part of *Existence and Existents*. It bears similarities, in many respects, to the well known distinction between physical time and duration. Like physical time, the time of economic life is characterized by its homogeneity and its monotony. At this stage where he is on the verge of encountering the Other, the existant has already eluded the weight of anonymous existence. Nevertheless, economic time remains marked by the neutrality of the "there is", and the monotony of its endless flow. It is also made up of a succession of instants, where nothing distinguishes one from the others.

[7] See Jacques Taminiaux, "La première réplique à l'ontologie fondamentale", Emmanuel Levinas, Paris, 1991.

[8] *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, The Hague, 1978, 94.

The time of daily life is hence open to the criticism that Levinas addressed to the whole philosophical tradition: by subordinating the instant to time, by only seizing it within a series, and not as itself, it is divested of what makes it singular and unique. From that point the instant "is considered just anywhere in the 'space of time', whose different points are only distinguished from each other by their order, and, other than that, are equivalent."[9]

In contrast to this homogeneous and monotonous time, Bergson was able "like Heidegger and before him" to define a totally different image of temporality. From *Existence and Existents* until his last writings, Levinas' works provide numerous examples of his admiration for Bergsonian duration in which each moment is absolutely new, for this duration which describes, in his eyes "a time that cannot be reduced to an infinite series of instants."

But while affirming his affinity with Bergson, Levinas also sets the limits. Although in constant renewal, duration is characterized by its continuity. Far from being juxtaposed, the different moments which comprise it interpenetrate such that, to use the well known Bergsonian metaphor of the snowball, each instant is "heavy with all of the past and pregnant with the whole future". In contrast, the time that Levinas opposes to the one which governs economic life differs in its discontinuity. Unlike the abstract time of science or economic life which is made up of a series of identical instants, the time of redemption and justice is structured around an exceptional and central instant, this present instant that Pascal regretted that we do not think of more often.

This structure of time was already hinted at in an earlier part of *Existence and Existents* which deals with hypostasis, this event by which the existant affirms his presence by exiting his anonymous existence. The present instant where the free subject, the master of his existence emerges is likened to a "beginning" or a "birth". This way Levinas highlighted the ontological value of this privileged moment where a personal relationship between the existant and one's existence is formed.

[9] *Existence and Existents,* 75.

In contrast to the time of economic life, the time of redemption and justice is hence organized around a present instant that is unlike any other. But, this time, its value is not only derived from its ontological significance. By associating it with the notion of justice, Levinas introduces an ethical dimension to time that was lacking in Heideggerian temporality. This is what is represented by the opposition between the time of the economic life and the time of redemption and justice, as described in *Existence and Existents*. In the time of economic activity and daily life whose "instants are equivalent" and which is characterized by the alternation of effort with leisure, all suffering is dissipated in the enjoyment of the fruits of one's labors, every labor receives and deserves its due. As Levinas says, "The Sunday does not sanctify the week, but rather compensates for it".

Economic life represents an order where "time dries all tears", where the pain felt during the present instant is compensated for by the expectation of wages which one will receive in the next instant, or the redemption that will be granted in a time to come. In reaction to this order of compensation which makes short shrift of human suffering, Levinas underscores its severity and inevitability. This is the meaning of the distinction he makes in *Time and the Other* between moral pain and physical suffering: "In moral pain one can preserve an attitude of dignity and compunction, and consequently already be free".[10] In contrast, "physical suffering…entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence",[11] meaning from the present instant to which the individual is in a sense brought to bay, his back to the wall, with no exit and no recourse.

In *Existence and Existents* Levinas does stress this fact by stating that "the very suffering of the present remains like a cry whose echo will resound forever in the eternity of spaces."[12] The unpardonable nature of suffering resurfaces at the present instant where the individual experiences the presence and the weight of a pain which the expectation of wages cannot attenuate, or even less remove. Levinas high-

[10] *Time and the Other*, 55.
[11] *Existence and Existents*, 69.
[12] *Existence and Existents,* 89.

lights a second feature, which confers absolute uniqueness to the present instant: the entirely individual nature of suffering. Well before *Totality and Infinity*, he excluded any attempt, either philosophical or theological, to dismiss the "private tears" of the individual by placing oneself in a more general perspective where suffering has a meaning and is, in a certain way, justified. This is what emerges from this passage in *Existence and Existents* where he rejects all attempts at theodicy: "Just as the happiness of humanity does not justify the misery, retribution in the future does not wipe away the pains of the present."[13]

At this point, a further comparison can be made with Bergson and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, published in 1932.[14] In *God, Death and Time*, Levinas once again expresses his admiration for this book where "the duration that Creative Evolution considered as a vital impulse becomes interhuman life."[15] He at times also cites, in particular in the *Talmudic Readings*, the Bergsonian categories of "closed" and "open".[16]

This first form of justice closely resembles the one described by Aristotle in the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Elaborated on the basis of a primitive mode of exchange—barter—this justice that Bergson terms "ancient" and "closed" preserves the principle. By a type of mathematical calculation, it establishes proportion and equality between two realities that differ in nature, by assigning them a common measure. By establishing an equivalence between damage inflicted and the punishment it deserves, it provides the victim with reparation and compensation. While stressing the advantages of this system which replaces the cruel law of retaliation ("an eye for an eye") Aristotle already pointed to the difficulty the judge or mediator must cope with: to determine a fair measure between injury and punishment and to establish an equality, he must ignore everything that is

[13] *Existence and Existents,* 91.

[14] See Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and C. Brereton, Westport, 1974; and Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, New York, 1944, 3-108.

[15] *God, Death and Time*, trans. B. Bergo, Stanford, 2000, 55.

[16] For instance, the Talmudic Reading on "Commentaries" in the second part of *Difficult Freedom,* trans. Sean Hand, London, 1990.

either measurable or quantifiable. This is true in particular for rectificatory justice. In this case, as Aristotle notes "the law looks only to the difference made by the injury, and treats the parties as equals, if one is committing injustice and the other suffering it."[17]

These are precisely the categories used by Bergson in *The Two Sources* to describe the difference between the two forms of justice. The first form corresponds to the historical and classical representation of justice. As Bergson states, "Justice has always evoked ideas of equality, of proportion and compensation. *Pensare*, from which we derive 'compensation' and 'recompense', means to weigh. Justice is represented as holding the scales. Equity signifies equality."[18]

However, for Bergson this point is highly problematical. How is it possible to apply to human relationships a mercantile model which should only apply to relationships between goods or property? How can we accept the fact that justice can compensate, by financial or material award, for damage done to human dignity and to the rights of the individual?

These considerations prompted Bergson to contrast the closed justice of Antiquity with a second form of justice: an open justice which, announced by the prophets of Israel, achieved by Christianity, was, 18 centuries later, the source of human rights and the democratic principles of 1789. Bergson contrasts the closed justice of the City—the "equilibrium, arrived at mechanically and always transitory, like that of the scales held by the justice of yore"—the ancient justice, to an open justice which promotes "the inviolability of right and of the incommensurability of the person with any values whatever".[19] Or a justice "that does no longer evoke ideas of relativity and proportion but, on the contrary, of the incommensurable and the absolute".[20]

Although Levinas does not refer to *The Two Sources* in *Existence and Existents*, one cannot fail to perceive the analogy between his concept of justice and Bergson's. In contrast to a relativistic order where

[17] *Nicomachean Ethics* V, 4.
[18] *Two Sources*, 69
[19] *Two Sources*, 71.
[20] *Two Sources*, 74.

everything, even suffering, can be assessed and measured, where everything can be compensated for and amends made, they both argue for a justice which affirms the incommensurable value of the person. Or, to refer to the title of this study: a justice which includes the dimension of infinity. As Bergson says, a justice where "we could form a complete idea only if we were to "draw it out to infinity" as the mathematicians say."

For Bergson, the transition from closed justice to open justice can only be explained by a "creation" and by the action of "certain men, a certain man, perhaps", by the work of heroes, saints and above all, mystics. In the classic work he devoted to his mentor during Bergson's lifetime, Jankélévitch shed light on a novel feature of his position in the *Two Sources*: the suddenness by which, in this philosopher of duration and continuity, the transition between closed and open justice takes place—a transition which Bergson likens to a "saltus" or a "leap forward" ("bond en avant").[21]

In *Existence and Existents*, the open justice presented in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* corresponds to an ethical concept of justice that is firmly opposed to the economic order and to all ideas of compensation. Associated with notions of redemption and salvation, this justice also has a messianic component. Like Bergson's open justice, it is associated with a providential figure. Although Levinas identifies it with the Messiah, this figure has nothing theological about it. Unlike religious salvation, redemption as he sees it does not promise a radiant future which would compensate for present sufferings. On the contrary, it concerns the present, the instant of suffering itself.

The Messiah's duty hence consists of insuring the re-emergence of this instant that has been hidden or effaced by the monotonous course of economic life. The consolation he gives through a caress which has nothing erotic about it does not consist of giving wages but of freeing the present instant from the suffering that weighs it down, by redeeming it and enabling the resurrection. In this phase where Levinas bridges the distance separating I from others, this Messianic figure is,

[21] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, Paris, 1931.

in fact, the forerunner of the other who saves me from my imprisonment in myself. Through the caress, it gives the individual prisoner of his suffering "fresh air, a dimension and a future". It also represents a form of salvation which Levinas would later go beyond, to reach another higher form which, without doubt "no eye has seen": not to be saved by others but to save all the others.[22]

In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas hence repeats Bergson's move by severing the traditional tie between justice and compensation. By associating it to compassion, which is expressed in the salutary caress, he gives justice a strictly ethical meaning which it will maintain up through *Totality and Infinity.* Similarly, he situates it firmly in the ethical order where individual rights are infinite and absolute.

If we stopped here, we could say that Levinas is much more Bergsonian than he would like to admit. But as one may well have guessed, things are not as simple as they seem. If we take a closer look, we notice significant divergences between Levinas and Bergson. In 1947, when *Existence and Existents* was published, Levinas was on the threshold of the Talmudic world that he would enter little by little after his encounter with M. Chouchani. One can imagine his reservations concerning the Bergsonian vision of a justice which although still reined in by the prophets of the children of Israel, does not become genuinely open until Christianity which universalizes it by extending it to the entire humanity.

Above all, the evolution of the notion of justice in the work of these two philosophers takes diametrically opposite tacks. Bergson moves from closed to open, from the restricted to the extended, from the particular to the universal, from an order where justice is synonymous with measure and equality to an order where it is synonymous, on the contrary, with incommensurability and infinity. For Bergson, the order of Greek justice is both antique and out of date. With regard to modern justice and human rights, it takes on a primitive and elementary

[22] *Difficult Freedom*, "Commentaries"; "The State of Caesar and the State of David" in *Beyond the Verse*, trans. Gary D. Mole, Bloomington, 1994.

cast. Although it governs social relations and exchanges, the justice of measure and equality in no way seems to him to be able to guarantee the infinite rights of the individual.

Levinas takes an entirely different perspective than Bergson. Over the course of the thirty years separating *Existence and Existents* from *Otherwise than Being*, there is a gradual shift from absolute ethical justice to the political justice of measure. Without detracting from the surprise effect created in *Otherwise than Being* by the appearance of the third, without denying in any way the value of the question dealing with the rights of the "3rd, the 4th, and the 5th individual" one can say that the rehabilitation of Greek justice of measure and equality indeed began much earlier in Levinas' work.

The precursors can be found as early as 1948 in *Time and the Other* where Levinas differentiates, as we have seen, between charity and justice, by citing, doubtless for the first time, the presence of the Third party. In 1954, the motif of the Third is taken up once again in "The I and the Totality", one of the articles forming the original impetus for *Totality and Infinity*.[23] The same is true for the problem which would be at the heart of the issue of justice in *Otherwise than Being* , as well as the beginning of the shift from ethics to politics, as Levinas wrote in "The I and the Totality": "If I recognize my wrongs with regard to you, I may be wronging the third one through my repentance itself."[24] Appealing once again to Bergsonian categories, he even makes the comment that "the society of two"—the couple which forms an exclusive relationship that excludes the third party—is a closed society. From this we deduce that an "open society" necessarily includes the third.

[23] *Entre nous*, 30-31.
[24] *Entre nous*, 19.

We have the great privilege of holding this conference on Levinas in Jerusalem.[25] In one of his *Talmudic Readings*, Levinas comments a text which makes the earthly Jerusalem here below the "unavoidable antichamber" of the heavenly Jerusalem on high. In his view this means the "impossibility for Israel of religious salvation without justice in the earthly city."

The place where the order of infinity and ethics encounters the order of measure and justice is indeed Jerusalem.

[25] I first presented this paper at the International Conference "Ethics and Politics in Emmanuel Levinas", June 2003, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

LEVINAS, JUSTICE, AND JUST WAR

Peter Atterton

> Yet I shall temper so
> Justice with mercy
>
> —John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

The question of the legitimacy, justification, and limits of violence, particularly in the political sphere, has a long and varied history in the West. Whereas Roman writers such as Cicero and Ulpian tended to offer prudential reasons for the use of force, arguing that self-defense and the protection of one's property constituted lawful grounds for killing,[1] the early Church Fathers, such as Ambrose and Augustine, emphasized the *moral duty to defend one's neighbor from injury and oppose the violation of peace.* In *De officiis,* Ambrose went so far as to say:

> fortitude which in war preserves the country from the barbarians, or helps the infirm at home, or defends one's neighbor's from robbers, is full of justice.... (1.27.129) *He who does not repel an injury done to his fellow, if he is able to do so, is as much at fault as he who commits the injury.* (1.36.179)[2]

The fact that Ambrose was a Christian should not mislead us into thinking that he was merely applying to the situation of war the insight found in the Gospels: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Rather, he seems to have been following directly in the tradition of the Psalmist: "Defend the

[1] Larry J. Eshelman, "Might Versus Right", *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 12/1 (1996), 29-50.

[2] Excerpted from *The New Catholic Encyclopedia,* New York, 1967-1989, 593.

poor and the fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid *them* out of the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 82:3-4).

How does Levinas justify the use of violence in a manner that is consistent with his philosophical ethics? The question is made particularly difficult by the fact that Levinas considers the meaning of the face to be expressed by the command "Thou shalt not kill." How then does one remain in relation to the Other face to face while using violence and force? And if that is not possible, how does one justify the break with ethics in the concern with justice that necessitates the use of force? By examining various texts and interviews mostly postdating *Totality and Infinity*, I shall attempt to reconstruct Levinas' argument, whose conclusion is similar to Ambrose's, that force is justified when it is used to defend the third party (*le tiers*) from the injury caused by others. I shall also try to show how ethics has always to be criticized from the perspective of justice, which must be criticized from the point of view of ethics in turn, if justice is not to loose its ethical foundation and degenerate into what Levinas calls "Stalinism."[3]

The Violence of Ethics

The problem of justice is introduced in chapter five, section three of *Otherwise Than Being*, entitled "From Saying to the Said, or the Wisdom of Desire." There we read at length:

> If proximity ordered me only to the other alone, there would not have been any problem, in even the most general sense of the term. A question would not have been born, nor consciousness, nor self-consciousness. The responsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to questions; it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when the third party enters.
>
> The third party is other than the neighbor but also another neighbor, and is also the neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow. What then are the other and the third party for one another? Which passes before the other in my

[3] François Poirié (ed.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Qui êtes-vous?* Lyon, 1987, 98; *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins, Stanford, CA, 2001, 51-52.

> responsibility? The other stands in a relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer, before any question, for my neighbor. The other and the third party, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third party. "Peace, peace to the neighbor and the one far-off" (Isaiah 57:19)—we now understand the point of this apparent rhetoric.[4] The third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction. It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice?[5]

It might be thought that Levinas in this passage is simply defending the traditional liberal principle of equal consideration of interests, and arguing that I ought to weigh all affected interests—including my own ("It is thus that ... there is also justice for me")[6]—when calculating what to do morally. However, I would suggest that the situation is more complex than that, for at least two reasons. First, it is clear that the entrance of the third party does not attenuate the fundamental principle of ethical asymmetry between me and the Other. Levinas insists that "in no way is justice a degradation of obsession, a degeneration of the for-the-other, a diminution, a limitation of anarchic responsibility".[7] Despite the fact that the entrance of the third party introduces a "contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then [*jusqu'alors*] went in one direction," this cannot be viewed as a pretext for ignoring one's immediate and absolute obligation to the Other, which is prior to any questioning.

[4] Levinas misquotes Isaiah (57:19) in this instance. The correct citation is: "Peace, peace to the one far-off and the neighbor." The rhetorical device to which Levinas is referring is to place "peace to the one far-off" *before* "peace to the neighbor," as though the third party were placed between me and the Other. This is important, as Levinas makes clear in an interview in 1985 ("Entretien avec Emmanuel Levinas," by F. Armengaud, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 90 (1985), 307), where the biblical quote is given correctly on three occasions (300; 302; 307).

[5] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, 1981, 157. (*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, The Hague, 1974, 200.)

[6] *Otherwise than Being,* 159. (*Autrement qu'être,* 202.)

[7] *Otherwise than Being,* 159. (*Autrement qu'être,* 203.)

Second, it is not clear how the concern for justice can justify punitive and repressive measures—a certain violence—when the face would appear expressly to forbid them. Is not the face said to be "inviolable"?[8] In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas states that "his [the Other's] justified existence is the primary fact, the synonym of his very perfection."[9] How am I therefore justified in repressing one who is *perfect*? A perhaps obvious response is to say that the existence of the Other is no longer justified when he or she aggresses against the neighbor. But that would be to present the Other's freedom as in need of justification and thus like mine, which Levinas emphatically denies is the case: "The other is not opposed to me as a freedom other than, but similar to my own. ... The Other is not another freedom as arbitrary as my own".[10] Indeed, Levinas' theory even makes it difficult to justify the right of the third party to use violence to repel the Other in self-defense. For how could "another neighbor" be entitled to restrain the already justified freedom of neighbor who is the Other?

Questions like these are bewildering, and it is difficult to know where to begin to resolve them. Things would be relatively straightforward had the Other simply forfeited his or her rights as a face through infringing on the rights of the third party. That would be the classical liberal response of someone like Locke, for example, who in his second *Treatise of Government* defended the right

> *to secure* Men from the attempts of the Criminal, who having renounced Reason, the common Rule and Measure, God have given Mankind, hath by unjust Violence and Slaughter he hath committed upon one, declared War on all Mankind, and therefore may be destroyed as a *Lyon* or a *Tyger*, one of those wild Savage beasts, with whom Men can have no security.[11]

[8] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficile liberté,* Paris, 1976, 21. *Difficult Freedom*, trans. Seán Hand, Baltimore, 1990, 8.

[9] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, 1969, 84. (*Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'exteriorité*. The Hague, 1961, 56.)

[10] *Totality and Infinity*, 171. (*Totalité et infini,* 146.)

[11] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, New York, 1988, II, section 11.

Although Levinas ultimately rejects the Lockean notion of forfeiture, on at least one occasion he appears to suggest that the aggressor does lose his or her entitlements as a "face." In an interview that took place in 1983 Levinas was asked whether or not "the executioner [*bourreau*] has a face."[12] In giving his reply he sought to distance himself from the idea of non-resistance to evil by situating the question in the context of the problem of justice as formulated in the fifth chapter of *Otherwise Than Being*. In so doing, he distinguished between two possible rationales for using violence. The first was self-defense "starting from a threat against me",[13] which Levinas denied had any moral legitimacy. The second rationale, Levinas' own, was "starting from justice and the defense of the other man, my neighbor." This was used to justify his claim that the executioner who threatens the neighbor "no longer has a face." In order not to give the impression that this was intended to undermine what he called his "central idea" of ethical asymmetry, Levinas recalled once more the Elder Zossima's teaching from *The Brothers Karamazov*—"we are all guilty for everything and for everyone, and I more than all the others"[14]—but he added that the concern for the third party who is threatened by the Other constitutes a limit to my responsibility "without contradicting it".[15]

However, when addressing a similar question during an interview conducted at the time of the Klaus Barbie trial (1987) in France four years later, Levinas gave a quite different response. On that occasion, he appeared to go out of his way to deny the idea of forfeiture. Specifically at issue was the question, initially posed by Jean-Toussaint Desanti, of whether "an SS officer has what I [Levinas] call a face." Levinas replied that it was "a very troubling question that calls, to my mind, for an

[12] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophie, justice et amour: entretien avec Emmanuel Levinas," ed. R. Fornet and A. Gomez, in *Esprit* 8/9 (1983), 8-17, (here: 9). *Is It Righteous to Be?* 167.

[13] "Philosophie, justice et amour", 9; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 167.

[14] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack, London, 1984, 339.

[15] "Philosophie, justice et amour", 9; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 167.

affirmative answer. An affirmative answer that is painful every time!"[16] The great personal loss suffered by Levinas during the Holocaust, in which his birth family from Lithuania was murdered, explains why his response here is so anguished. The implication is clear. If the members of the SS—"the executioners of Auschwitz"[17]—have a face, then they have certain rights. These rights include "a right to a defense and respect [*droit à une défense, à des égards*]"[18]—the very rights the Nazis denied their victims.

How, then, does Levinas justify punishing and repressing the face—for example, the face of Klaus Barbie? Does not the heavy premium he places on the face preclude the possibility justice altogether? Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity* that the face is "entitled [*ayant droit*] to everything"?[19] Does this include a right to leniency? Indeed, how on Levinas' theory does one justify going to war itself if the enemy has a face? ("War and commerce presuppose the face and the transcendence of the being appearing in the face. ... [I]t aims at a presence that comes always from elsewhere, a being that appears in a face".)[20] In a brief article written against the death penalty entitled "An Eye for an Eye" (1963), appearing two years after the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas appeared to concede everything to the pacifist camp when he claimed that "violence calls up violence, but we must put a stop to this chain reaction".[21] If violence only gives rise to more violence, how can it rightly be called "just," precisely defined in terms the struggle against violence?

[16] Emmanuel Levinas, "A quoi pensent les philosophes?" *Autrement* 102 (1988): 53-60 (59); personal translation. Henceforth AP. Compare Levinas' "pain" here with Alyosha's in *The Brothers Karamazov*, 283. See Levinas' note in "La Souffrance inutile," in *Les Cahiers de la nuit surveillé. Numéro 3: Emmanuel Levinas,* ed. J. Rolland, Lagress, 1984, 329-38 (here: 332n4). "Useless Suffering," trans. Richard Cohen, in *The Provocation of Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, London, 1988, 156-67 (here: 166n5).

[17] *Qui êtes-vous?* 121; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 70.

[18] "A quoi pensent les philosophes?", 59.

[19] *Totality and Infinity*, 75. (*Totalité et infini,* 48.)

[20] *Totality and Infinity*, 222. (*Totalité et infini,* 197-198.)

[21] *Difficult Freedom*, 147. (*Difficile liberté,* 209)

Levinas doesn't always claim that violence gives rise to violence. Indeed, in "Judaism and Revolution," a Talmudic lecture given in 1969, he argued that violence is unavoidable in some cases. "Unquestionably [*c'est incontestable*] violent action against Evil is necessary."[22] Invoking the authority of Rabbi Eleazar, he wrote: "if I am violent it is because violence is needed to put an end to violence".[23] There can be no question of refusing violence outright. Not only is the doctrine of non-violence powerless to put an end to violence, it risks complicity in violence. In a polemical essay entitled "Simone Weil Against the Bible" (1952), written half way through the bloodiest century in history, Levinas reminded us that

> The doctrine of non-violence has not stemmed the natural course toward violence displayed by the whole world over the last two thousand years. ... The extermination of evil by violence means that evil is taken seriously and that the possibility of infinite pardon tempts us to infinite evil. ... It is precisely this inanity of charity—this resignation at the base of the most active charity, to the misfortune of the innocent—which is a contradiction. Love cannot overcome it, since it feeds off it. To overcome it we must act. ... Life is not passion. It is an act. It is in history.[24]

Levinas, however, is not indifferent to the risk that violent action also presents in history. In "Judaism and Revolution," he made a point of saying that "it is not only a question of seizing the evil-doer but also of not making the innocent suffer".[25] Even if we can agree that it is just to *go to* war (*jus ad bellum*), there is still the question of the morality of various actions performed *within* war (*jus in bello*) to consider. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas put the problem this way:

[22] Emmanuel Levinas, *Du sacré au saint* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), 38. *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 109.

[23] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 114. (*Du sacré au saint*, 45.)

[24] *Difficult Freedom,* 138-141. (*Difficile liberté*, 196-200.) Modified translation.

[25] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 110. (*Du sacré au saint*, 38-39.)

> The true problem for us other [26] Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence that, without blanching in non-resistance to evil, could avoid the institution of violence out of this very struggle. Does not war against war perpetuate that which it is called to make disappear in order to consecrate war and its virile virtues in good conscience? One has to reconsider the meaning of a certain human weakness, and no longer see in patience only the reverse side of the ontological finitude of the human.[27]

What Levinas is here calling "patience" should not be mistaken for pusillanimity or a lack of what Heidegger called "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*) (of being-toward-death). It is an ethical deliberation before action in which the resolve to bring the malefactor to justice is tempered by the concern not make the innocent suffer in the process. This agonizing deliberation in the "double clandestinity of the catacombs and of conscience," argues Levinas, "risks making the revolution impossible".[28] It is a risk, however, that must be run, for it is only by running such a risk that the "true revolution" (or just war) is made possible. In a short essay written in 1963, entitled the "Virtues of Patience," Levinas wrote:

> We must recall these virtues of patience not so as to preach a sense of resignation in the face of revolutionary spirit, but so that we can feel the essential link which connects the spirit of patience to the true revolution. This revolution comes from great pity. The hand that grasps the weapon must suffer in the very violence of that gesture. To anaesthetize this pain brings the revolutionary to the frontiers of fascism.[29]

[26] This qualification, omitted in Lingis' translation, is important. Having spoken of the "history of the West" (*Otherwise than Being,* 222; *Autrement qu'être,* 176) and the "violences of nationalism" (*Otherwise than Being,* 223; *Autrement qu'être,* 176), Levinas is here addressing those readers who are not seduced by such violence and for whom such violence is a problem. The address therefore seeks to remain within the framework of a descriptive discourse without entering upon a prescriptive one.

[27] *Otherwise than Being,* 177. (*Autrement qu'être,* 223.) Modified translation.

[28] *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 110. (*Du sacré au saint*, 38.)

[29] *Difficult Freedom*, 155. (*Difficile liberté,* 219.) Lao-Tzu, recall, said something similar two-and-a-half millennia earlier: "Weapons are tools of violence not of the sage. He uses them only when there is no choice, and then calmly and with tact, for he finds no beauty in them" (Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Hex. 31).

Although pacifism is not an option when the Other is an aggressor, it is not something that I can dispense with in *good* conscience. Here it seems that whatever course of action I adopt I am in the wrong. If I fully discharge my obligations to the Other, then I forsake the third party, as well as tempt "infinite evil." On the other hand, if I fulfill my duty to the third party, I must necessarily renege on my commitment to the Other, and, in the case of bringing the Other to justice by violent means, risk perpetuating evil by making the innocent suffer. Since I will either, if ethically motivated, discharge my obligations to the Other or to the third party, then I will either renege on my obligations to the third party or renege on my obligations to the Other.

Levinas appears to accept the soundness of the argument, and thus the impossibility of escaping the dilemma. As Derrida[30] has shown in another context, *violence is inevitable and inescapable*. The best one can hope for is to mitigate the violence as much as humanly possible. Such is the role assigned to charity after justice.

Justice and Charity

In "Simone Weil against the Bible," love was criticized by Levinas because of its pathos and ethical complacency. In "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," an interview that took place in 1983, Levinas abandoned his earlier criticism, while drawing certain parallels between love and the Greek Agape, which the Romans translated as "*caritas*." Love was s*till regarded as exclusively oriented in the direction of the Other, but its ethical character was accented over its erotic (or pathetic) aspect. Levinas described it as "the responsibility for my neighbor," and linked it to the "'vision' of the face, as it applies to the first one to come along".*[31]

[30] See Jacques Derrida, "Violence et Métaphysique," *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris, 1967, 117-228 (esp. 183-191); "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London, 1978, 79-153 (esp. 125-130); See also *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, Paris, 1997, 60ff; *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford, 1999, 29ff.

[31] *Qui êtes-vous?* 8; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 165.

Thus Levinas attempted to draw a contrast between love and justice, traditionally held to be blind in the sense of being impartial. The blindness of justice was discussed in an interview with François Poirié that took place three years later. There Levinas interpreted the Biblical claim that "the judge does not look at the face of everyone" (Deut. 11:7)[32] to mean that the individual Other who stands before the court of law is no longer looked directly in the face, but rather judged in accordance with universal laws and precepts, as though he or she were absent. Such is what Levinas called "the first violence, [the] contestation of uniqueness".[33]

To surmount the ineluctable violence committed in the name of universal justice Levinas in the same interview proposed the reintroduction of the face-to-face relation. If the lofty ambitions of justice are not to end up being drowned in administration and Stalinism, he argued, "it is necessary that I rediscover the unique, once I have judged the thing; each time anew, and each time as a living individual and as a unique individual who can find, in his very uniqueness, what a general consideration cannot find".[34] The rediscovery of the uniqueness of the Other is the critical task reserved for philosophy.[35] This is not merely one area of philosophical inquiry among others, e.g., epistemology, logic, and aesthetics. Rather, it changes the very meaning of philosophy insofar as it transforms the thinker's vocation from the search for truth to the search for a better justice. In the concrete, this amounts to a continual criticism, reexamination, revision, and amendment of existing governmental policies, political and judicial procedures, laws, statutes, and institutions conforming to the liberal State. While Levinas elsewhere confesses to a Platonic or "a utopian moment"[36] in his thinking here, one that is governed by the ideal of "a state which holds justice as

[32] Quoted in *Qui êtes-vous?* 119; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 69.

[33] *Qui êtes-vous?* 97; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 51.

[34] *Qui êtes-vous?* 98; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 51-52.

[35] See Levinas' discussion of the dual role of philosophy in connection with justice in *Otherwise Than Being*: "Philosophy serves justice by thematizing the difference and reducing the thematized to difference. It brings equity into the abnegation of the one for the other, justice into responsibility", *Otherwise than Being,* 165. (*Autrement qu'être,* 210.)

the absolutely desirable end and hence as a perfection",[37] in the Poirié interview Levinas drew two important implications from the critical awareness that "the justice on which the State is founded is, at this moment, still an imperfect justice".[38] The first is that the liberal State has within it a surplus that is not of the State, but from which the State issues, namely, "the call of humanity".[39] The second is that

> in the State where laws function in their generality, where verdicts are pronounced out of a concern for universality, once justice is said there is still, for the person as unique and responsible one, the possibility of or appeal to something that will reconsider the rigor of this always rigorous justice. To soften this justice, to listen to the personal appeal, is each person's role. It is in that sense that one has to speak of a return to charity and mercy. *Charity* is a Christian term, but it is also a general biblical term: the word *hesed* signifies precisely charity or mercy.[40]

Having judged the face justly according to universal laws, it is necessary once again to place oneself under the judgment of the face so as to soften this justice, lessening its severity. "Justice is awakened by charity, but the charity which is before justice is also after".[41] Although the dangers of reliance on the authority of the face of the Other to the exclusion of the third party are real, it is important to realize that ethics ultimately has the last word.

If the most just procedure is one that is concerned to correct its own injustices and blind spots, then the most just procedure is that which finds a way of accommodating the face. Levinas gives the abolition of the death penalty as a pertinent example of the "coexistence of charity with justice".[42] This is not only because *la peine de mort* destroys the condition of the possibility of charity after justice, but also

[36] "The Paradox of Morality" (interview with Tamra Wright, Alison Ainley, and Peter Hughes), in *The Provocation of Levinas*, 168-180 (here: 178).

[37] "The Paradox of Morality", 177.

[38] *Qui êtes-vous?* 118; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 68.

[39] *Qui êtes-vous?* 119; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 68-69.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Qui êtes-vous?* 98; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 52.

[42] *Qui êtes-vous?* 97; *Is It Righteous to Be?* 51.See also "The Paradox of Morality", 175 and "A quoi pensent les philosophes?" 58.

because the abolition is an obvious instance where the face and the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is respected. Nevertheless, it is the death *penalty*, that is, retributive killing that "no longer belongs to justice".[43] Non-retributive killing, i.e., killing in (a just) war to protect the lives of innocents is a legitimate means of justice in the last resort. Charity is an option only when the danger posed by the malefactor has been averted. Although Levinas insists that war is not something to be entered into in good conscience, he also makes it clear that it is unavoidable in some cases. Patience is a virtue only up to a point. Eventually deliberation must be replaced by action if justice is to be done and evil is to be overcome. That is why patience cannot be preached to others.[44] For the victims of violence justice is already too late. As Cicero says: "When weapons reduce laws to silence, they no longer expect one to await their pronouncements. For people who decide to wait for these will have to wait for justice, too—and meanwhile they much suffer injustice first."[45]

Conclusion

The ethical relationship with the Other is complicated by the presence of the third party, enormously so. Am I not responsible for the third party, "another neighbor," too? Who therefore merits the most care and attention? Whose needs are the most urgent? In fulfilling my obligations toward one do I not in turn risk not only ignoring but also injuring the other? The presence of the third party, according to Levinas, introduces a problem in responsibility itself inasmuch as it gives rise to the question: "What do I have I to do with justice?" However, justice raises an ethical problem in turn. Insofar as justice, which is traditionally blind, judges the Other, not individually on account of his or her face, but according to general rules and concepts, then it does violence to the Other. The task of philosophical criticism is to help reduce this

[43] "A quoi pensent les philosophes?" 58.
[44] *Difficult Freedom*, 171. (*Difficile liberté*, 239.)
[45] Quoted in Eshelman, "Might Versus Right," 32.

violence, which to the extent that it cannot be eliminated completely, gives rise to the need for charity after justice. Without charity, justice is impossible, and without justice, ethics becomes unethical, reminding us that

> notions like goodness are not simple, and that they call up and encapsulate notions that seem opposed to them.[46]

[46] *Difficult Freedom*, 140. (*Difficile liberté,* 199.)

PART THREE: AESTHETICS AND EROS

THE LANGUAGE OF THE MEETING WITH THE OTHER AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EROS
Traces of Aesthetic Thinking in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

Francesca Yardenit Albertini

They have idols of silver and gold,
made by human hands.

These have mouths but say nothing,
have eyes but see nothing,
have years but hear nothing,
have noses but smell nothing.

They have hands but cannot feel,
have feet but cannot walk,
no sound comes from their throats.
Their makers will end up like them,
everyone who relies on them.

(Ps. 115: 4-8)

1. The Work of Art by Levinas

In the Italian and French academic milieu, the issue of the existence of an aesthetic theory in Emmanuel Levinas' thought has long been debated.[1] Such a discussion has concentrated itself on Levinas' critical positions (already taken up at the beginning of his philosophical pro-

[1] Raffaella Di Castro, *Un'estetica implicita. Saggio su Levinas*, Milan, 1997; Fabio Ciaramelli, "L'appel infini à l'interpretation. Remarques sur Levinas et l'art", in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 92/1 (1994), 32-52; Françoise Armengaud, "Ethique et esthétique. De l'ombre à l'oblitération", in *Cahiers de l'Herne. Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris, 1991, 605-617; Francesco Paolo Ciglia, "L'essere, il sacro e l'arte negli esordi filosofici di E. Levinas", in *Archivio di Filosofia* 1-2 (1982), 249-280.

duction) concerning this topic and concerning the possibility of tracing *malgré tout* an aesthetic theory moving from the manifestation of the face of the Other as origin of the primacy of ethics over ontology.

One can not disagree with French and Italian scholars' conclusions about the aesthetic conception in young Levinas: in his first writings, aesthetics is not only treated in a very superficial and naive manner, but it becomes even object of a virulent aggressiveness based on groundless prejudices.

In the essay "La réalité et son ombre"[2] and in the work *De l'existence à l'existant,*[3] both dated back to the end of the 1940s, a negative conception of art prevails. This can be traced to Levinas' opinion that the romantic-Hegelian aesthetic theories tended to lead to a religious adoration of the aesthetic dimension and attempted to transform it into a language beyond the language, into a perceptible representation of the Idea, into a metaphysical intuition of the Absolute. According to Levinas, this transformation resulted in a general aesthetization of perception and of the history of culture, such that museums and theatres took the place of the former pagan temples, in which the artist played the role of the Creator. From Levinas' perspective, art can not represent the supreme values of the civilization, because it both absolves the artist of his duties as human being and grants to him a facile and undeserved nobility. Thus, art no longer involves the indifference of the contemplation, but rather the indifference of the irresponsibility. Although art steadily invites us to understand and to act, it plunges us into a reality which strives only to be superseded in a book or in a picture.[4]

[2] Emmanuel Levinas, "La réalité et son ombre", in *Les Temps Modernes* 4 (1948), nr. 38, 771-789. Reprinted in *Les Imprévus de l'histoire*; English translation: "Reality and its Shadow", in: Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Duquesne, 1998, 1-14.

[3] Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*, Paris, 1978; English translation: *Existence and Existents*, Duquesne, 2001. In my article, I shall refer to Levinas' original works only.

[4] Emmanuel Levinas, *Noms propres*, Paris, 1982, 176-188; English translation: *Proper Names*, London, 2000[2].

Levinas includes in this judgement the so-called "engaged art" as well, moving from the assumption that every form of art is produced under the aegis of disengagement, because art transforms each contents into mere image which is, in Levinas' opinion, synonymous with abstractness and of estrangement from reality. In these first writings, the Kantian distinction between image and representation seems to be totally unknown or at least ignored by Levinas. He identifies the image with the perceptible dimension, which is interpreted not as material of the perception or quality of an object, but as pure sensation, as autonomous function purified of every conceptual form. The faculty of sensation as ontological event, namely as discovery of the materiality of Being, fulfils itself only through the imagination. For Levinas, art has a "cosmoclastic" effect, because it puts on the line the solidity of things in the world, it reveals their "verbal insubstantiality" and immerses them in the "ontological murmuring" from which things arose. In *De l'existence à l'existant* Levinas writes that the movement of art leads the spectator to abandon the perception in order to rehabilitate the sensation, so that his/her intention gets lost in the sensation itself.[5]

One objection to Levinas' interpretation of art might point out that such a "verdict" is simply a reformulation of the Jewish tradition that regards every work of art as idolatrous. Actually, the rabbinical tradition (whose different positions on this topic I can not deepen here)[6]

[5] *De l'existence à l'existant*, 63-64.

[6] Numerous historians and philologists have pointed out that the second commandment does not refer to the art at all, but to its idolatric use during the worship. As the most recent archaeological discoveries have also demonstrated, art always existed among the Jewish people. For a closer examination of the second commandment's Jewish interpretation, see: Efraim Elimelek Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts", in *Israel Exploration Journal* 9/3 (1959), 149-165; J. Oullette, "Le Deuxième Commandement et le rôle de l'image dans la symbolique religieuse de l'Ancien Testament. Essai d'interpretation", in *Revue Biblique*, 74 (1967), 504-516; Joseph Guttman (editor), *No graven images. Studies in art and the Hebrew Bible*, New York, 1971; Christoph Dohmen, *Das Bilderverbot. Seine Entstehung und seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament*, Frankfurt/M. 1987; Hans-Peter Stähli, *Antike Synagogenkunst*, Stuttgart 1988; Pierre Prigent, *L'image dans le judaisme. Du Iie au*

does not at all convict art for its spiritual celebration of beauty; therefore, I doubt that this tradition corresponds to the extremism of Levinas' interpretation of the second commandment: even the most perfect image—as idol—is characterized by its "narrow-mindness", hence it reveals itself as mere appearance of the existence of Being.[7]

2. Materiality and Shapelessness in the Work of Art

The "magic of art" to which Levinas refers is the "shadow" which is drawn over reality by art. Thus, this shadow is the ontological danger of art: by replacing the reality with an image, the work of art does not limit itself to hiding or to disguising reality, but rather it modifies it in such a radical manner that a dimension of irreality within the reality is opened.

According to Levinas, this negative ontological power art develops itself through two aesthetic categories: musicality and plasticity. The former is the characteristic of every form of art, even if it is usually limited to music. According to Levinas, the musical element accomplishes the deconceptualization of reality, because sound is the quality most distant from the object. Because this aspect resonates impersonally, when one listens to music, one can not grasp the "Something" of listening; in other words, one is essentially beyond the domain of concepts.[8]

In Levinas' interpretation, objects in their materiality sink into the work of art, they disperse themselves in sonority and return back to the "impersonality of the elements",[9] in which shapes empty themselves and appear in their shapelessness.[10] In poetry, the meanings of the words sing of nothing else than of the evocative powers of their ety-

VIe, Geneva, 1991; Aldo Luzzatto, *L'aniconismo ebraico tra immagine e simbolo*, in *L'arte e la Bibbia. Immagine come esegesi biblica*, Settimello 1992, 87-101; Fiorella Bassan, "Iconografia ebraica", in *Torah e filosofia. Percorsi del pensiero ebraico*, Florence, 1993, 121-127.

[7] "La réalité et son ombre", 773-775.

[8] *Ibid.,* 775.

[9] *De l'existence à l'existant*, 64 (my translation).

mologies,[11] in a novel matters and events get lost in mere atmosphere,[12] and a stage play comes to consist of nothing but a mixture of gestures and movements arising from nothingness and returning back to nothingness.[13] In such a *resonance*, the aesthetic elements replace the object itself, which is reduced in this manner to a mere a-material reflection; they overpower the perceiving subject, destroying his or her capacity of maintaining control over and distance from objective reality. Hence, art is a return to the "childhood of mankind",[14] namely a regression to myth; this is a danger—always waiting in ambush—for the Being of man. Thus, according to Levinas, this danger has an ontological status. The loss of control of reality by the subject happens through the dictatorial affirmation of the plasticity of every form of art which Levinas defines as the dimension of *il y a*, namely a corporality which is only a reflection of an image's sensible essence. The *il y a* is *l'être en général*—Levinas particularly polemicizes against Martin Heidegger—which does not show itself as condition of the possibility of beings, as abundance and variety of shapes, but rather as *présence in the absence*, namely a pure Nothing which nevertheless resounds as a Something in the aesthetic dimension. The material is only the fact of the *il y a*, where we observe an anonymous stream of Being invading and submerging every subject, person or thing. Being remains like a force field or an impeding atmosphere which belongs to nothing and nobody, though it is all-embracing. What Levinas names "the horror"[15] is exactly this compelled participation in the *il y a* without any way out, even without the possibility of death as extreme form of liberation.

Unlike sign, symbol and word, the image is "opaque", because it breaks up every vital relationship of intelligibility, instrumentality and cross-reference between signifier and meaning, between subject and

[10] Levinas, *Autrement qu'etre ou au-delà de l'essence*, Paris, 1990, 100-102; English translation: *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Duquesne, 1998.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] "La réalité et son ombre", 778.

[13] *De l'existence à l'existant*, 28ff.

[14] Levinas, *Du sacré au saint. Cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques*, Paris, 1977, 31 (my translation); English translation: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Bloomington, 1994.

[15] *De l'existence à l'existant*, 68-74 (my translation).

object; the image shuts itself up in a total self-referentiality. According to Levinas, the artist declines to say about the work of art anything else than what it is, and the work of art declines to affirm anything more than its essence. The work of art is not ready to begin a dialogue, but rather is the negation of understanding. It contents itself with being the shadow of the world (actually, what the work of art is).[16]

3. Ethics and Aesthetics by Levinas

Levinas maintains such a negative judgment in his later work *Totalité et infini* as well, where art is compared to a sort of façade serving as a mask to cover the real essence of things.[17]

Otherwise formulated: for Levinas, art presents itself like the negative pole of reality; art is not metaphysically *other*, but a double of reality, a shadow. By substituting the reality with its image, art reveals the risk of non-sense to which the human being is always ontologically exposed.

In my opinion, one might trace here a first positive evaluation of art, although *via negationis*: art echoes those dangers about which the second commandment warns, namely the danger of becoming lost in creative omnipotence and of making sense of reality by means of substitutes (the golden calf). In this manner, the aesthetic event shows itself like a warning against the always latent precariousness of sense, against the inhuman element of Being. According to Levinas, the role of art criticism is fundamental, because through its analysis, it attacks and weakens the omnipotence of art, which wills—present through itself and in itself—a self-referential world deprived of contradictions and sense of responsibility. Hence, *via negationis*, aesthetics can disclose a path toward a conquering the ethical dimension. As a matter of fact, many interpreters claim that even in this conception of the passage from aesthetics to ethics one can trace Levinas' originality, despite

[16] "La réalité et son ombre", 780.

[17] Levinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, Paris, 1990, 280; English translation: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Esteriority*, The Hague, 1979.

his questionable judgements on art. If it is so, the term "originality" would be extremely incorrect, because Immanuel Kant already points out the affinities between ethics and aesthetics in *The Critique of Judgement*:

> But, now, reason is further interested in ideas ... having ... objective reality. ... That being so, reason must take an interest in every manifestation on the part of nature of some such accordance ... under these circumstances, the analogy in which the pure judgement of taste that, without relying upon any interest, gives us a feeling of delight, and at the same time represents it *a priori* as proper to mankind in general, stands to the moral judgment that does just the same from concepts, as one which, without any clear, subtle, and deliberate reflection, conduces to a like immediate interest being taken in the objects of the former judgment as in those of the latter—with this one difference, that the interest in the first case is free, while in the latter it is one founded on objective laws.[18]

Where can one discover Levinas' originality in this shifting of the aesthetic dimension from negative pole to the ethical dimension as ontologically prior, to a positive pole to the latter? In our opinion, the answer can be found in the third section of *Totalité et infini (Visage et extériorité)*, in which a specific aesthetic argumentation is certainly explicit (although the author of the only essay on this topic in Italian, Raffaella Di Castro, would not share my position);[19] rather, in this section aesthetics can attain a positive ontological meaning if it is regarded as phenomenological experience permitting one to experience the other as face.

Before dealing with *Totalité et infini*, one has to take into consideration the fact that a first and different evaluation not only of the aesthetic experience, but of the sensible realm in general can already be found in the essay "Langage et proximité" (end of the 1960's) and in the section "Sensibilité et proximité" in *Autrement qu'être*. In both these writings, Levinas claims that sensibility does not limit itself to be

[18] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, B 170/A 168, Oxford, 1968, 159-160.

[19] One of the most significant essays on this topic in German is by Thomas Wiener: *Die Passion des Sagens. Zur Deutung der Sprachen bei Emmanuel Levinas und ihrer Realisierung im philosophischen Diskurs*, Freiburg, 1988.

image of the true (*le vrai*), as the image is a kind of derived sensibility which has already lost the immediateness of the perceptible; namely, sensibility is already a conceptualized perception. Its function is not that of introducing an opaque element into our knowledge, an element which is opposite to the structures of intelligibility and which even leads to other kinds of knowledges: sensibility has the aim of establishing a relationship to reality on another level, namely, it aims to "pierce" knowledge as if it penetrated into the intimity of things.[20] This means that in its fundamental role, perceiving is not a superificial mirror game, rather "it does not play any game [...], it is the seriousness which breaks up the pleasure aspect of the game"[21] and which founds "the ethical relationship to reality."[22]

In *Totalité et infini* the gradual swing in Levinas' thinking becomes more radical when he claims the necessity of a "phenomenology of sensation"[23] which should be able to recognize in the perceptible a transcendental function *sui generis* (it is very interesting to point out here Levinas' attempt to tie Husserl's phenomenology to the Kantian transcendentality of the sensible): namely, a transcendental function which anticipates the crystallization of the consciousness in the subject/object and which is revealed in the relish of I, which in the artistic experience grasps with open hands the nourishment of the world, a way out of the dictatorship of the *il y a*. From this perspective, for Levinas, perceptibility is what demolishes every system, what sets itself against Parmenides' monism by becoming a sort of *principium individuationis* that makes possible the finiteness of the world and the subjectivity of the subject against the anonymity of the *il y a*.[24]

[20] Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris, 1988, 227; English translation: *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, Evanston, 1998.

[21] Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Paris, 1990, 71 (my translation); English translation: *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,* Duquesne, 1998.

[22] *En découvrant*, 228.

[23] *Totalité et infini*, 93.

[24] *Autrement qu'être*, 81.

As in Kant, aesthetics (regarded by Levinas as phenomenology of sensibility) opens itself to the problem of the attribution of sense to reality, a sense which is not gained by the solipsistic and monadic subject of German idealistic tradition, but by the subject who bursts out of itself experiencing the perceptible. By exposing itself to the risk of non-sense, the subject attains its identity through the signification of the sensibility, which, according to Levinas, the other (*autrui*) makes possible. For this reason, *autrui* shows itself as "the structure *a priori* of the perceptible".[25] In *Autrement qu'être* Levinas writes that sensibility is "the entanglement through which I am tied to others before being knotted to my body",[26] a continuous "placing in question through the alterity of the other".[27] Thanks to this alterity, the difference between the I and the other becomes mutual non-indifference, it becomes "the manner in which signification gains meaning."[28]

In this ethical reflection concerning sensibility one can find not only the first indications of an aesthetical analysis of the concept of the other as a face which awakes my responsibility, but also the first indications of a general revaluation of art. Although art always remains enclosed in its paradoxical *reasonable sense-lessness*, it modifies and deepens one's perception of the world. Body is the first instrument which allows our thinking to get in touch with the world as well as with its truth, for this reason Levinas' category of "proximity" [29] (proximity of the other) is inseparable from truth.

Despite this general revaluation, for Levinas art essentially remains "song", namely a language which does not refer to any determined meaning, but whose musicality lets resound the perceptible against the mortally sclerotic process of the *il y a*. Even by breaking up the monism of the I, art offers to the I the opportunity of not losing itself in the chaotic senselessness of the perceptible: art offers itself as creative

[25] *En découvrant*, 228 (my translation).
[26] *Autrement qu'être*, 96 (my translation).
[27] *Autrement qu'être*, 94 (my translation).
[28] *Autrement qu'être*, 96 (my translation).
[29] Levinas, *Autrement qu'être*, 173 (my translation).

source of meaning, as a resurrection of the face.[30] Hence, art is not merely an iconoclastic gesture, because through the sonority of its language, it is able not only to collect into unity the multiplicity, but also to connect finite and infinite, particularity and universality without transforming this collection in a sort of idolatrous totality: art can save the difference of each element and can create inside of them an infinity of other differences which can not be reduced to the Hegelian totality.[31]

4. Art as a Metaphor of Heteronomy

In the essay "Max Picard et le visage",[32] Levinas already defines the poetical experience as an evocation and an apparition of the face as first meaning and as origin of every other signification, by using a "plastic" language for the description of the face. This although the face is the un-representable *par excellence*: it always avoids our attempts at definition and encapsulation (thus, it also avoids our attempts at violence, of making the other *mine*).

According to Levinas, in Max Picard's work, the universe gives itself as plastic shape thanks to the human face: the swarm of particles attains a meaning by crystallizing itself in images, in metaphors (which have their origin in the sensibility), in originary language, in a primordial song. Picard's work consists in deciphering the universe, moving from those fundamental images or metaphors which human faces are.[33] For Levinas, Picard's work represents the emblematic capacity of art to move the subject from the meaning of his or her existence and of his or her time to the experience of the other's time and existence.

[30] Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Montpellier, 1972, 9-61; English translation: *Humanism of the Other*, Champaign, 2003.

[31] *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, 16.

[32] Levinas gave this paper on 22nd March 1966 during a meeting organized by the *Jeunesses Littéraires de France* in commemoration of Max Picard. In: *Noms propres*, 141-146.

[33] *Noms propres*, 143.

The poem is an elliptic text rich with allusions, which is incessantly interrupted in order to let pass through its gaps the voice and the time of the other, the voice and the time of the reader.[34]

From Levinas' perspective, art shows itself as metaphor of heteronomy and of the responsibility: both found the ethical subjectivity of the Other-in-the-Self. When the work of art is radically thought, it shows itself as a movement of the Self towards the other who never returns back to the Self, because the work of art is primarly relationship to the other reached without appearing to have been touched. Under this point of view, there is no difference between art and ethics.[35]

Language, of which the poem is the highest expression *per antonomasia*, compels us to enter into the other's time and world by putting at risk our capacity to give sense to reality, a capacity which one believes to have established in the solipsistic enclosure of I as Self. Because of this capacity of attribution of meaning and its disclosure to the ethical dimension of the other, language shows that the face of the other can also be read as an aesthetic-phenomenological category. Furthermore, the face of the other gives itself to us in the most plastic and physical form among sensible experiences, namely the experience of Eros. It is precisely the phenomenology of Eros to which one of the final sections of *Totalité et Infini*[36] is dedicated, and I would like to concentrate my attention on this aspect for a few concluding reflections.

Levinas' intention is to present this work to his readers as an essay on exteriority, namely as the description of the intentional movement which brings the I out from itself. But to what is the I brought (or more precisely, in respect to Levinas' phenomenological terminology: toward what is the I "stretched")? Where is it possible to experience for the first time and then ever again exteriority? Levinas' answers is: in the plastic materiality of the other. The other, who is "violated"[37] by me in the intentionality of the understanding-act, is what is offered *per ant-*

[34] *Noms propres*, 57-60.
[35] *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, 34-36.
[36] *Totalité et infini*, 263-273.
[37] *Totalité et infini*, 374 (my translation).

onomasia to my sensibility, the object into which I *carnally* run in my existence and which shows its plastic radicality in the experience of Eros. The erotic experience is the attempt to take possession of the other as naked body, as originary carnality, as fragility (nothing is easier to violate than a body offering itself in its defenceless nakedness). Yet this territory, apparently so easy to conquer, shuns us by drawing back into its universe of sense and meaning from which we are excluded: the caress, which in the erotic act almost desires to mould the other, touches in reality a shifty Something, namely an absence, a never-ending withdrawal. The caress pretends to know that which, despite its plastic concreteness, remains beyond knowledge,[38] a being remaining on the borderline of the experientiality and of the understanding-act of Being. In truth, Levinas does not seem to be involved in a search for an ontological definition of the Other as face that offers itself in the extreme condition of the erotic nakedness, but he is interested in its to-be-origin of the ethics of the I. The I strives for this face which is at the same time sensible body and aesthetic experience. In the fragility of the erotic nakedness, the I discovers its responsibility towards the Other, which is not only simultaneously violable and inviolable, but also intentionality without meaning and without vision. According to Levinas, the erotic nakedness says the unspeakable which is not separable from this speaking. It is a mysterious object alien to the expression which is nevertheless said through the work of art. This manner of "saying" and "showing hides by revealing", it is a sort of permanent torment disclosed to all possible misunderstandings which are not provoked by two meanings of the same word, but rather by its countless different pronounciations, so that what is discovered by profane voluptuousness does not offer itself as unique meaning and does not light up any horizon.[39] Such a non-sig-

[38] In Biblical Hebrew, the verb "to know" also means to have a sexual relationship to somebody, namely to know somebody carnally.

[39] *Totalité et infini*, 379ff.

nifying of erotic nakedness lets the face of the other remain mysterious and ineffable, because only a being having the frankness of the face can discover itself in the non-signifying of the lascivious dimension.[40]

Moving from the aesthetic experience of the other as body, which presents itself through the erotic experience in its most extreme fragility, the possibility for a new position in the horizon of sense and for a new evaluation of concepts such as "sense, significativity and significance" discloses itself for the experiencing subject. Exteriority in the aesthetic and erotic experience defines the being as being and makes the meaning of the face dependent on the essential correspondence between beings and significance. Yet, the meaning is not added to the being, but rather discovered in it.[41]

5. Conclusion

In his later works on art, Levinas ties the primacy of ethics over ontology to the attribution of sense generated by the other's face, although the latter always remains beyond this sense. Ethics is rooted in my To-Feel-The-Other by experiencing its concrete plasticity, its body's naked fragility, its finiteness. Aesthetics as attribution of transcendental sense is linked by Levinas with the phenomenological knowledge of the Other. The epiphany of the face as origin of the exteriority is also origin of the sense and of the primacy of ethics over ontology, a primacy which is made possible by the primarily "aesthetic" experience of the encounter with the other.

It is true that during his whole philosophical development Levinas, has never elaborated an aesthetic theory. Thus, in my investigation I was obliged to undertake a zigzag through the entire body of Levinas' work in order to discover but traces of an aesthetic thought, which are, however, not irrelevant. The tie between the search for sense in the aesthetic (that is, erotic and linguistic) experience of the other and the Husserlian phenomenological intentionality offer, in my opinion, a

[40] *Totalité et infini*, 381.
[41] *Totalité et infini*, 382.

new interpretation of the existential position of the Self and a new interpretation of the risk/challenge which one finds in the primarily physical (prior to its ontological) presence of the other. This experience discloses a path toward the ethical dimension of existence.

TEACHING AS AN INTERNALIZATION OF FEMININE ASPECTS

HANOCH BEN PAZI

The meaning of the feminine in Levinas' thought is a topic that has drawn a good deal of scholarly attention. The significance of this category in Levinas' thought[1] is expressly apparent. The *feminine* is discussed by Levinas at several main junctures of his philosophical research: the analysis of time, the analysis of dwelling, the description of the breach of infinity. Levinas dedicated a few articles to the meaning of woman and the feminine. He was criticized for relating to woman as a metaphor and not as a person. The standpoint of this study is based on recognition of the importance of the *feminine in* Levinas' writings, not just as a category describing passivity but especially in reference to the deep meaning and ethical responsibility relating to the Levinasian subject.[2] This paper will seek to advance philosophical research into the feminine aspects of Levinas' thought. The

[1] A rich and varied body of scholarly writings has appeared on Levinas' concept of *feminine.* See, for example: R.A. Cohen, "The Metaphysics of Gender", *Elevation—The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*, Chicago and London, 1994, 195-219; L. Irigaray, "Question to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love", *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. by R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991, 109-118; C. Chalier, *Figures du féminin*, Paris, 1982; C. Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine", *Re-Reading Levinas*, 119-129; T. Chanter, "Antigone's Dilemma", *Re-Reading Levinas*, 130-146; T. Chanter, "Feminism and the Other", *The Provocation of Levinas—Rethinking the Other*, ed. by R. Bernasconi and D. Wood, London and New York, 1988, 32-56; R. Manning, "Thinking the Other Without Violence? An Analysis of the Relations Between the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Feminism", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 5/2 (1991), 132-143; M.A. Ouaknin, *Méditations érotiques—Essais sur Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris, 1992; A. Ainley, "The Feminine, Otherness, Dwelling," *Facing the Other—The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by S. Hand, Richmond, 1996, 7-20; P. Kayser, *Emmanuel Levinas: la trace du féminin*, Paris, 2000; B. Lichtenberg Etinger, "Time is the Breath of the Spirit" (in Hebrew), *Iyyun* 43 (1994), 145-152; E. Meir,"The Dimension of the Feminine in Levinas' Philosophy" (in Hebrew), *Ibid.*

question to be discussed here is the exclusiveness of the feminine dimension to women. In answer I suggest that Levinas saw teaching or education as an option for internalization of the ethical aspects of the feminine by men as well.[3]

The Unique Phenomenology of Pregnancy

In his Talmudic Reading "And God Created Woman,"[4] Levinas counts two central characteristics of the feminine. One characterization, that of beautification, is explained by Levinas as a quality related to the erotic realm of male-female interaction. The second, central in Levinas' view, is that of pregnancy, being a home to a gestating being. These two phenomena are raised by Levinas as two uniquely feminine characteristics related to the midrash on the word *vayiven* in Genesis 2:22: "And the Lord God fashioned [*vayiven*] the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman."

> Another explanation: Rav Hisda said—and others said that it was taught in a *baraita*: The text teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, made Eve like a granary. For just as the granary is narrow at the top and large at the bottom to hold the harvest, so woman is narrow at the top and large at the bottom to hold the child.[5]

[2] See the studies by R. Cohen, E. Meir, and B. Lichtenberg Etinger and my dissertation—H. Ben Pazi, *Call to Responsibility* [Dissertation, Heb.], Ramat Gan, 2002, 260-296.

[3] One methodological remark, which in itself could be a separate discussion, is that the resources of my research are taken from the two corpuses of Levinas: that is, the philosophical research and the Talmudic Readings. The Talmudic Readings are not written in a philosophical manner. They are less severe and more speculative. This gives Levinas a special space for expressing ideas he chose not to include in his explicitly philosophical writings. This gives the reader an option to enrich his understanding of Levinas' philosophy by revealing the philosophical in the Talmudic Readings.

[4] E. Levinas, "And God Created Woman", in: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. A. Aronowicz, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990, 161-177.

[5] B. Talmud, Tractate Berakhot, 60a.

The Talmudic description of beauty is interpreted by Levinas as Eros. Sexual difference adds attention and care for external appearance to the direct and honest relationship between men and women. Thus the deep meaning of beauty includes a measure of "forgery." Taking responsibility for this sexual difference is problematic because man approaches the female other not only as an other but also as a woman. One does not relate directly to the other person exposed before him.[6] One relates to the other through the other's mask, or the other's *Persona*:

> In the feminine, there is face and appearance, and God was the first hairdresser. He created the first illusions, the first make-up. *To build* a feminine being is from the outset to make room for appearance. 'Her hair had to be done.' There is in the feminine face and in the relation between the sexes this beckoning to the lie, to an arrangement beyond the savage straight-forwardness of face-to-face encounter.[7]

The other interpretation is directed to pregnancy, as Levinas writes:

> …the gestation of a new being! The relation with the other person through the son.[8]

My discussion will focus on the importance of *pregnancy*. Pregnancy is described as a unique situation of human nature. During pregnancy the relations between the subject and the other, between the woman and the fetus, are not based on strangeness, but on complete responsibility. The Other is at one and the same time part of the woman and separate from her.

The unique phenomenon of *pregnancy* and its special meaning of understanding can be demonstrated by reference to Maimonides' philosophy on limited human consciousness. Maimonides refers to preg-

[6] The exposure of the face with its nakedness and its standing revealed is very central to Levinas' philosophy. Levinas sees the face as a non-phenomenal phenomenon and understands ethics to be established by seeing the other's face. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1969, 187-219.

[7] "And God Created Woman," 174

[8] "And God Created Woman," 174

nancy when trying to illustrate the impossible mission of grasping *Divine Creation*. He suggests imagining an orphan growing up on a deserted island, who in one way or another finds out the facts of pregnancy, the fact of there being a person within another person:

> Now the orphaned child must of necessity put the question: Did every individual among us—when he was little, contained within a belly, but alive and moving and growing—did he eat, drink, breathe through the mouth and nose, produce excrements? […] Similarly all the analogies will be carried on in order to show that it is in no respect possible that man should be generated in that manner.[9]

Pregnancy is a situation in which a person contains within herself the other, which is at once both a part of her and entirely separate from her. Maternity is a fascinating phenomenon that takes in all the necessary dimensions of *being for an Other*.[10] It gets significance by making a meaning other than itself possible. It receives its identity not by virtue of being for itself but by virtue of being for another.

Levinas identifies otherness of gender as an otherness that is not subject to Husserlian Reduction. In this point one can perceive a criticism of Husserl for not having approached woman with sufficient seriousness in his attempt to solve the problem of "experience of the other," the mode of presentation of the other as a different subject. That experience serves also as the test of the phenomenological reduction that Husserl performs.[11]

It would appear that, had Husserl taken the female subject seriously as a subject, the difference of gender would have overcome the attempt at reduction, and we would have found ourselves with an entire field or

[9] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines, Chicago and London, 1963, II:17, 295-296.

[10] *Être pour l'autre*—"being for the other"—signifies the responsibility demanded of the subject in his relations with another person. Levinas developed an ethical phenomenology connected to this term in *Otherwise than Being*. One may compare this ethical meaning to Sartre's phrase *être pour soi*.

[11] E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns, The Hague, 1960, 110-111.

fields that Levinas labels "irreducible." According to Levinas, from the perspective of a man's concepts, woman is irreducible. She is the "absolute Other."[12]

> What is the alterity that does not purely and simply enter into the opposition of two species of the same genus? I think the absolutely contrary contrary *[le contraire absolument contraire]*, whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine.*[13]

The event of *maternity,* which is described by *pregnancy,* means a change in observation, from *looking towards* and *grasping* to an internal connection to the Other. In *maternity* the subject is hosting the other in his otherness. Responsibility is an integral part of pregnancy, extending even to the maximal request from the subject to be ready to *substitute* for the other and to take complete responsibility for him. In Levinas' view that means to be responsible even for the suffering one may endure as a result of one's acceptance of responsibility for the other.

Identifying the centrality of the phenomenon of a woman's pregnancy occurs within feminist thought as well, as a major point of contention. There have been those who view pregnancy as a crisis and the choice of maternity as a woman's becoming weaker and more vulnerable, dependent upon a man and thus having a lower social status. (According to Simone de Beauvoir's suggestion, each woman has the choice of opting either for maternity or for human equality. One is not born a woman; one becomes a woman.)[14]

[12] Of course, Levinas thought includes this notion, about the impossibility of reduction vis-à-vis any other individual, since an essential quality of otherness is that it cannot be reduced into the self's concepts of consciousness. Nonetheless, feminine otherness stands out inasmuch as gender difference does not make it possible for its bearer to identify with the sexual uniqueness of a man.

[13] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans.: R. Cohen, Pittsburgh, 1987, 85.

[14] See, for example, Patterson's criticism of Simone de Beauvoir: A. Patterson, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood*, Ann Arbor, 1989.

In contrast, we can find descriptions of maternity such as those in the writings of Sara Ruddick.[15] In her view, the practicalities of maternity direct the mother into relinquishing part of her power for the benefit of her children. Maternal thinking is unique by virtue of its being a consciousness directed toward the other and relating to others as free subjects.[16]

Examining the *feminine* in Levinas' philosophy raises the question whether femininity is an attribute exclusively of women. My aim in this paper is to suggest a human translation of feminine categories, which can relate both to women and to men. Obviously, pregnancy is a very defined biological phenomenon. But pregnancy is not merely biological. And the ethical implications that Levinas sees in this phenomenon are important to the conceptual meaning of Subjectivity.

Levinas himself advocated this kind of thinking in his conversations with Philippe Nemo:

> Perhaps […] all these allusions to the ontological differences between the masculine and the feminine would appear less archaic if […] they would signify that the participation in the masculine and in the feminine were the attribute of every human being. Could this be the meaning of the enigmatic verse of Genesis 1,27 "male and female created He them?"[17]

And also in his conversation with Bracha Lichtenberg Etinger:

> Before the face of the other I am already obligated […] and then there is the idea of the feminine, or love, the relationship of love with the woman […] but this meaning exists before any present of the Other, for every human being.[18]

[15] S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Boston, 1980

[16] Ruddick also describes the danger of maternal thinking, which makes for great power in the private realm along with low feminine social status and its concomitant, powerlessness in the public sphere. That can make female maternity into bossiness and arrogance, in an attempt to include a public dimension within the private sphere.

[17] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, 1985, 68-69.

[18] *Levinas—conversations with Lichtenberg Ettinger*, 444

In Levinas' thought maternity, paternity and childhood are an extension of pregnancy. The concept of time can be based on the relationship between a father and his son, between a mother and her daughter. The concept of parenthood is grasped as a key concept for understanding responsibility toward the other, even at the price of having the other do something injurious to oneself. This is a form of welcoming, of hospitality, in his words, that goes beyond the limits of alienated encounter. This logical process could neutralize the exclusiveness of the feminine to women. As Levinas wrote in his Talmudic Reading "Judaism and the Feminine":

> Finally, that 'man without woman diminishes the image of God in the world'. And this leads us to another dimension of the feminine—maternity.[19]

Levinas derives the meanings of parenthood, fatherhood and childhood from *pregnancy* and *maternity*. Relating to one's child may cast uncertainty upon the ego's sense of fullness, since one's child is part of his parents and at the same time transcends them. One is demanded to be responsible to his or her child and to recognize their independent and unique existentiality. According to Chalier, to think with the category of *maternity* permits philosophical discussion on subjectivity with no differentiation between male and female.[20] Levinas used maternal metaphors to describe the openness of time.[21] But Chalier objects to Levinas on both counts: relating to woman as metaphor and relating metaphorically to woman both deny to actual women the use of language.[22]

[19] Levinas, "Judaism and the Feminine" in: *Difficult Freedom*, trans. S. Hand, Baltimore, 1990, 34.

[20] Chalier, *Figures du féminin,* 28-30.

[21] Chalier, *Figures du féminin*, 40.

[22] See Chalier, *Figures du féminin,* 46-51, especially the study of the use of language relating to the feminine.

Education and Parenthood[23]

The traditional philosophy of education preceded Levinas in recognizing the conceptual relation between teaching and parenthood. The theories of Pestalozzi and Korczak could indicate that. It is possible that this connection was made because of their concrete situation as teachers, in institutions that were very similar to family, to a "home." The teacher functions as a parent of children, and so he has to be like a crying and loving father or mother. He has to let them to develop themselves and change their identity from incomplete persons to their adult identity. One can see these thinkers' educational systems as a sharp critique of formal schooling and its inflexible and stubborn ways. The use of familial description permits them to present an alternative direction for educating children.

Levinas, too, draws a connection between teaching and parenthood. He effects a change of perspective, though: the two are related not in that teachers imitate parents but rather, he claims, because parenthood itself is not a biological matter. The biological category does not reveal the full wealth of meaning of parenthood.

> Biological filiality is only the first shape filiality takes, but one can very well conceive filiality as a relationship between human beings without the tie of biological kinship. […] To consider the Other as a son is precisely to establish with him those relations I call "beyond the possible".[24]

[23] See E. Meir, "The Jewish-Dialogical Philosophy and its Educational Implication" [Heb.], *Hagut* 1 (1999), 127-141; S. Wygoda, "Freedom as Responsibility" [Heb], *On Patriarchs' way,* Alon Shvut, 2000, 75-162; A. Aronowicz, "L'éducation juive dans la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas", *Pardès* 26 (1999), 195-210; A. Aronowicz, "Jewish Education in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas", in: *Abiding Challenges: Research Perspectives on Jewish Education (Studies in Memory of Mordechai Bar-Lev),* London and Ramat Gan, 1999, 65-100; A. Bouganim, "Levinas pedagogue", in: *Emmanuel Levinas—Philosophe et Pédagogue*, Paris, 1998, 55-64; C. Chalier, "Levinas maître", in: *Emmanuel Levinas—Philosophe et Pédagogue*, 65-70.

[24] *Ethics and Infinity*, 71.

When Levinas wants to widen the meaning of parenthood, he cites the Midrash: "Whoever teaches another person's child, Scriptures consider him as if he had given birth to him". Herein lies the change in the understanding of parenthood to an ethical significance.

Relating to the educator-teacher as a biological parent reconstructs the concept of parenthood, by reflecting its ethical meaning: responsibility. Different from normal situations where the ethical command comes to the subject from the outside inward, from the other person and his face, pregnancy and maternity suggest an ethical command that comes from the inside.[25] The ethical status of education is an internalization of all these feminine aspects illustrated by pregnancy and maternity. This principal idea has a few ethical implications that consign parental duties to an educational context.

Respecting the Otherness of the Pupil

Levinas' comments about parenthood go beyond the discussion of biological paternity. They are liable to be misinterpreted as portraying a proprietary relationship of the teacher towards his students, but in his view, the implication of the parenthood image is that a teacher is subject to strenuous ethical command before the other and bears complete responsibility.[26] The student does not belong to the teacher, just as a child does not belong to his father or mother. Despite all this non-belonging, the child's teacher, just like his parents, bears a heavy responsibility:

> Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with oneself who is nonetheless a stranger to me… Neither the categories of power nor those of having can indicate the relationship with the child… I do not *have* my child: I *am* in some way my child.[27]

[25] The transcendental direction towards inside is discussed in Ben Pazi, *Call to Responsibility,* 283-291.

[26] Rosenson discussed the metaphor of welcoming in Education, see I. Rosenson, "Mass on Education as Hospitality", *Hagut* 2 (2002), 36-45.

[27] *Time and the Other,* 85.

The meaning of child-parent relations is not that of identifying one with the other. I am not my child, even though there is a meaning to the sentence of *hineni*—"here I am" for my child. This *hineni* means recognition of the child's otherness. As Levinas said, it is a very non-simple request because a person's natural sense would have him see his continuity and development in his own son. As for the mother, more than the father, there is a symbiotic aspect to their budding biological dependence. The initial logic of Levinas' observation reveals the differentiation between biological facts and the category of parenthood.

The naturalist approach to education applies the biological metaphor—that is, continuity and evolution—to the event of teaching. Bergson called it "Elan Vital", the energy of life. But Levinas puts the emphasis on the exteriority of the son and pupil. By doing so, he rejects the biological factor as the deepest meaning and definition of parenthood.[28]

> Paternity is not simply the renewal of the father in the son and the father's merger with him, it is also the father's exteriority in relation to the son, a pluralist exiting. The fecundity of the ego must be appreciated at its correct ontological value, which until now has never been done. The fact it is a biological—and psychological—category in no way neutralizes the paradox of its significances.[29]

The complex relation to the child can be described as an ultimate complication relating to other as other. It is not only the other person which escapes my grasp, but even my own child does not belong to me and is other. According to Levinas, its implication is infinite responsibility and the duty to be the child's guarantor and to be ready to tend to his difficult aspects.

[28] This observation arises especially from Dewey's presentation of biological affiliation and its implication in educational situations. See J. Dewey, *Creative Intelligence*, New York, 1917; J. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, New York, 1930; J. Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, New York, 1910.

[29] *Time and the Other,* 92.

There is another side to this responsibility based on feminine categories. As Levinas wrote in "Judaism and the Feminine," in rabbinic thought the female brings along with her values of happiness, peace and blessing. For Levinas these values have ethical meaning in the encounter between people. If the first description of male encounter entails threat and endangerment—in Hegel's words, a "struggle for life and death"—the female meeting can be described using different terms: response and responsibility, cancellation of anonymity and recognition of individuality.

In Talmudic teachings, the meaning of feminine is embodied by a very masculine and lonely person, the prophet Elijah. It is said that Rabbi Yose met the prophet Elijah and took the opportunity to ask him the meaning of the biblical phrase mentioned above, ėzer ke-negdo' (literally, "a help opposite him").[30]

Elijah's answer is roughly this: man brings home wheat, but can he eat wheat? A man brings home flax, but can he wear flax? Woman turns the flax into clothing and the wheat into bread.

Levinas examines the two characteristics that the Rabbis ascribe to woman through Elijah. Wheat and flax are products that man produces. He has separated from nature, overcome nature, and learned to produce through agriculture. What is odd about Elijah's answer is the need for woman to process the wheat into bread. Wouldn't a mere helper, or to put it bluntly, a servant, have been sufficient? Rather, says Levinas, the meaning of Elijah's response is in the reversal of movement.[31] If the male's movement is the conquest of nature for the sake of his needs, the female offers the opposite movement, homeward, of the clothing and the bread. Transforming wheat into bread is certainly one of the symbols of domestic sensibility.

> To light eyes that are blind, to restore to equilibrium, and so overcome an alienation which ultimately results from the very shadows that could have sheltered it, should be the ontological function of the feminine.[32]

[30] B. Talmud, Yebamot 60a.

[31] Cf. J.B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith,* 13—21, on divine creation of human aspects.

[32] "Judaism and the Feminine", 33.

Male civilization is a civilization of conquest, if not of a common enemy then of nature. Female civilization is a civilization of humaneness, of domesticity, of "peace", a civilization of ethics. In the terms Levinas uses in this context, borrowed from the Talmud, feminine civilization grants "blessing" and "joy" and gives "light."[33] Sara Ruddick thus calls—and here I see a certain parallel with Levinas—for integrating the maternal voice into political discourse. Maternal thinking in public discourse would include a pacifist dimension, protecting life, and would stand opposite male thinking, which is based on militarism and destruction and is therefore an element of death. Perhaps this description is parallel to Ruddik's terms as in the title of her book: *Civilization of Peace*.

Hospitality and Given Space for Growth

One of the ultimate meanings of pregnancy is hospitality. This is for Levinas perfect morality. Hospitality is the ethical situation when the host allows the other to come into his world, and is responsible for him.[34] This is the meaning of opening up to the other as other. According to Levinas the guest brings infinity into the host's home. Hospitality is the option of transcendence for the host[35]. The teacher is the host for his pupils, and they bring him the dimension of transcendence.

For Levinas, the woman embodies an ultimate concept of hospitality. The ultimate meaning of *dwelling* as a feminine concept is situated in the relation between the mother and her children. A concept derived from the phenomenon of pregnancy is that of domesticity,

[33] "Judaism and the Feminine," 32–33. The topic of light will be taken up below.

[34] See G. Ofrat, *The Jewish Derrida* [Heb.], Jerusalem, 1998, 242-246. Ofrat describes Hospitality in its different implications: politically, psychologically, and in ethics.

[35] See Levinas on Hospitality in his book, *Totality and Infinity*, 51-60, 162-169, 276. Derrida has written on this topic in: J. Derrida & A. Dufourmantelle, *De l'hospitalité,* Paris, 1997; J. Derrida, "Le mot d'accueil", *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris, 1997, 39-129.

which constitutes a development of thought on pregnancy.[36] But the feminine aspect of hospitality has also an erotic meaning within male-female relations.[37]

Levinas devotes thought to the concept of dwelling, a separate place and a distinguished status. Levinas cites a Talmudic legend that delicately describes, in a somewhat fanciful reading of the verses in Genesis preceding the creation of Eve, how Adam "copulated [or: attempted to copulate] with every wild animal and beast."[38] Looking for a sexual partner, Adam first tried out all the animals, but he knew he had not found the right partner until he met Eve. An odd and vulgar story, it would seem. Levinas takes it to mean that woman is not an answer to a need, woman is not a sexual response to man's needs. At that level, man resembles every other animal, and at that level he can find his sexual fulfillment, or a response to his sexual needs, his need for sexual pleasure, without even being dependent on a woman. What woman offers man is something not sexual, or beyond sexuality—dwelling, motion in another direction. To my thinking Levinas is looking to describe as vividly as possible, although in very modest language, the vagina as home. But this home is welcoming; it turns an outward movement into an inward movement. It makes a movement of alienation into a movement of intimacy. Woman not only solves the mythical Adam's problem of loneliness but she grants him "peace" in the sense of undoing his sense of alienation from the world.[39]

Levinas views the womb as an ethical situation.[40] The womb is the place or the space for the embryo to grow and develop, and become an independent person. Levinas derives from this space the general

[36] Levinas has dedicated one chapter to this topic, in *Totality and Infinity,* 162-189. The meaning of *demeure*—dwelling is described on 164-167.

[37] Levinas has changed the meaning of House from the one who is situated at home, to the category of homeness. See "Judaism and the Feminine."

[38] B. Talmud, Yebamot 60a.

[39] See Soloveitchik, *Lonely Man of Faith*, 14-26. His attempt is directed at interpreting the first word of Adam to Eve as an existential aspect of human being towards the feminine.

[40] See Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Paris, 1972, 104-105, 122n6.

meaning of being *for* the other. The "I" has to make a space for the "other". This, Levinas identifies as "Rakhamim", mercy, derived from Rekhem, womb.[41]

Elsewhere,[42] Levinas directs the reader to the connection between thought about God and pregnancy, between God and the womb.[43] In rabbinic Hebrew, God is sometimes called *Rakhmana*, "The Merciful One," derived from the Aramaic term for "love," whose root letters (r-kh-m) are the same as those the Hebrew term for "womb," *rekhem*. That divine epithet, then, can be seen to derive from relating to God as a uterus:

> *Rakhamim* is the relation of the other, whose gestation takes place within it. *Rakhamim* is maternity itself.[44]

The idea of divinity as womb is one that makes it possible to describe God's infinite nature as an openness to different possibilities, an openness to a future time that will arrive by human agency. The womb as the possibility of containment, the ability of opening up to the other, is a distinctly feminine phenomenon.

> God as merciful is God defined by maternity. A feminine element is stirred in the depth of this mercy. This maternal element in divine paternity is very remarkable.[45]

The responsibility that pregnancy demands is for all those dimensions, even those which cause the mother suffering. The pains and the suffering of the woman at the time of birth are parallel to some aspects of teaching. To educate is to give the other a space to develop himself, to

[41] See *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, 104-105, 122.

[42] Levinas, "Damages Due to Fire", *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 178-197.

[43] The aspect of Maternity within the divinity is founded already in the biblical text and see P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* Philadelphia, 1978 (esp. 40-55) ; M. I. Gruber, "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah", *Revue Biblique* 90 (1983), 351-359; J.J. Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother", *Revue Biblique* 92 (1985), 557-569.

[44] "Damages Due to Fire", 183.

[45] "Damages Due to Fire", 183.

give the disciple the option to be or to become as a unique person. And at the same time it is to be responsible for him, and even for the pains that he causes the teacher.

A comparison with Martin Buber's position on this subject emphasizes the uniqueness of Levinas' position. In Buber's view the teacher's role is constructed from two parts. First, Buber asks the teacher to establish the relation with his student as an "I—Thou" relation. The teacher has to be authentic and honest before the disciple. He has to be in his true personality, in order to give the pupil the option to meet him, as a person, and not in his function as a teacher. The second part of the teacher's task is what makes teaching a unique position. The teacher has to encircle the relation. The teacher has to be on both sides of the situation.[46] On one hand he has to be inside the situation as an equal person, and on the other hand outside the situation with full responsibility for the pupil.

For Levinas, even a teacher cannot stand at the disciple's side of the relationship, because he is the other in all his otherness. The student is unique and has a difference that the teacher cannot grasp, as is true of man and woman, and as is true of every other person. Even parents cannot see a child as a part of them. The child is not a fulfillment of his parents. We cannot use the category of cause and effect to understand the situation of education. Being parents is being open to the future. The same as being a teacher:

> Paternity is not a sympathy through which I can put myself in the son's place. [I could understand paternity] thanks to the perspective of the future opened by eros.[47]

Since Buber set up the expectation of *encirclement*, that the teacher be on both sides of teacher-pupil relations, Levinas established respect for the other in his otherness, in his unknownness. The phenomenon of pregnancy can very well illustrate this, as during this period the subject

[46] M. Buber, "On Educational Deed", in: *I and Thou* [Heb.], Jerusalem, 1963, 258.
[47] *Time and the Other*, 91.

(the woman) has an other (the fetus) taking place and energy, and at the same time the subject has to recognize the fetus' otherness. *Hospitality* is the mature fruit of Levinas' ethical theory.

Teacher and Parent Guiding Toward the Future

The phenomenon of pregnancy opens the I before the other, before one who has not yet come, one who is unknown because will arrive only later. This thought gives ethical meaning to the observation of the future.

There is another aspect of the feminine that is derived from this phenomenon: the future. The woman is the future, because she establishes the future. First of all, in the most concrete of implications, she does so as a mother of the next generation.

And in "Judaism and the Feminine," Levinas writes:

> The participation of the present in [the] future takes place specifically in the feeling of love, in the grace of the betrothed, and even in the erotic. The real dynamism of love leads it beyond the present instant and even beyond the person loved. This end does not appear to a vision outside the love, which would then integrate it into the place of creation; it lies in the love itself.[48]

Maternity is the option to be in connection with the other, from inside. This relationship goes on, beyond a lover's relations, to the other person, that one who is both part of you and a separate being. This other is directed to the future, and maternity takes part in this future that enters into the present.

The option to give birth to a new creature breaches the totality of the present. The situation of love can be explained as a closed circle, between the "I" and the other. The option of maternity gives new meaning to the terms "pleasure" and "sexual relations."

In the last chapter of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes:

[48] "Judaism and the Feminine", 35-36.

> The situation in which the I thus posits itself before truth in placing its subjective morality in the infinite time of its fecundity—a situation in which the instant of eroticism and the infinity of paternity are conjoined—is concretized in the marvel of the family. […] The structure of fecundity in not limited to the biological fact.[49]

The relationship with the child is the relationship with the future. The description of the teacher as mother takes on a very potent significance in this analysis—the temporal dimension. To put it somewhat schematically, we might say that the teacher brings the past, or traces of the past, to the learning in the present, while it is the student who opens the learning to new possibilities, going from the present to the future.

The time that a person has within himself, from his own presence, is only the present. The possibility of extension into other dimensions of time, whether past or future, is what grants a person the freedom that time can give, the sense that things might be one way or might be another. This possibility does not come from within the self but rather from the other.

If we give profound consideration to the future dimension of time in Levinas, it appears that nothing expresses this capability of moving the individual beyond his present into a future regarding which he does not know what will transpire or whether it will transpire, but toward which he turns—nothing expresses this better than the encounter between an older person and a young person, between a parent and a child, between a teacher and a student. This event Levinas calls "salvation." It is an event of broad dimensions, indicating as it does the ability to transcend the present and enter a future which has not yet come but which is moved into the present.[50]

The student, even in more concrete conceptions, is the one who will bring about the future. The statement that "the future lies in education" is common knowledge. But for Levinas this is not some amorphous expression but rather the very meaning of "future"—what addresses

[49] *Totality and Infinity*, 306.

[50] Levinas criticizes H. Bergson on the idea of "élan vital", since it explains the continuation of the father in his son, and see *The Time and the Other,* 86-88.

the next generation, my children or my students. But as such, the future demands of me that I be responsive to something of which I do not know what it is, within my present time. Thought about teaching, in Levinas' view, enables full expression of the intrusion of the future into the present, as that which creates time.

Perhaps it is possible to show Levinas' description in sharper relief if we contrast it with a similar image in Socrates, the teacher, or Plato as student. I do not intend to refer to Socrates himself as teacher, but rather to the way in which he explains the process of education and teaching as birth.

The image of the teacher is that of midwife. The task of the teacher is not to teach the student what is not within him or what he did not previously know. Instead, it is to assist him in learning from within himself.[51] The real teacher is the student himself; the instructor is his teaching assistant. Learning does not exist in order to fill an empty vessel with new content but to remind the student of what was originally recorded within him. The act of learning is an act of recalling, and as such the role of the teacher is to actualize what is within the student from the start.[52]

This description of teaching is, of course, subject to critique on the basis of the type of instruction Plato himself provides. After all, an analysis of the dialogic instruction of the Socratic instructor reveals that it does not remain within the realm of stimulating recall but through the dialogue gives birth to something new. I intend, however, only to use the Socratic view to highlight its deep difference from that

[51] See R. L. Nettleship, *The Theory of Education in Plato's* Republic, London, 1935; R. Barrow, *Plato and Education,* London, 1976; S. Scolnicov, *Plato's Metaphysics of Education,* London, 1988; K. Egan, *Education and Psychology,* New York, 1983. On the meaning of the midwife model in Plato's education thought, following the Socratic model, see: K. L.Sanchez, "The 'Teacher as Midwife': New Wine in Old Skins?" *Philosophical Studies in Education (*1989), 72-82; R. G. Wengert, "The Paradox of the Midwife", *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (1988), 3-10; R. H. Beck, "Plato's View on Teaching", *Educational Theory* 35 (1985), 119-134; S. Kramer, "Education and Digressions in Plato's Theaetetus", *Educational Theory* 26 (1976), 388-394.

[52] See R. H. Weingartner, "Is Reading Plato Educational? Thoughts on Education, Prompted by a Reading of Plato's 'Meno'", *Teaching Philosophy* 17 (1994), 335-351.

of Levinas. If to instruct is to stimulate recall, including recall of good character traits and not only of information, education is the making present once again of the past that can be brought to memory. Education, then, does not face toward the future, the unknown. To the contrary, it brings us back to the known past. It is not for nothing that the description employs the cyclical image of birth and death, in which the soul returns many times to the fixed cycle of life.

For Levinas, the outstanding point is that education turns not toward the past but toward the future, in the sense of that which I do not know. He transfers the center of gravity from the student, who in Plato's image gives birth, to the teacher, who gives birth to the student.

The Messianic Aspect of Teaching

Another aspect of teaching, which derives from the previous one, is the feminine as messianism. For Levinas, the messianic is not an aspect of history, its eventual conclusion, but rather an ethical dimension of the present. Why is messianism an aspect of the ethical? The messianic opens the present to new horizons, new possibilities—that is, to otherness. It opens the individual to the Other, whoever it is that may arrive.

Messianism is examined from many angles in Levinas' thought, but the relevant one here is the expectation of the future, pure expectation: the possibility of being open to the future, to the *à venir*, the one who is to come. Messianism offers an alternative to a continued history of wars, an alternative based not on struggle but on responsibility. Levinas seeks to bring into daily life those values of peace and responsibility that for him are feminine values.

"The maternity itself is described as a salvation."[53] For Levinas, that salvation deals not with the abstract but with something quite concrete. The woman can grant humanity the characteristics of peace, of happiness, of recognition of the other not as an anonymous part of a collective, but as a unique individual.

The teacher opens to messianic possibilities in his work with students, who are the future. The teacher's interaction with the pupil is his relation with the future. We might say that the teacher brings the past and the present to the educational moment, but the pupil takes it to the future. The time the teacher has is the present (the presence). In order to transcend the present, to enter into other states of time, he needs the other. The pupil gives the teacher the freedom of variation.

People usually say that the future belongs to youth. For Levinas, this is not merely a slogan, because youth brings the future by definition. The young person opens the present from its totality to its infinity. The meeting between adult and child, between teacher and student, could extricate the subject matter from the danger of becoming fixed. For Levinas, this event of teaching is the event of deliverance. The event of teaching points to the meaning of the future, and to the task of salvation.

Levinas' Talmudic Reading on the topic of messianism portrays the teacher as a messiah. The Talmud asks about the name of the Messiah, and the answers are surprising, because in each case the suggested name resembles the name of the leading figure of the school making the suggestion. It may seem ridiculous that students call their teacher a Messiah. But, Levinas suggests, this is an entirely serious idea.

[53] "Judaism and the Feminine", 36. Levinas cites a passage from Tractate Yevamot of the Babylonian Talmud as the source for his identification of messianism with the feminine.

> What is his [the Messiah's] name?
> The school of R. Shila said: His name is Shiloh, for it is written 'until Shiloh come.'[54]
> The school of R. Yannai said: His name is Yinon, for it is written 'his name is Yinon.'[55]
> The school of R. Hannina maintained: His name is Hannina, as it is written 'For which I will show you no *hannina* [mercy].'[56]
> Others said: His name is Menachem the son of Hezekiah, for it is written 'Because Menachem [the comforter] that would relieve my soul, is far.'[57]"[58]

A second look at this text tells us that the educational relationship is very rich, with all the passion and the spirituality of messianism. Levinas sees in the names of the Messiah values that are different from intellectualism. The name Shiloh expresses peace [*shalom*]. The second name is Yanai [Yinon], whose meaning according to Psalms is justice. The meaning of the name Hannina is generosity and sympathy. The name Menachem has the same meaning. And Levinas explains that messianism is not an abstract idea, but the recognition and the sympathy that the teacher offers his students.[59] The teacher helps the pupil emerge from his or her anonymity. The teacher has to offer the disciple recognition as a unique individual and not as a part of a factory of knowledge.

When Levinas portrays the teacher not as one who imparts dry knowledge but as one who enables the future, he endows the teacher with feminine aspects. All those values that Levinas ascribes to the teacher as messianic, he also describes as messianic aspects of the feminine: recognition, peace, the possibility of escaping from anonymity.

[54] Genesis 49:10.
[55] Psalms 72:17.
[56] Jeremiah 16:13.
[57] Lamentations 1:16
[58] B. Talmud, Sanhedrin 90b
[59] See the meaning of alienation in *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, 108-109.

Embryo as Pursuer and Pupil as Young Man

The last meaning of the feminine that I want to mention here is the confrontation represented by what in Jewish law is called the Law of the Pursuer—*din rodef*. Here we are dealing with the situation of the fetus that is endangering its mother's life. Here we can find the confrontation between one person and the other as "a struggle for life and death." For Levinas it is possible to identify the attribute of persecution with the embryo, even when the mother is not in danger.

In his book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas develops the image of pregnancy as something that bursts every framework of consciousness, precisely when we consider maternity as a physical, bodily experience. The thought of maternity destroys the possibility of conceptualizing relations only in an external fashion, since with pregnancy the meaning of the relation to the other is embodied. Sensitivity does not begin with awareness of the other, but within the body. This sensitivity includes being pursued in a very real fashion by an outsider, but maternity contains the paradox of *wanting* this being-pursued and even being responsible for this pursuit. This, says Levinas, is the sigh that includes pregnancy, which is the result of being pursued by the one who is to be born or has been born.

It should be emphasized that from Levinas' perspective, maternity is not just the phenomenon of pregnancy; it is subject to expansion into thinking about relations with an other that are not preceded by the consciousness of a subject:

> In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the effect of persecution itself in which the persecutor sinks. Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even the responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor.[60]

[60] *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 75.

The meaning of this difference is rooted in the fact that the person-to-person encounter of pregnancy happens without cover, without defense, with no setting of boundaries between them. The entire significance of sensitivity toward the other is reconsidered in the situation of pregnancy and loses the aspect of disingenuousness that may accompany any encounter. The leap of consciousness of the subject in pregnancy includes the pain and suffering of being actively pursued.[61]

To the description of a mother's readiness to suffer and bear pain for another is added an additional principle of messianism, too, as readiness to endure agony. This idea appears in Levinas' writings when he attempts to explain one of the names given to the Messiah by the Talmud, a name that does not paint a positive portrait like the other names but instead indicates conflict and a willingness to endure suffering for another:

> And the Rabbis said: "The *metzora'* [one afflicted with a disfiguring skin disease] of the House of Rabbi [Judah the Prince]" is his name, as it is stated: "Indeed it was our diseases that he bore and our pangs that he endured, whereas we considered him plagued, smitten by God and afflicted." (Isa. 53:4).[62]

The expression "the *metzora'* of the House of Rabbi" as a name for the Messiah again ascribes messianic attributes to the academy, to teaching —not those that comfort and encourage but those that are about a willingness to suffer. This statement takes messianic status out of the realm of a particular individual in order to define it as a particular human capability. The ability to suffer for others is a central characteristic of the messianic mission. If we return to the concept of the teacher, and to that of the parent as well, we can see how close this thinking is to the concept of pregnancy as being pursued and suffering for the benefit of the very one who is pursuing you. Readiness to suffer for others is a central characteristic of messianism and of teaching.

We now see that the description of the teacher as messiah, which appeared at first so complimentary, is a demand that sounds pleasant only as long as one does not inquire into its constituent parts. Once

[61] *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 121.

[62] B. Talmud, Sanhedrin 90b.

you have explored it at that deeper level, it becomes a tough demand upon the teacher, perhaps even an intolerable expectation, since it demands that the student be extricated from alienation, from his anonymity in the classroom, in the community, or in the world at large. Personal recognition of the student is accomplished by means of peace, sympathy, and generosity. It is not an intellectual event, the learning of a particular "content." There is no material to be imparted, no necessary knowledge or even "truth." This is something beyond truth, something entirely personal, a "personal name." As if these difficult demands were not enough, Levinas asks of the teacher to be prepared to "endure", to suffer on behalf of the student not only because of what we suffers from the world around him but because of what he does to you as his teacher.

The Immemorial Aspect of Teaching

One of the more far-reaching implications of this conception of maternity is a radical change in the teacher's self-perception. For Levinas, maternity is not just about the responsibility borne by the subject; it redefines the subject itself. Since maternity is not just a guarantee but a reminder of the "immemorial memory" of the self. Levinas appears to touch upon the I's difficulty with assuming itself as a certainty and as a basis for consciousness, with pregnancy being a reminder to the individual of his or her own having once been born. Whoever is born cannot be a source of certainty or of primacy. A born being is not a basis for full consciousness or one who establishes a world.

> Maternity is the complete being 'for the other' which characterized it, which is the very signifyingness of signification, is the ultimate sense of this vulnerability. This hither side of identity is not reducible to the for-itself. Where, beyond its immediate identity, being recognizes itself in its difference.[63]

[63] *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 108.

The idea of memory of the past beyond memory is meaningful in its educational context as well. The difficult task of the teacher would seem to be to open up to the future that approaches him via the young person, the student. This problem of transcending the present, however, also affects the meaning of "the past". The meaning of the past is in that part of it that is present in the present time, in both aspects: its presence and its re-presentation. But the past is that dimension of experience that is always past, that which, in Levinas' terms, "a past which never was present." There is an immemorial past that leaves its imprint upon the present and whose meaning I do not know. It has left "footprints" in the present, not in the sense of tracks that clearly identify who was once here, but like footprints in the sand that the sea has washed over, leaving only a hint that there were once tracks here.[64] For Levinas, this is one of the more profound meanings of the idea of God's presence: footprints in the present.

The teacher in the present brings to his students not only his own dimension of the present but also the added dimension of his past, which cannot be made present. He brings them dimensions of time that do not carry over to them directly and presently from him but which are beyond him as well. In his present there are "footprints" of a past that is "immemorial", but which passes through him to them and takes on new meanings in the future that is "yet to come".

The Educational Conflict as an Expression of Parenthood—Youth Relations

Finally, we turn to the task of presenting the ethical implication of this complicated situation of the persecution by the embryo, in a new context—the complicated situation of youth. Levinas chooses to discuss the meaning of youth as an interpretation of the Talmudic tractate Nazir. But he does so by using the psychoanalytical images of youth in the Talmudic Readings.

[64] See Z. Levy, *The Other and the Responsibility* [Heb.], 36-51.

This choice makes a connection between the young person and the Nazirite, the Jewish monk. As Levinas proceeds, this parallelism is problematic, because of the use of religious concepts in a social context. This parallelism is based on three characteristics: the prohibition against drinking wine, the prohibition against being in contact with death, and prohibition against cutting one's hair.

For our discussion, the dilemma arises when there is confrontation between the teacher and the disciple. This confrontation is not the common difficulty of teaching, but the confrontation between two different points of views. The young person seeks to achieve an ideal. He or she wants innovation and revolution. The teacher is the adult person who presents the more conservative position. In this situation the teacher is asked to be responsible for the options that he disagrees with, or at least for idealizations that conflict with the reality.

Winnicott described this situation:

> If you do all you can to promote personal growth in your off-spring, you will need to be able to deal with startling results. If your children find themselves at all they will not be contended to find anything but the whole of themselves, and that will include the aggression and destructive elements in themselves as well as the elements that can be labeled loving. There will be this long tussle which you will need to survive.[65]

Levinas used two psychoanalytical images of youth. The first is the Oedipus conflict, and the second is narcissism. Freud examines these two aspects of adolescence when he explains the psychological aspects of this period. The increasing of the sexual impulse causes the second oedipal conflict, as part of the process of individuation. The other aspect is narcissism, as far as it is not a pathological phenomenon. These two aspects are part of the retreat to the basic relation between the mother and the child.

[65] D. W. Winnicott, "Contemporary Concepts of Adolescence Development and Their Implications for Higher Education", in: *Playing and Reality*, Middlesex, 1971, 162-176, especially 168.

The connection with the monastic domain was made by Anna Freud. She examined the period of adolescence. She found that one of the significant attributes of the Second Oedipal Conflict is the tendency to asceticism. The wish to be a Nazirite, or the tendency to monasticism, is part of this tendency.

> Young people who pass through the kind of ascetic phase which I have in mind seem to fear the quantity rather their quality of their instincts. They mistrust enjoyment in general and so their safest policy is to be simply to counter more urgent desires with more stringent prohibitions.[66]

Freud sees the mechanism of defense against this conflict in creating alienation between the adolescent and his surrounding. When the adolescent is fixed in this complex, he can seclude himself, and we can find him having retreated from the loving of the other to the loving of himself—narcissism.

Here we could understand the meaning of Levinas' choice of Tractate Nazir. Levinas agrees with the description of this period by psychoanalysis. But here he suggests to us a new mode of adolescence, the Talmudic one. The Talmudic manner of monasticism is different, as is attested by the classic image of the Nazirite: Samson. Indeed, he is the judge and he is the rescuer. Samson is the most suitable image for the young person—not only in his long hair but also in his falling in love and his readiness to sacrifice himself for others.

> But Samson is a youth. His whole tragedy is a tragedy of youth, made of the mistakes and loves of youth. That the loftiness of the Nazirite could find a norm in the destiny of Samson leads us to question ourselves further about the possibilities of youth and the essence of spirituality.[67]

[66] Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, Madison, Connecticut 1966, 154.

[67] Levinas, "The Youth of Israel", in: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans.: A. Aronowicz, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, 120-135, especially 129.

For Levinas, this image of the Nazirite is the true answer to the narcissistic retreat of the adolescent. Samson is not in love with himself, and he is ready to be responsible for others. We have to remember something else about Samson: Samson did not choose his Nazirite role.

That Levinas accepted the psychoanalytic picture of adolescence is indicated by his description of Rabbi Shimon Ha-Tzadik's opposition to monasticism. He does not trust the honesty of those who wish to be Nazirite. And sees it as a wrongdoing of adolescence, which brings the young to asceticism, which is a kind of narcissism. The Talmud tells us the following story which is very similar to the Narcissus:

> […] a young man who had come from the South. He had a nice appearance and beautiful eyes and hair falling in beautiful curls. I said to him: "My son, why did you decide to ruin such beautiful hair?" […] The young man then answered: "I was a shepherd in my village and watched my father's flocks. I would go to drink in the stream and, one day, I saw my image in it—my [evil] impulse. And then my [evil impulse] flew into a passion and tried to chase me from the world" […] I said to him: "Good-for-nothing, you derive pride from a world which isn't yours and in which you will finish as food for worms. By God, I will have your hair cut."[68]

This story could illustrate the ethical meaning of adolescence, the antithesis of narcissism. This young person was an adolescent, with all the problematical situation of this period. He saw himself in the water, and loved himself. But he inverts his Ego, he minimizes himself, for the sake of others and humanity. The deep meaning and importance of Jewish monasticism is the absence of the self-interest, or in Levinas' term the *dés-intéressement*. If narcissism is obsessive self-occupation, then monasticism is disinterested action. There is something naive and even powerful in this belief in the force of change.

Perhaps this is congruent with what Winnicot has written:

[68] B. Talmud, Nazir 4b; "The Youth of Israel", 126.

> Immaturity is a precious part of the adolescence scene. In this is contained the most exciting features of creative thought, new and fresh feeling, ideas for new living. Society needs to be shaken by the aspirations of those who are not responsible. If the adults abdicate, the adolescence becomes prematurely, and by false process, adult. Advice for a society could be: for the sake of adolescents, and of their immaturity, do not allow them to step up and attain a false maturity by handing over to them responsibility that is not yet theirs, even though they may fight for it.[69]

Two options are open before the young person: narcissism and responsibility. They are both revolutionary, but the difference is very important. The first is based on interest and the second is based on involvement. Tractate Nazir proposes to give youth the dignity and the space to be naive and revolutionary, because of the new future that young people bring to their teachers.

Levinas concludes this reading with this citation from the end of Tractate Nazir:

> All your children will be disciples of the Eternal One; great will be the peace of your children […] One must read not '*banayikh*,' your children, but '*bonayikh*', your builders.[70]

For Levinas the term "banayikh" refers to adolescents, and to the revolutionary power of youth. This midrash sees these sons as builders. This dimension of youth, when it is not suppressed, grants the world the power to revive itself.

The future announced by these sons is based on the "*des*-intéressent", which demands Difficult Freedom.

> [The Good] challenged your freedom; […] Precisely because the other who commands us thus is the Good, he redeems, by his goodness, the violence done to the "freedom" before freedom.[71]

[69] D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 172.

[70] B. Talmud Berakhot 64a; and see "The Youth of Israel", 134.
Tractate Nazir 66b.

[71] "The Youth of Israel", 135.

And as Levinas has noted, this youth is consecrated "from their very presence in their mother's womb."[72]

In conclusion we may note that, surprisingly perhaps, the aspects of the feminine that Levinas ascribes to the act of teaching are not only those that warm our hearts and raise our hopes. They contain dangers and threats as well.

[72] "The Youth of Israel", 135.

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