

UTOPIA AND REALITY

THE CONCEPT OF SANCTITY IN KANT AND LÉVINAS

Joëlle Hansel

Before I met Lévinas, I encountered his philosophy.¹ My acquaintance began nearly twenty years ago when I read *Totality and Infinity*.² This book was a shock to me, as it was to most of my contemporaries. As a student in philosophy I had been trained in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition which was still prevalent in France in the 1980s. For most of my teachers at the Sorbonne and the Ecole Normale Supérieure, the concepts of totality and identity were the core of philosophy. Through his ideas of otherness and infinity, Lévinas opened new horizons to me, new ways of thinking.

In 1984, I visited Lévinas at his home in Paris, rue Michel-Ange. Whenever I think of my first meeting with him, the only word I find appropriate to describe my impression is “affability.” Affability in the literal sense means dealing with someone with whom one can talk. In other words, it describes someone who has the ability to welcome the other graciously and to listen. Despite the distance between him, the great and famous philosopher, and me, the young and inexperienced student, Lévinas’ affability was devoid of any condescension. In his *Traité des vertus*, the French philosopher and friend of Lévinas, Vladimir Jankélévitch severely criticized condescension which he described as the disposition “to bow down without humbling oneself, to go down to ground floor to see how it feels there, while the mind stays perched on top of its sublime observation post, with its disdainful outlook.”³ There was no condescension in Lévinas. On the contrary, he had both highness or, as he says about Blanchot, an “aristocracy of thought,” and humility. After I got to know Lévinas better I discovered his sense of humor that contrasted so surprisingly with his serious, rigorous, and severe philosophy. Without Lévinas’ living presence, only his books remain. From now on he belongs to the history of philosophy. As Descartes states in his *Discours de la méthode*,⁴

this history is not a mere enumeration of writings and doctrines. On the contrary, it is a vast forum where individuals meet and converse despite their differences of time and place. So let us imagine an encounter between Lévinas and Kant, and their ensuing discussion on the relationship between utopia and reality.

In the history of philosophy, Kant and Lévinas are associated with the highest expressions of ethics; both philosophers center ethics on a concept of being human as a concern for the other. An actual meeting between the two men is not purely imaginary. It took place in Lévinas’ writings. Though his quotations of Kant are not numerous, they relate to major issues such as his criticism of ontology and his concept of ethics as first philosophy.

In early works, written in the 1950s, Lévinas stressed his proximity to Kant.⁵ In “Is Ontology Fundamental?”⁶ he paved the way for *Totality and Infinity* by elaborating the key concepts of “face,” “language,” and “religion.” As the title suggests, this article challenged the Heideggerian claim to the primacy of ontology. In contrast to Heidegger and the ontological tradition, Lévinas acknowledged that he felt particularly close to Kant’s practical philosophy. He also indicated the resonance of “Kantian echoes” in his own conception of the ethical relationship with the other. Twenty years later, Lévinas’ lectures on *God, Death, and Time*⁷ further develop his affinity with Kant. In the latter work, there is a chapter entitled, “The Radical Question: Kant against Heidegger.” By opposing Kant to Heidegger, Lévinas pointed to the possibility of overcoming ontology. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*,⁸ he celebrated Kantianism in which the meaning of being human is found, without measuring it by ontology, beyond the question “What is there here?” Nevertheless, Lévinas also stated that “Kantianism is the basis of philosophy, if philosophy is ontology.”⁹

Moreover, foundational aspects of his ethics are diametrically opposed to those of Kant. By understanding moral obligation as subjection to the other and based on heteronomy, Lévinas breaks with the Kantian principle of autonomy.¹⁰

Thus, Lévinas' attitude towards Kant is ambivalent. On the one hand, he viewed Kantian philosophy as a way to escape from the domination of Being; yet on the other hand, he depicted his philosophy as the summit of ontology; Lévinas rejected ontology as the basis for philosophy as already mentioned. The goal of the present study is to highlight this ambivalence by dealing with an issue that concerns both Lévinas and Kant: the tension between utopia and reality. In their effort to rouse people from dogmatic slumber, in their endeavor to put an end to egoism and inhumanity, Kant and Lévinas were both challenged by the opposition between utopia and reality.

By its very nature, ethics is utopian. Since "what is" is often contrary to "what should be," the search for good implies a criticism of reality. Nevertheless, ethical demands are desirable, not only in the theory; they should also be carried out in practice. Therefore, ethics is paradoxical: on the one hand, it is opposed and even contradictory to reality; on the other hand, it must be made true and be concretized. The paradox of ethics, captured in the tension between utopia and reality, is best reflected in a notion common to both Kant and Lévinas: the notion of sanctity. By focusing on sanctity I hope to demonstrate both the proximity and the distance between Kant's and Lévinas' respective ethics. First I shall examine the connection they both make between sanctity and utopia. Then I shall show how Lévinas departs from Kant's ideal of "holy will" by viewing sanctity as a "human possibility." Finally I shall consider how Lévinas makes the shift from ethics to politics, i.e., from sanctity to justice, in other words, from possibility to reality.

Sanctity and Utopia

Lévinas' use of the word sanctity appeared in his philosophical and confessional works that were published in the 1960s. In *Totality and Infinity*, sanctity, i.e., separation, is a quality of the Infinite as well as of the face of the other that opens to the Infinite. Sanctity is con-

trasted with sacredness and numinosity, two terms that imply participation and fusion.¹¹ In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lévinas noted that his book "aims to disengage this holiness."¹² Elsewhere he stated that "ethics' is a Greek word; I think much more, especially now, about sanctity."¹³ His preference for sanctity requires further analysis. In Lévinas' view, sanctity is neither a moral quality, nor the supreme degree in the hierarchy of virtues. Rather it is the principle of an ethics whose foundations rest on the priority of the other and on 'my' infinite responsibility for him. Actually Lévinas' idea of sanctity can be summarized in the little phrase he was so fond of: "After you" (*après vous*), which invites the other to pass before me when we both walk through a door.¹⁴ Lévinas' choice of a banal rule of politeness is significant. It indicates that sanctity does not only consist of heroic and extraordinary action; neither is it the privilege of those "happy few" who choose an ascetic and entirely spiritual kind of life. On the contrary, sanctity is involved in the simple acts and gestures of everyday life.¹⁵ By saying "after you" to the other, I acknowledge the fact that the other always comes first. Furthermore I recognize that I have obligations and duties towards the other, or in Lévinas' terms, that I am responsible for him.

Kant's ethics is also concerned with obligation to wards the other. In order to achieve humanity, each individual must strive towards personal, moral perfection. Nevertheless that does not mean being in different to others. Besides having duties to one self, one must carry out duties related to the happiness of others. According to the categorical imperatives of moral law, one must treat human beings not as things but as persons. Due to their dignity, the others must be an object of love and respect.¹⁶ Moreover I must be ready to sacrifice part of my well-being for their benefit.

In Kant, will is the source of the moral law that prescribes respecting humanity not only in my own person but also in any one else. In his practical philosophy, he describes "good will" as "a jewel that shines by itself, as some thing that has its full worth in itself."¹⁷ This will always acts out of virtue, that is, by duty and respect for moral law. Furthermore, Kant developed the ideal of a "holy will" which is

UTOPIA AND REALITY

“perfectly good” and whose intention always conforms to moral law.⁸ Unlike the virtuous will, the holy will acts morally, even without the experience of the pure inner constraint of duty. It is the lack of any internal or external coercion that distinguishes sanctity from virtue in Kant.⁹ For Kant as well as for Lévinas, sanctity is a supreme value. Similarly they both consider sanctity to be utopian.

In Kant’s view, sanctity can be possessed only by a perfect being; that is, a divine being whose will always coincides with moral law. Thus sanctity, i.e., “complete conformity with the moral law” is “a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence.”²⁰ It is an idea that represents a perfection to which nothing adequate can be given in experience. Strictly speaking, sanctity is *u-topic*: it has no place or *topos* in the world below. Rather, it belongs in another realm, an afterlife and an intelligible world, i.e., in the Kingdom of God.²¹ It is therefore inaccessible to reasonable and finite beings such as we are. We can only hope to approximate sanctity through an endless progress. This does not imply that sanctity is deprived of any connection to reality. On the contrary, it is required as an archetype, a model and a standard of comparison for moral conduct. Kant makes it clear by stating that “holiness of morals is prescribed to them [to men] as a rule even in this life.” Nevertheless man is only capable of sanctification, i.e., “firm resolution and consciousness of steadfastness in moral progress.” As a consequence, though human beings can pursue sanctity, they can never be holy.²²

As pointed out above, Lévinas considered sanctity to be involved in simple and concrete acts of everyday life. “After you” implies concern about the other’s material needs, hunger and nakedness.²³ However, his ethics made more extreme demands. By using the word sanctity, Lévinas assigned an absolute meaning to the priority of the other as well as to my responsibility for the other. Responsibility is located in the asymmetry that forms the basis for interpersonal relationships: to Lévinas, there is no symmetry, no reciprocity in the relation between the I and the other. Responsibility is also reflected in the Levinasian concept of “substitution,” or being “responsible for the re-

sponsibility of the other,” “atoning for the wrongdoing of the other,” and even “dying for the other.”²⁴ In view of such ethical demands, one could conclude that sanctity is impossible to achieve. Lévinas himself admitted that atoning or dying for the other is an insane demand. Moreover he stated that sanctity is an “ideal” that “commands our being in a utopic way.”²⁵

Therefore, Kant and Lévinas agreed on the utopian nature of ethics. Likewise they considered sanctity to be an ideal. This brings us to the core problem of the tension or contradiction between utopia and reality. Kant’s and Lévinas’ ethics must both cope with the same question: is sanctity just a remote ideal which is desirable in theory but unrealizable in practice? This question arises in view of the duality that characterizes the term utopia. Although it involves making generous plans about helping humanity by building a perfect state, utopia has a pejorative meaning. It refers to an ideal that may be fascinating in theory but unrealizable in practice. In the latter case, utopia is often considered deceitful and illusory. Moreover, Lévinas’ connection between sanctity and utopia seemed to be highly problematic given his own critical attitude towards utopianism.²⁶ He did not view utopia as the pure negation of reality. Rather, it originated in a judgment which consisted in “underestimating” or, on the contrary “overestimating” reality.²⁷ Following this concept of judgment, one may miss the ethical dimension which is involved in the relationship with the other. Consequently, the utopist is led to reject the world below: i.e., the locus of responsibility for the other. In Lévinas’ view, sanctity has nothing in common with the anchorite’s so-called sanctity. It is not a search for individual salvation outside of human society. On the contrary, it consists of an involvement in this world and a response for all others.²⁸ Therefore Lévinas’ approach to sanctity is paradoxical. On the one hand, he considered it to be utopian but on the other hand, he strongly related it to our world and to reality.

Sanctity as a Human Possibility

So far I have stressed some similarities between Kant’s and Lévinas’ idea of sanctity. Nevertheless, their views are not identical. Despite some proximity, Lévinas’ ethical thought is not a simple continuation of Kantian prac-

cal philosophy. As is shown by further examination, major differences separate the two philosophers. Unlike Kant, Lévinas does not see sanctity as a modality of will. Rather, sanctity is associated with heteronomy, that is, subordination of the “I” to the other. By acknowledging that the other always comes first, the individual does not manifest his freedom of choice. According to Lévinas, “the other has demanded a response from me before I affirm my freedom not to respond to his demand.” Therefore, responsibility; i.e., obligation to respond to and for the other, is prior to my own liberty.

Kant and Lévinas both contended that man can not expect to attain sanctity, but they base this impossibility on completely different grounds. Whereas Kant referred to the realm of ontology, Lévinas’ view originated in his conception of ethics as “*prima philosophia*.” In Kant’s opinion, our inability to achieve sanctity in this life is due to the very constitution of our nature, namely to our finitude. Given its embodiment, human rational will is always pathologically affected. In order to observe moral law, will must overcome such internal obstacles as impulses, needs, inclinations, and passions. It also struggles continuously against man’s innate propensity for evil. Owing to our ontological status as mere creatures, virtue, i.e., “a disposition conformed with law from respect for law” also implies “consciousness of a continuing propensity to transgression or at least, impurity, that is, an admixture of many spurious (non moral) motives to observe the law.”²⁹ Human irremediable imperfection entails the possibility of actions that contradict the categorical imperatives of the moral law. In contrast to man’s finite constitution, Kant celebrated the perfection that characterizes divine holy will. Such a will is by nature disembodied. It therefore “enjoys complete independence from inclinations and desires” and is “incapable of any maxim which conflicts with the moral law.”

Though he admitted that one can never fully attain sanctity, Lévinas did not ascribe such an incapacity to the finitude of human nature.³⁰ Rather he described the infinity that characterizes responsibility for the other. In Lévinas’ view the impossibility of being holy is not ontological, but ethical.³¹ It derives from the very

fact that responsibility “increases the more it is fulfilled.”³² Sanctity can thus be described as the asymptotic ascent of responsibility towards infinity.³³ The fulfillment of my duties can not satisfy the insatiable desire for good which always rises from its ashes.³⁴ As Lévinas said, “the more I am just, the more I am responsible.”³⁵ Although responsibility increases infinitely, Lévinas did not see sanctity as radically unattainable here below. Rather, he considered it as a “human possibility.” By conceiving sanctity as “human,” Lévinas suggested that it does not lie out of man’s reach. By defining sanctity as a “possibility,” he stressed its ambiguity, that is, its position between utopia and reality. According to the classic definition, possibility means indetermination and contingency. Unlike necessity, it is what may be or may not be. By taking into account the possible non-being of sanctity, Lévinas acknowledged its proximity with utopia. He admitted that “the concern for the other . . . is always “‘out of place’ (*u-topos*) in this world.”

Nevertheless, being out of place does not signify that sanctity has a totally utopic meaning or that it has absolutely no place on earth. Rather, it is always “other than the ways of the world”; it is different from humanity’s spontaneous preoccupation with personal interests. This relates to Lévinas’ criticism of Spinoza’s *conatus essendi*, that is, perseverance of being into being. In his view, sanctity runs counter to this ego-centric effort and suspends the natural right to self-survival by proclaiming that my concern for the other is prior to my concern for myself.³⁶ The possibility of being manifests the connection between sanctity and reality. Though I often prefer sleep, i.e., being indifferent to my responsibility for the other, I may also experience ethical wakefulness and insomnia.³⁷ In this respect, sanctity is possible and may also become reality. In order to show that sanctity, this “surprising” and “extravagant” possibility, is realizable, Lévinas made the shift from ethics to politics, from “sanctity” to “justice.”³⁸

Sanctity and Justice

Though Lévinas strongly rejected any kind of moralism, he was inevitably confronted with the question of practice. In view of the excessive requirements of ethics, one may ask

UTOPIA AND REALITY

whether ethics is practicable in individual life or in human society as a whole. In Lévinas' eyes, this preoccupation with practice was far from being purely utilitarian and pragmatist. On the contrary, it emerged out of the ethical demand. So far, the ethical relationship has been described as a relation between the "I" and the "other," i.e., between two people. Following Lévinas' observations, one may ask: what about the "third party," the third, the fourth, the fifth, who is my neighbor and who other? If I give everything to the "second" other, I may harm the "third" other. The reverse is also true: in attending to a third party, I may harm the first other that I encountered. To Lévinas, in order to prevent sanctity from being unjust with respect to a third party, a transition from ethics to politics or from sanctity to justice is needed.

By justice, Lévinas was referring to society and the State with their institutions, tribunals and prisons. Judging consists in comparing, weighing, and measuring in order to equalize terms that could not originally be compared. This principle of equality contrasts with the inequality of the asymmetrical relation with the other whose face is not in front of me but above me. Justice limits sanctity, i.e., the asymptotic ascent towards infinity that characterizes responsibility for the other. Justice corrects the excessive and exorbitant demands of ethics by confronting the individual with this responsibility for all the others. Besides preventing sanctity from being unjust, justice and politics allow the human possibility of sanctity to be achieved by taking into account socio-political order. By doing so, Lévinas did not compromise with the pressure of reality. He was consistent with his idea of sanctity. As I mentioned above, sanctity means non-indifference towards the other's hunger or nakedness. In order to feed humankind, one has to care about the political, scientific, and technical structures of organizations.³

Unlike other ethical philosophers, Lévinas did not consider justice and politics to be a degradation of sanctity and ethics. Nevertheless, his conception of the relationship between these two realms seems to be problematic. In order to be carried out, the ethical demands of sanctity must be limited by justice as well as adjusted to material conditions. Does that

mean that infinity, which makes these demands ethical and holy, is negated? Is this the price to pay for allowing sanctity to have a chance in this world? In order to solve these issues, I will refer to Lévinas' conception of judgment. To Lévinas, when delivering a judgment, a judge should not take into account his infinite responsibility for the other. Otherwise, he will not be able to be equitable in passing a fair sentence on the defendant. In line with a biblical verse and its talmudic interpretation, Lévinas stated that one should not look at the defendant's face while judging.⁴ This does not imply that the judge should completely forget the other's face and his calls for a response. After the verdict, the judge must look at the defendant's face in order to moderate the severity of the decision. Generally speaking, Lévinas thought that the entire legal system was concerned with humanizing the punishments and reducing the legitimate violence that is inherent in every act of justice. Lévinas' description of judgment shows that ethics and sanctity have the last word. Though justice may enjoy some autonomy, it is never disconnected from the ethical demands that control it. Ultimately, the idea of sanctity is the norm that must inspire and direct the political order to prevent it from degenerating into tyranny and dictatorship.

In view of contemporaneous tragedies, Lévinas denounced the danger of separating ethics and politics. In his opinion, autonomy of politics inevitably leads to totalitarianism, that is, to a situation in which *conatus essendi* (i.e., man's egocentric tendency to increase his power infinitely) is no longer limited by the obligation towards the other. Moreover, Lévinas stressed the limitation which inheres in the law. Justice is constantly confronted with the impossibility of subsuming every special case under its general rules. In addition to legislation on social welfare, acts of goodness from one person to another. Acts of goodness demonstrate that sanctity remains a human possibility, that is, the very possibility of being human.

Conclusion

I have tried to determine the boundaries around comparing Kant's and Lévinas' respective positions. Despite his assertions on his proximity to Kant, Lévinas' conception of the

relationship between utopia and reality broke with practical philosophy. Though some aspects of his idea of sanctity converge with those of Kant, other aspects illustrate the unbridgeable gap that separated the two philosophers. To put it in Levinasian terms, Kant's escapes, or flights, from the realm of ontology do not prevent him from returning to it. As mentioned above, this is particularly true of the Kantian idea of human finitude that contrasts so radically with Lévinas' conception of the *psyche* as originally invested by the Infinite, i.e., by an unlimited responsibility for the other.

Lévinas' distance from Kant is extended by an additional difference. Whereas Kant's ethics led to religion, that is, to the hope of attaining sanctity and the highest good, or beatitude in an other world and in an after life, Lévinas' ethics tried to achieve sanctity here and now, that is, in the realm of politics, science and technology. Though I have not dealt with sanctity in his Jewish or confessional writings, tal-

ludic debate also bears witness to this constant effort to introduce sanctity in every day, concrete reality. In this respect Lévinas' conception of ethics converged surprisingly with those of Hegel. Unlike Kant, both philosophers did not consider morality solely as an ideal that is pursued endlessly across eternity. To them both, the requirements of ethics should be concretized in this life. The Levinasian representation of sanctity as a "human possibility" intersected with the Hegelian concept of an ethical life.

Nevertheless, Lévinas maintained that sanctity is somehow utopian. Owing to the asymptotic ascent of responsibility towards infinity, we are never done with the task of realizing sanctity concretely. Moreover, the philosophical reflection of sanctity itself is affected by this utopian bent. In this respect, one can view Lévinas' whole work as an attempt to go further into an inquiry of an infinite that will never be bounded by the limits of thinking.

ENDNOTES

1. The present essay is based on some of my previous works on Lévinas: an article published as "Après vous : The Concept of Sanctity in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas" in an issue of *Daat* 40 (winter 1992) devoted entirely to Lévinas; two lectures that were given, respectively, at the 27th and 28th conferences of the Association for Jewish Studies in Boston in 1995 and 1996.
2. *Totalité et infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961). Translated by Alphonso Lingis as *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). Concerning *Totality and Infinity*, see Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Lévinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).
3. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Traité des vertus* (Paris: Bordsas, 1949), Chapter IX, p. 296.
4. See the first part of the *Discours de la méthode*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard, Paris, 1978), p. 128.
5. On this issue, see Peter Atterton, "The Proximity Between Lévinas and Kant: The Primacy of Pure Practical Reason" (unpublished paper). This article contains numerous references to the secondary literature concerning both proximity and differences between the two philosophers.
6. Emmanuel Lévinas. "L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?" *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 56 (1951): 88–98; and *Entre-nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), pp. 13–24. The former has been translated by Peter Atterton as "Is Ontology Fundamental?" *Philosophy Today* 33 (1989): 121–28. Revised translation in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 2–10.
7. J. Rolland, ed., *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993). This collection of Lévinas' lectures at the Sorbonne in 1975–1976 contains two lectures on Kant: "La question radicale: Kant contre Heidegger," pp. 74–78; and "Kant et l'idéal transcendantal," pp. 175–178. As Atterton notices in his essay, there is not "in Lévinas' corpus a rigorous treatment of Kant comparable to that extended to Descartes, Husserl, and Heidegger." If we discount the article on "The Primacy of Pure Practical Reason" that appeared in Dutch and English (*Man and World* 27 [1994]: 445–53), and has

- yet to be published in the original French, the Sorbonne lectures are among the few occurrences of an explicit confrontation of Lévinas with Kant's philosophy.
8. Emmanuel Lévinas. *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 166. Page 129 in the English translation made by Alphonso Lingis (*Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981]). Though he acknowledges that Kant escapes from the realm of ontology, Lévinas immediately restricts the scope of his parallels with him by stating that, in so doing, he "only retains one trait" of his philosophical system and that he "neglects all the details of its architecture."
 9. *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, p. 226; *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 180. See also *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, p. 225; "criticism is the very foundation of philosophy understood as comprehension of being" (*Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 179).
 10. Concerning this topic, see Jean-Louis Chrétien's article that appeared as "La dette et l'élection" in a special issue of *Cahier de l'Herne* on Lévinas, 1991. See also Robert Bernasconi, "The Ethics of Suspicion," *Research in Phenomenology* 20 (1990): 3–18.
 11. *Totalité et infini*, p. 49. "To relate to the absolute as an atheist is to welcome the absolute purified of the violence of the sacred. In the dimension of height in which sanctity, that is, his separation, is presented, the infinite does not burn the eyes that are lifted into him. He speaks; he does not have the mythical format that is impossible to confront and would hold the limits in visible meshes. He is not numerous: the I who approaches him is neither annihilated on contact nor transported outside of itself, but remains separated and keeps its as-for-me" (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 77). See also *Totalité et infini*, p. 267; "Man as Other comes to us from the outside, a separated-or holy-face" (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 291). The radical opposition between "sanctity" and "sacredness" is also reflected in the title of Lévinas' Talmudic Readings that appeared in the original French as *Du Sacré au saint* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977); translated by A. Aronowicz and published in *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). The identity between "holy" and "separated" is also to be found in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. In *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1982), Lévinas stresses that the "desirable or God remain separated in the desire; as desirable it is near but different: holy" ("Dieu et la philosophie," translated by A. Lingis as "God and Philosophy," *Collected Philosophical Papers* [Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987], p. 164).
 12. *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, p. 76; *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 59.
 13. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Qui êtes-vous?* (Paris: La Manufacture, 1987), p. 95.
 14. *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, p. 150, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 117.
 15. On this point, Bernasconi correctly observes that by emphasizing such phrases as *Après-vous, mon sieur, Bonjour*, or *Shalom*, Lévinas "is not advocating a way of speaking, but finding in everyday speech a meaning which the philosophers did not suspect when they ignored or even vilified such speech in favor of grander forms." ("The Ethics of Suspicion," p. 11).
 16. Emmanuel Kant. "The Doctrine of Virtue," in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Greger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 517–19.
 17. Emmanuel Kant. *Metaphysics of Morals*, beginning of Section I, pp. 37–109, henceforth *Groundwork*. About Kant's idea of sanctity, see Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 139–41. Lines cited here from *Groundwork*, p. 50.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 67; Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 165.
 19. Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 88. In Kant's view, that makes the difference between holy will which is "absolutely good" and virtuous will which does not possess this absolute goodness.
 20. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 238.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
 23. See Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of The Good in Rosenzweig and Lévinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 130: "Lévinas does not deny the holy; he interprets it ethically. Holiness is neither an attenuated or otherworldly sanctity nor an adherence to ancient laws. It is precisely and concretely

- love for the neighbor, food for the hungry, shelter for the unsheltered, a kind word, a door held open, an 'after you.' The material needs of the other are my spiritual needs—such is holiness.”
24. See *Otherwise than Being*, chapter IV.
25. In the very last pages of *Otherwise than Being*, Lévinas acknowledges that his “the sis,” i.e., his interpretation of “the subject as a hostage and the subjectivity of the subject as a substitution” is “exposed imprudently to the reproach of utopianism.” (*Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, p. 232; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 184).
26. “Le lieu et l’utopie,” in *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Albin Michel, third edition, 1988), pp. 143–48. Translated by Sean Hand as “Place and Utopia” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 99–103.
27. “The belief that the things of this world are important has never been denied by Christianity, but it simultaneously overestimates and underestimates the weight of reality which it wants to improve” (*Difficult Freedom*, p. 99).
28. Lévinas contends that by choosing “ethical action,” Judaism has committed itself to “remain here below,” meaning in the “place” where fulfilling my responsibility for the other is incumbent on me (*ibid.*, p. 100).
29. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 243.
30. Actually, Lévinas’ conception of “created existence” is totally opposed to Kant’s. See *Totalité et infini*, p. 78; “What is essential to created existence is not the limited character of its being, and the concrete structure of the creature is not deducible from this finitude. What is essential to created existence is its separation with regard to the Infinite. This separation is not simply a negation. Accomplished as psychism, it precisely opens upon the idea of Infinity” (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 105). Furthermore, Lévinas opposes his own conception of creation *ex nihilo* to those of the theological tradition. See *Totalité et infini*, pp. 269–70; *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 293–94.
31. Lévinas carefully distinguishes two sorts of “impossibility,” namely, “on to logical” or “real” and “ethical” impossibility (*Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, p. 213, note 2; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 199, note 1).
32. Richard A. Cohen, ed., *Face to Face with Lévinas* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), p. 8.
33. Lévinas himself uses the geometrical image of the asymptote. See, for instance, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, p. 181; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, p. 142.
34. See Lévinas’ accounts of the “metaphysical desire” as a “desire that can not be satisfied,” a “sublime hunger,” a desire that “the Desired does not fulfill, but deepens” and that “nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger” (*Totalité et infini*, p. 4; *Totality and Infinity*, p. 34).
35. Emmanuel Lévinas. *Éthique et infini* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 111; translated as *Ethics and Infinity* by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 105. Furthermore, Lévinas makes the following statement: “It is the exigency of holiness. At no time can one say: I have done all my duty. Except the hypocrite.”
36. In “Place and Utopia,” Lévinas already expresses his opposition to egocentric preoccupation for self-survival by raising the following questions: “What is an individual, a solitary individual, if not a tree that grows without regard for everything it suppresses and breaks, grabbing all the nourishment, air and sun, a being that is fully justified in its nature and its being? What is an individual, if not a usurper?” (*Difficult Freedom*, p. 100).
37. On these topics, see “God and philosophy,” *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 155–56. See also *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, pp. 195–207; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, pp. 153–62.
38. In the fifth chapter of *Otherwise than Being*, Lévinas deals with this shift from ethics to politics.
39. Lévinas’ positive attitude towards science leads him to connect it strongly with ethics. See for instance the following statement: “Is not the locus of ethics and elevation now in the laboratory?” “Le mot je, le mot tu, le mot Dieu,” *Le Monde* (March 19–20 1978).
40. *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Rosh Hashana 17a–18b.

WHAT GOOD IS THE HOLOCAUST?

ON SUFFERING AND EVIL

Richard A. Cohen

The theological explanation for evil, theodicy, is that evil is willed by God, willed by an absolute God, an absolutely benevolent God.¹ The logic may be painful, in the sense that it outrages moral reason, but it remains logical for all that. Since God wills all things, God willed the Holocaust. Because all things willed by God are good, the Holocaust too was good. Not just that good comes from the Holocaust, but that the Holocaust itself was good, as repentance, sacrifice, purification, sign, redemption, punishment, perhaps all of these, but ultimately good in itself. Not only do such scandalous conclusions necessarily follow from the logic of a philosophical God, from an absolute omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and benevolence, but even more painfully and intimately, they follow from the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from His special covenant with the Jews, and in our day with “Israel, in its Passion under Adolph Hitler.”² Part of holy history (*Heilsgeschichte*), the Holocaust above all—where the Jews once again take center stage, not only in the locale of the Middle East, or of Europe, but globally—would have been willed by God, and thus would be good. It would have to be good, or it would be meaningless, and the Jews for saken. As we know, this very line of thought, enunciated in 1961 by a leading German cleric whose moral heroism had earlier been proven by saving Jews during the Nazi period, so shocked Richard Rubenstein that he rejected altogether any belief in the special election of Israel.³ Emmanuel Lévinas too was shocked by this sound but appalling logic. Like Rubenstein, he too rejected theodicy, the vindication of evil in terms of divine justice. But he did not, in contrast, reject God or the idea of Jewish election.

How can one affirm God, Israel’s election, and ethics after the Holocaust? We are driven

to ask anew what sense, if any, do religion and morality have if human affairs are divorced from divine justice. Is a God who hides His face, or is eclipsed, any different than no God at all? Are we to become like those “agnostics” whose mendaciousness Nietzsche derides because “they now worship the *question mark itself* as God?”⁴ If the rejection of theodicy leaves those for whom God is still meaningful with a *tremendum*, is it no more than a clouding of consciousness, an elliptical but false gesture, a brave but empty stubbornness? Lévinas answered in the negative. After the Holocaust, to be sure, he rejected theodicy. But for Lévinas the meaning of the Holocaust is precisely the “end of theodicy.” “The most revolutionary fact of our twentieth century,” Lévinas wrote, “is that of the destruction of all balance between . . . theodicy . . . and the forms which suffering and evil take.”⁵ “The Holocaust of the Jewish people,” he continued, is the “paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, where evil appears in all its horror.”⁶ “Auschwitz,” he wrote, is “the radical rupture between evil and mercy, between evil and sense.”⁷ But the question of evil remains. This most questionable question, older than Job, is in fact newly deepened, newly sharpened, radicalized by the Holocaust. Lévinas did not shirk from asking: What can suffering mean when suffering is rendered so obviously “useless” (*inutile*), use less to its core? What can suffering mean when it is “for nothing,” when it heralds and leads only to death and is intended only for obliteration?

Friedrich Nietzsche was also troubled by “the meaninglessness of suffering.”⁸ Like Lévinas, but of course decades before the Holocaust, he too rejected as false and self-deceptive all the justifications of suffering as theodicy, for example, punishment for sin, or a necessary piece of a hidden but divinely ordained whole. But with the same stroke, with

the same hammer blow, Nietzsche rejected all interpretations whatsoever for suffering. “‘Why so hard?’ the charcoal once said to the diamond; ‘for are we not close relations?’ Why so soft?” Nietzsche has the diamond answer, “for are you not—my brothers?”⁹ Nietzsche’s readers are acutely aware of the provocation concluding the third book of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in which after having masterfully tracked down and categorically rejected the self-deceptions of the “ascetic ideal,” including theodicy in all its multifarious forms, both gross and subtle, Nietzsche challenges himself and his readers with the regretful admission that fundamentally no other interpretation of suffering has existed hitherto: “It was the only meaning of fered so far.”¹⁰ For himself, Nietzsche answered with a brave but empty and fantastic heralding of the heralding of yet another messiah: Zarathustra heralding the overman. In agreement with the rejection of theodicy, Lévinas took up Nietzsche’s challenge, the stigma of the meaninglessness of suffering, but he articulates another response, in which suffering and evil, without losing and without denying their essentially useless character, nonetheless retain a meaning—the only meaning (according to Lévinas)—for religion and morality.

Lévinas took up the interwoven topics of evil and suffering, the end of theodicy, and a “new modality of faith to day,” that is to say, the topic of ethics after the Holocaust, in three short articles, comprising twenty-four pages in all, published at four year intervals, in 1978, 1982, and 1986.¹¹ The first is entitled “Transcendence and Evil” (“*Transcendence et Mal*”).¹² It is a creative review of Philippe Nemo’s book *Job and the Excess of Evil*, also published in 1978.¹³ The second article, entitled “Useless Suffering” (“*La Souffrance inutile*”),¹⁴ and the third, entitled “The Call of Auschwitz,”¹⁵ invoke the Holocaust and Emil Fackenheim’s book, *God’s Presence in History*, which appeared in French translation in 1980.¹⁶ The third article concluded, as we will see later, by referring back to an other short article of 1955, which expressed Lévinas’ thoughts on evil and suffering one decade after the Holocaust, entitled “Loving the Torah More than God.”¹⁷

The three articles work as most of Lévinas’ writings work, by progressively building on original phenomenological and ethical insights by means of review and elaboration, circling back to retrieve, extrapolate, and amplify earlier thoughts. Each progresses, that is to say, as an ever deepening commentary upon its own insights, like Talmud exegesis, resaying its own said—like *musar* [ethical self-development] itself, as Rabbi Ira Stone has pointed out.¹⁸ The three articles each develop, in different proportions and depth, three basic components: they begin with a phenomenology of evil and suffering, and then, building on these intuitions and insights, they turn to ethics, negatively to criticize theodicy, as we have already seen, and positively to propose an ethical alternative, which we shall shortly see. In the following I will trace this same route, beginning with suffering and evil, then concluding with Lévinas’ positive religico-ethical alternative to theodicy.

Phenomenology of Suffering and Evil

Phenomenology uncovers two primary and related dimensions of suffering: (1) excess or transcendence, and (2) meaninglessness. Because these two dimensions are fundamental, suffering is linked to evil, both in one self and in another.

Suffering appears in and as an “extreme passivity,”¹⁹ a passivity “more passive than receptivity,”²⁰ “an ordeal more passive than experience.”²¹ The passivity of suffering is extreme or excessive because of its quality of “unassumability,”²² “non-integrability.”²³ This quality of “excess”²⁴ or “transcendence,”²⁵ which makes up its essence, can not be understood quantitatively. Little and great suffering are both suffering. The “too much” of pain is its very essence, “manner,” or “quiddity.”²⁶ Suffering, that is to say, is not only a suffering from something, as Husserl’s commitment to intentional analysis would suggest, but also at the same time a suffering from suffering itself, a redoubling of suffering, such that all suffering, regardless of its quantitative measure, and regardless of whether it is endured voluntarily or not, is unwanted, in supportable, unbearable of it self. Just as a bodily being enjoys enjoying,²⁷ it suffers suffering. The unwanted and at the same time inescapable character of pained

ON SUFFERING AND EVIL

corporeal reflexivity is what distinguishes the phenomenon of suffering: one suffers from suffering itself.

From the inherent excess of suffering comes its second characteristic and its link to evil: meaninglessness. Despite a variety of *post facto* explanations or finalities—that pain serves as a biological warning, or is the price of spiritual refinement, or of social or political regeneration³—the “non-sense of pain . . . pierces beneath reasonable forms.”²⁹ Lévinas wrote of suffering: “in its own phenomenality, in itself, it is useless, ‘for nothing’.”³⁰ As such it is a “monstrosity,”³¹ “non-sense par excellence,”³² the “absurd,”³³ “basic senselessness,”³⁴ it is “disturbing and foreign to itself.”³⁵ “The evil of pain, the harm itself, is the explosion and most profound articulation of absurdity.”³⁶ “The break with the normal and the normative, with order, with synthesis, with the world, already constitutes its qualitative essence.”³⁷

Unbearable and useless, suffering is evil. Suffering is evil; evil is suffering. Together they constitute an irreducible zero point of significance, an *ursignificance* “where the dimensions of the physical and moral are not yet separated.”³⁸ “All evil,” Lévinas wrote, “refers to suffering.”³⁹ It is “not,” he continued, “through passivity that evil is described, but through evil that suffering is understood”⁴⁰ as “sickness, evil in living, aging, corruptible flesh, perishing and rotting.”⁴¹ In the end suffering and evil are names for the meaningless painfulness of pain which is always, regardless of quantitative considerations, intrinsically excessive, unwanted, not to be accommodated.

From this unwanted burden comes Lévinas’ first articulation of an ethical issue: “the fundamental ethical problem which pain poses ‘for nothing.’”⁴² That ethical problem is not the sufferer’s, the one subject to the pain of meaningless suffering, but that of the witnesses in relation to the sufferer: “the inevitable and preemptory ethical problem of the medication which is my duty” (“Useless Suffering,” 158). In the other’s suffering, then, Lévinas saw an “original call for aid,”⁴³ an original call “for curative help,”⁴⁴ “where the primordial, irreducible, and ethical, anthropological category of the medical comes to impose itself—across a demand for analgesia.”⁴⁵ Earlier, in 1961, in *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas had already written:

“The doctor is an a priori principle of human mortality.”⁴⁶ There he contested one of the central claims of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, that dying or being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-tode*) isolates and individualizes human subjectivity. For Lévinas, in contrast: “A social conjunction is maintained in this menace”⁴⁷ of death, which “renders possible an appeal to the Other, to his friendship and his medication.”⁴⁸ The evil of suffering, then, meaningless for the sufferer, would at once be an appeal to the other, a demand for analgesia. These are Lévinas’ first and fundamental ethical elaborations of suffering: suffering as a call to help, as my obligation to help. But what if the other’s call is silenced?

Hoocaust: the End of Theodicy

As I have already indicated, the phenomenal or intrinsic meaninglessness of suffering and evil render them resistant to all theodicy. The enormity of the Hoocaust would be the unforgettable and irrefutable historical proof, and hence forth a paradigmatic proof, of the essential disproportion between suffering and explanation. But Lévinas went one step further. After Auschwitz theodicy itself becomes immorality. The idea of theodicy may remain a consolation or a moral challenge for the sufferer, but *from me*, coming from me, it is my flight, rationalization, imposition, as if the other’s suffering, meaningless to the sufferer, were meaningful to me. “For an ethical sensibility,” Lévinas wrote, “confirming itself, in the inhumanity of our time, against this inhumanity—the justification of the neighbor’s pain is certainly the source of all immorality.”⁴⁹ That I can explain someone else’s pain, that I can justify it, is to pile evil upon evil. But how, we must still ask, is it possible to retain an “ethical sensibility,” beyond the nonsense of “evil,” after the Hoocaust? If suffering is intrinsically meaningless, and the Hoocaust the unavoidable global proof of this meaninglessness, the proof of the inapplicability of any explanation, then why and how can we still speak of evil and morality at all? This remains a fundamental question. How do we retain an ethical sensibility, or, as Lévinas expressed this in the now famous opening sentence of *Totality and Infinity*: “Every one will readily agree that it is of the

highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.”⁵⁰

Suffering and evil are intrinsically meaningless. The inordinate suffering and evil of the Holocaust make this evident not only to diligent students of phenomenology or Nietzsche, but to the whole world, and to all the religions of the world. “The philosophical problem,” Lévinas wrote, “which is posed by the useless pain which appears in its fundamental malignancy across the events of the twentieth century, concerns the meaning that religiosity and the human morality of goodness can still retain after the end of theodicy.”⁵¹ Precisely this “philosophical problem” agitates the various exigencies which drive the question of ethics, the problem of evil, and the meaning of religion, in our time. What is Lévinas’ answer?

Suffering for the Suffering of Another

Deepening his earlier formulations regarding the “category of the medical” and the “*a priori* principle” of the doctor by holding fast to the phenomenon of suffering itself, Lévinas’ entire answer regarding the ethico-religious meaning of suffering, can be summed up in a simple but powerful statement: The only sense that can be made of evil, that is to say, of suffering, is to make one’s own suffering into a suffering for the suffering of others. Or, to put this in one word: the only ethical meaning of suffering, in deed, “the only meaning to which suffering is susceptible”⁵² is *compassion*. The other person suffers; that is evil; there is no moral or religious explanation for it. In deed, such explanations are themselves immoral, irreligious. Suffering, in short, can not be made into an object, can not be externalized, is not indifferent, and any attempt to do so, in whatever exalted name, is itself an immorality. But I am a being who suffers too. What Lévinas proposed, then, without any “mystical” implications, is a kind of holy almost sublime contagion of suffering.⁵³ He proposed that morality and religion can still make sense, in deed can in fact only make sense after the Holocaust, in “suffering elevated or deepened to a suffering-for-the-suffering-of-another-person.”⁵⁴ The fundamental philosophical problem of suffering, then, its evil, its meaninglessness, its malignancy, would then become the “problem of the relationship between the suffering of the

self and the suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other person.”⁵⁵

It is this empathy, this compassion, that would be the “new modality of faith to day”:⁵⁶ “that in the evil that pursues me the evil suffered by the other man affects me, that it touches me.”⁵⁷ To take on, in and as one’s own affliction, the affliction of the other, is not simply a feeling, however, nor is it a mystical or vicarious action at a distance. Rather, it is a being *responsible* for the other, the self-as-responsibility, the self as “ashes and dust,” as Abraham said.⁵⁸ Morality and humanity, in other words, arise in a painful solidarity. The humanity of the human would arise—it is an elevation, an “election”⁵⁹—across the narrow bridge of compassion, a bridge which despite its narrowness is linked to all and every thing. “The humanity of man,” Lévinas wrote, “is fraternal solidarity,” solidarity not only with all humans, but even more, it is “fraternal solidarity with creation.”⁶⁰ This is not, then, the human defined by spiritualization or by absorption into nature, whether nature be spirit or matter. Rather it is nature uplifted to creation, where across human responsibility—“responsibility for everything and for all”⁶¹—no one, not the greatest and not the least, no creature whatsoever, whether animal, vegetable or mineral, is left out.⁶² Lévinas called this vast empathy, this vast compassion, this vast responsibility: “theophany” and “revelation.”⁶³ Beyond theodicy, it is compassion without concern for reward, recompense, remuneration. It is solar love. Putting the other above oneself, converting one’s own suffering into a suffering for the other’s suffering, has “no other recompense than this very elevation.”⁶⁴

This “new devotion”⁶⁵ after the Holocaust, then, would be the “ultimate vocation of our people,”⁶⁶ and hence the ultimate vocation of and for humanity: “to give rather than receive, to love and make love, rather than be loved.”⁶⁷ Such, again, would be Israel and humanity, and conceding nothing to Caesar,⁶⁸ it would be the “utopian” imperative of the State of Israel *and of all the nations of the earth*. In demanding that after the Holocaust Jews remain faithful to the uttermost depths or heights of Judaism, in a unique particularity which always refers to the universal without ever giving up its particularity, Lévinas several times invoked the demand

of Emil Fackenheim that now more than ever Jews (and in this sense everyone is a Jew)⁶⁹ must deny Hitler a posthumous victory. Jews must remain Jews. After the Holocaust, in other words, human beings must remain human. We must be “servants,” Lévinas wrote, citing the Talmudic tractate *Pirke Avos*, I:3, “who serve without regard to recompense.”⁷⁰ And this, he continued—circling back to his article of 1955—this new devotion and ultimate vocation of Israel after the Holocaust is nothing other and no less than “loving Torah more than God.”⁷¹

Conclusion: Loving Torah More Than God⁷²

In conclusion, then, let us turn to the vista opened up by Lévinas’ conclusion. In 1955, Lévinas had already written of suffering, God’s absence, and the Holocaust. “What,” he asked then, “can this suffering of the innocent mean?”⁷³ The answer is powerful and magnificent, and true. I will cite it at length:

The God who hides his face is not, I believe, a theological abstraction or a poetic image. It is the moment in which the just individual can find no help. No institution will protect him. The consolation of divine presence to be found in infantile religious feeling is equally denied him, and the individual can prevail only through his conscience,⁷⁴ which necessarily involves suffering. This is the specifically Jewish sense of suffering that at no stage assumes the value of a mystical atonement for the sins of the world. The condition of the victims in a disordered world—that is to say, in a world where good does not triumph—is that of suffering. This condition reveals a God who renounces all aids to manifestation, and appeals instead to the full maturity of the responsible person.⁷⁵

“The suffering of the just person for a justice that has no triumph,” Lévinas continued, “is physically lived out as Judaism. The historical and physical Israel becomes once again a religious category.”⁷⁶ It is through the Torah, then, *through law dedicated to justice, and justice bound to morality, and morality emerging out of compassion*, that is to say, through a life edified continually through education in To-

rah—in which “education in Torah” is understood, like justice and compassion as yet another form of responsibility to others—that we discover “the link between God and man.”⁷⁷ Such, then, in contrast to an “infantile religious feeling,” would be a mature ethics and a mature religion, inextricably linked, as one person is linked to another in the humanity of the human. “Only the man who has recognized the hidden God,” Lévinas concluded, “can demand that He show Himself.”⁷⁸

“Loving Torah more than God” would thus have two senses—and nothing would be more serious than the play between them. It would mean first of all loving God’s commands, His law, loving the redemptive work of institutionalizing justice, the *u-topos* of the State of Israel (and all states), which depends on the work of loving one’s neighbor, on moral relations between humans, and loving all of these moral and juridical tasks more than one’s own unmediated personal relationship with God. This is Martin Buber’s rejoinder to Kierkegaard: marrying Regina, sanctifying God through the world, are not flights from purity and from God but rather the very work God demands of human beings. Morality would be revelation; justice would be redemption. But “Loving Torah more than God” would also have a second sense, unavoidable after the Holocaust. It would mean people must love the work of morality and justice more, *ap par*ently, than does God Himself. It would mean that even if God seems to have let humanity down, having hidden His face or having been eclipsed, as our twentieth century seems to teach again and again, that now *all the more* must we, we humans, love the Torah, that is to say, “do justice and love mercy.” The prophet Isaiah taught the lofty lesson that God Himself was “afflicted by her [Israel’s] afflictions” (Isaiah 63:9).⁷⁹ After the Holocaust, Lévinas is urging that we must take this burden upon our selves, joining Yom Kippur⁸⁰ to Purim,⁸¹ that regardless of God’s silence or absence, indeed inspired by the responsibilities which devolve upon us through this silence and absence, we must be moved in our afflictions by the afflictions of our fellow humans. Perhaps only in this way, finally, without making any demands, without expecting any rewards,⁸² without reservation or reserve,⁸³ without miracles, can each of us for the

first time as adults “walk humbly with your God.”⁸¹

ENDNOTES

1. On the significance of the dash in “God,” see my *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Lévinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. xiv–xv.
2. “The passion of Israel in the sense in which one speaks of the passion of Christ—is the moment humanity begins to bleed from the wounds of Israel.” From “Emmanuel Lévinas se souvient . . .” in *Les nouveaux cahiers: Emmanuel Lévinas*, No. 82 (Fall, 1985): 35. Cf., Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews: The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986; originally published by Harper and Row Publishers, 1975).
3. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill), p. 166.
4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 25 (Kaufmann translation).
5. E. Lévinas, “Useless Suffering,” translated by Richard A. Cohen, in *The Provocation of Lévinas*, ed. by R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 161. Henceforth, *Provocation*.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
7. *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 1. My translations.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Part III, section 28.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 112.
10. We know, too, that unable to rise to his own challenge, Nietzsche’s thought falters in a longing for eternity (perhaps more pathetic than parodic) in its own constructive efforts to situate suffering within a larger justifying whole, even if that whole is now not only quite small, but in different and God-forsaken, and even if that longing, bravely refusing genuine elevation, is reduced to an elitist and solitary will to eternal recurrence.
11. *Provocation*, p. 164.
12. “Transcendence and Evil,” trans. Alphonso Lingis, in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), pp. 175–86.
13. Philippe Nemo, *Job et l’excès du Mal* (Paris: Grasset, 1978).
14. *Provocation*, pp. 156–67.
15. Emmanuel Lévinas, “L’appel d’Auschwitz,” in *Les nouveaux cahiers* No. 65 (Summer, 1986): 15–17. “The Call of Auschwitz” using my translations.
16. Emil Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970); *La Présence de Dieu dans l’histoire*, trans. M. Delmotte and B. Dupey (Lagrass: Verdier, 1980).
17. Emmanuel Lévinas, “Loving the Torah More Than God,” in *Les nouveaux cahiers: Emmanuel Lévinas*.
18. See Ira F. Stone, “Emmanuel Lévinas, The Musar Movement and the Future of Jewish Ethical Living,” unpublished paper given at the University of Oregon, “Ethics After the Holocaust” conference, May 6, 1996; Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 142–45. This article also appears in two short volumes pertinent to the themes of this essay, the first written by an American Jesuit priest and professor, and the second edited by an American Jewish author: Franz Jozef van Beeck, S.J., *Loving the Torah More than God?: Towards a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1989); Zvi Kolitz, *Yossel Rakover Speaks to God: Holocaust Challenges to Religious Faith* (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, 1995).
19. *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 15.
20. *Provocation*, p. 157.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
23. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 180.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 179–181; *Provocation*, p. 156.

25. *Collected Philosophical Papers* p.181.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
27. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 110–21.
28. *Provocation*, p. 159.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 157–58.
31. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 180.
32. *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 15.
33. *Provocation*, p. 157; *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 15.
34. *Provocation* p. 158.
35. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 181.
36. *Provocation*, p. 157.
37. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 180.
38. *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 15.
39. *Provocation*, p. 157. In Latin *malus*, “bad,” and *male*, “ill,” both derive from *mel*, “bad.” In biblical Hebrew *mameer*, “malignant,” “evil” (e.g., Leviticus 13:51), suggests to cause pain.
40. *Provocation*, p. 157.
41. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 179.
42. *Provocation*, p. 158.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Totality and Infinity*, p. 234.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Provocation*, p. 163. Lévinas’s strong claim finds a fainter echo in the normative Jewish code of Law, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 228:4–5.
50. *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.
51. *Provocation*, p. 63.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
53. Recently, from within an explicitly Christian standpoint, and primarily regarding the suffering of children with terminal illnesses, Stanley Hauerwas, in *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), touchingly recognizes many of the themes we have found in Lévinas: that suffering has “no point” (pp. 78–79), the link between suffering and medicine, the crucial difference between another’s suffering and “my suffering as service” (p. 89), and the wrong committed when forcing the other’s suffering into an explanation, including traditional theodicy.
54. *Shulchan Aruch*, 16.
55. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 184.
56. *Provocation*, p. 164.
57. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 185.
58. Genesis 18:27. See Lévinas’s “Talmudic Readings” on this topic, “Who is One-Self?” in Emmanuel Lévinas, *New Talmudic Readings*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999).
59. See the excellent article by Joelle Hansel on “election” in the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas.
60. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 185.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
62. Here, in the solidarity of suffering, in compassion, lies the path to the ethical theory of “animal rights” that certain commentators have found lacking in Lévinas’s thought, and, more broadly, to the whole dimension of an ethical rather than a naturalistic environmentalism.
63. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 185.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 17.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. See Emmanuel Lévinas, “The State of Caesar and the State of David,” in *The Lévinas Reader*, ed. by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), pp. 268–77.
69. Lévinas writes: “The authentically human is the being-Jewish in all men (may you not be shocked by this!) and its reflection in the singular and the particular.” “Judaism and Christianity,” in Emmanuel Lévinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 164.
70. *Les nouveaux cahiers*, p. 17.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Cf., *Jerusalem Talmud*, tractate *Hagigah* 1:7, commenting on Jeremiah 16:11: “Better that they [Israel] abandon Me [God] and continue to observe My laws.”
73. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 143.
74. In the discussion period following the presentation of this paper in Oregon, Professor Sandor Goodhart quite rightly pointed out that the French term *conscience*, here translated “conscience,” can also mean “con-

sciousness,” since for Lévinas consciousness itself, and not only an explicitly moral conscience, is a vigilance awakened by the other.

75. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 143.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

79. Isaiah 63:9: “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all.”

80. Cf. Chapter XII, “The Day of Atonement,” in Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), pp. 216–35 (originally published in 1919). Cohen also rejects interpreting another’s suffering (p. 226), “unless the sufferer is considered as suffering for the sake of others” (p. 227), which compassion is a “means” to ward redemption, for “redemption is also liberation from suffering” (p. 230). All this, encapsulated in Cohen’s formula: “Without suffering—no redemption,” invites comparison with Lévinas on suffering and evil. “The days of old.” Of course, long before Isaiah, the Jews already understood God to be “compassionate” (*rachoum*) and “long-suffering” (*erek apayim*), see Exodus 34:6–7.

81. In stark contrast to the inaugural story of the Jewish nation leaving Egypt for Israel in Exodus, the story of

Esther in Persia, told on Purim, contains no overt miracles or divine interventions. Jewish sages have often noted that in this biblical text, unlike any other, the name of God does not appear. Precisely for this reason, too, it is said (e.g., Midrash to Proverbs ix) that when in the messianic era all the other holidays become outmoded, only Purim—a “minor” holiday to day—will remain. But was there no miracle—precisely the “miracle” of ethical suffering—in the three-day fast of Esther, Mordechai, and the Jews of ancient Shushan?

82. For a comparison of morality without compensation in Lévinas and Spinoza, see my article, “To Love God for Nothing: Lévinas and Spinoza,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20 (Spring, 1998).

83. On the notion of an “economy without reserve,” see the very suggestive paper of Robert Doran, “Speaking After the Holocaust: Infinity, the Sublime, and Economy in Bataille and Lévinas,” presented at the University of Oregon, May 8, 1996.

84. This essay was first presented as a keynote address, on May 7, 1996, at a conference on “Ethics After the Holocaust,” held at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

LÉVINAS AND THE HOLOCAUST

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE VICTIM

Gilbert Laroche

Failure of the discourse on Being without a doubt presents the most stimulating challenge of contemporary thought. The work of Emmanuel Lévinas, derived from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, while it denies all aspects of existentialism, contributes to the realization of this task. The originality of his project runs through a *displacement* of Being as the reference point of conscience. On that basis, Lévinas disrupts philosophical reflection and tries to give it a vocation that is no longer that of revealing the world.

The decentering move ment relies on the priority ceded to the question of the Other over that of Being. This displacement aims to evade the traps of all ontological reduction, and draw attention to the transcendence to which no thought can render justice. Lévinas writes, "One must understand Being though the Other of Being." He adds: "The alterity of the Infinite is not abolished by the thought that thinks it." His statement calls for the reinvention of a philosophy susceptible to realize a sobering up of knowledge. For him, human beings do not need to feel responsible for the world, but for the Other. This reasoning consecrates the end of anthropomorphism, and the appeal to a solidarity in which each must make himself hospitable to the face of his fellow man. Herein are the stakes of metaphysics without ontology.

The problem examined in my analysis of Lévinas' thinking concerns the apparent excess of responsibility towards the Other, and the possibility of inscribing it in the realm of an effective justice. If Being evades all determination, and the subject of its own identity, how can one be held responsible in the face of an event? Does not the incrimination of some one after a misdeed imply that the fact as such be established beforehand, and then, as a result, that strong identities between the victim and the guilty be distributed? In short, the central

question for Lévinas is the following: can metaphysics be founded without recourse to ontology? Through this questioning, an interpretation of rationality is played out with the presumptions it generates in the construction of knowledge. Reason tests its limits, for Lévinas, when measured by the standard of metaphysics. In his thinking, Western philosophy is pagan, because it is founded on a principle of reflexivity, identity, and ontology, obstructing the challenge to accept unlimited responsibility for the Other. The Holocaust, a perfect example of paganism, shows that the triumph of ontology destroys all finalities. It reveals, for Lévinas, the failings of human justice. Yet that event is not crucial to Jews alone, for it points out the pitfalls of all thought folded upon itself, and, as a consequence, the necessity to reintroduce the infinite into all human reflection.

While Lévinas only made sporadic reference to the Holocaust in his work, his entire philosophy is admittedly impregnated with the lessons it teaches. However, my argument consists in demonstrating that he is not able to reconstruct metaphysics without ontology, justice without identity, responsibility without subjectivity. Instead of actually decentering all points of view, Lévinas seems rather to displace the final legitimacy of his theory from the persecutor to the persecuted, by giving the victim the final right to ontology. Three propositions can serve here to establish the framework for this reflection: a) reflexivity, as a form of identity, re-surfaces in Lévinas through the status of the victim in the Holocaust; b) his notion of responsibility is defined by the will to adopt the point of view of the victim and opens onto, in accordance with Judeo-Christian tradition, an ontology of suffering as a way to salvation; c) that conception of identity and responsibility ends up justifying the moral superiority of the Jew, victim par excellence, and of his uni-

versal model of justice. The paradox we wish to expose is that the weakness of the victoriously becomes the instrument of a will of power in which the Jew takes on the form of the "last man" in his story. To demonstrate these assertions, it seems pertinent first to try to understand, through a rereading of *Difficult Freedom*, Lévinas' offensive against Western philosophy and paganism, then to see how Nazism became its worst manifestation. Finally, bringing light onto the victor will serve to unveil Lévinasian ontology and the failure of his decentering effort.

Reflexivity and Identity

a) *Solipsism and Circularity*. The drama of Western philosophy is its never having been able to conceive of alterity without reducing it. Reflection itself, in terms of "return to the self" means that the journey of the subject in exteriority can not be made solely through anticipation of a retreat towards its starting point. Such an act supposes, and Lévinas deplores, a loss of meaning and an excess of presumption. It condenses the miseries of philosophy since its origins. On the one hand, its exercise infringes upon the demands of taking into consideration the exceptional dimension of the Other by defining the criteria of its apprehension outside of it self. On the other hand, construction of intelligibility assumes that one can self-constitute as a standard for all things, while disregarding that which is essential in difference. Philosophy, he writes, "makes *itself* the doorway into the realm of the absolute." And calling on Plotinus as witness, Lévinas quotes as proof his own formula against him: "The soul will not go towards any other thing, but towards itself"; "that it will there fore not be in any other thing, but in itself."¹ However, damage far precedes the assertion of the neo-Platonian philosopher. It goes back to the imperative "know thyself" of Socrates, that "fundamental precept of all Western philosophy."² He integrates par excellence into solipsism of the conscience where the victory of the Same is paid for by the withdrawal of all obstacles.

The experience of responsibility would then be limited by the reflexivity of identity, for to think the world is equivalent to recognizing one self in it. For Lévinas, in the *Odyssey*, Ulys-

ses represents the paradigm of disorientation without true alterity. His tragedy does not lie so much in the many challenges he faces on his voyage, as it does in the difficulty in reaching his finality, wholly centered upon the perspective of a return to his native Ithaca. The discourse that emerges from the story of Ulysses only magnifies the philosophy of its enunciator.

What is the value of a reflection that stipulates in advance the modalities of its encounter with others? It decreases proportionally with the limits of its permeability to exogenous factors. Opposite to this perverse effect, the Lévinas model of conversation looks to undetermine all the heuristic possibilities of ecology. Richard Kearney notes that Lévinas relies on a "teaching" that takes away the sole predominance of the subject and, for that reason, can never be a "maieutics"³ in the strict sense of the word. While Socrates' intellectual strategy serves to wrench loose a truth hidden inside one self, and for the disclosure of which the interlocutor is merely a tool, one must, in the clear perspective of *Difficult Freedom*, open a breach in the identity of the Same so as to contradict its very dynamics. In Lévinas, the apparent banality of the act opens up onto authentic pluralism: "To speak, at the same time as knowing the Other, is making one self known to him. The Other is not only known, he is *greeted* [*salué*]. . . . Speaking and hearing become one rather than succeed one another."⁴

Through the privilege of speech over listening, of the affirmation of a vision against the face of the Other, the univocality of the Western point of view becomes complete through the soliloquy of an ultimate speaker. A number of figures represent the manifestation of this vanity along the very pathway of philosophy: a *cogito* that thinks and throws itself into existence as if observing itself from the outside (Descartes); a spirit that recognizes itself in a phenomenology of history (Hegel); a language shared out even before reflection has taken hold (Heidegger). In response to these various moments, Lévinas' offensive is launched through the question: "Who is looking?" The ambiguity of the "Who?" is only equaled by that of the "What?" The mirror of subjectivity and ontology is shattered by the simple fact that, in the space opened up by that relation of

identity, “the Other is looking at me,” to use Lévinas’ own wording. Only the intrusion of alterity allows us to grasp what thinking means. It reverses all ideologies for the benefit of a humanism without subject, an altruism without ego, a personalism without individualism, a phenomenology without the turn back to the reality of a *phaenomenon essendi*.

Numerous consequences emerge from such an upheaval, and register, from Lévinas’ point of view, the experience of responsibility. As soon as the way philosophy looks at the world answers only to itself through the presumption of infinitude of the subject with Being, the pitfalls of its project are revealed on at least three levels. First, *reflexive circularity* determines a closure of thought: he who delivers himself to the rationality of its unfolding is at once elevated to judge and jury. But self-referentiality reveals a performative approach: a statement that finds accomplishment in being expressed and, in this instance, a foundation that produces its own metadiscursive norms and legitimacy through the very act that establishes it. However then the *dialectics of identity* can no longer be defined in terms of the Platonic ideal of a correspondence between one self and the world, of a representation that would be its triumph. For Lévinas, the Hegelian strategy of gathering, through the junction of contradictions, no longer allows bringing out identities from the “circle of dialectics.”

Finally, these problems regarding circularity and identity exhibit the *aporias of totality*. Synthesis proceeds from the need to conquer. It is a way of coming to terms with the possession of the world. Lévinas explains that it recognizes itself in the operation of the *logos* as “subordination of an act to the knowledge that one can have of that act.”⁵ If phenomenology tried to perfect understanding by going beyond the strictly cognitive dimension, the trap of this procedure remains the same, thought still gives itself the possibility of containing the entire universe. The famous Husserlian precept that says “all consciousness is consciousness of something” still relies on the postulate that an “essential necessity attaches being to its ways of appearing to consciousness.”⁶ But this dream of coincidence and totality is abolished as Lévinas consolidates his negative answer to the question “is ontology fundamental?”⁵ Yet

two attitudes emerge from it in the face of the world, attitudes that can be differentiated for the most part through one’s relationship with the infinite.

b) *Paganism and Judaism*. The entire stakes of Lévinas’ thought are to restore the strength of revelation in philosophy. To confront the notion of its inability to testify to its own source, to reflect its opacity to an other visibility than that which it procures, to demonstrate that something resists or even escapes the phenomenon of its use, such are the epistemic bases from which Lévinas’ intellectual reframing takes root. The exit from solipsism depends on this opening to the demand of a voice. If hermeneutics sets limits to the virtuosity of cognitive action, it is under the condition that it respects the text, and accepts the imperative character of the spirit beyond the letter, since “Every word is an uprooting.”⁸ There is in that text an “Wholly Other” (Rudolf Otto) that nothing can impoverish. A principle emerges from the sliding of the concept towards the non-thematizable: “The infinite is given only to the moral view [*regard*]: it is not *known*, but is in *society* with us.”⁹ Deliverance from reflexivity only becomes possible through religious listening to the infinite, where all the *episteme* either come up against perpetuation in paganism or implodes before the “extreme consciousness”¹⁰ of Judaism.

For Lévinas, to be pagan means to live as if one were alone. Without any debt of meaning towards any power whatsoever, without density of Being deeper than that of interacting with the world, that is how the horizon of existence of one who acts and thinks his situation as that of the “first man,” that of the one who takes upon himself the thickness of Being, is defined. The sacrifice of all hope would sustain such self-referentiality and a corollary deprivation of the referral to another magnificence. A pagan is one who never looks above. He inhabits the universe and feels the full satisfaction of the face-to-face with himself. Subtraction of the vertical axis begins, according to Lévinas, with the pride of the I: “What is an individual, a solitary individual, if not a tree that grows without regard for everything it suppresses and breaks, grabbing all the nourishment, air, and sun, a being that is fully justified in its nature and its being?”¹¹ In his familiarity it

with himself, this “usurper,” to use Lévinas’ own wording, basks in the glory of being “at home,” and not being able to see himself elsewhere: “Paganism is the local spirit: nationalism in terms of its cruelty and pitilessness—that is to say, in its immediate, naïve, and unconscious sense. The tree grows and retains all the earth’s sap. A humanity with roots that possesses God inwardly, with the sap rising from the earth, is a forest or pre-human humanity. One must not be fooled by the peace of the woods.”¹² Heidegger is the perfect pagan, he who wanted to rediscover the world, to live as a poet in the calm of the Black Forest by going deep into the roots of Being.¹³

On the contrary, to be Jewish assumes immersion in the infinite, and heteronomy towards impregnable forces. Nothing falls due to this condition that was not first a heritage of foreign origin. The experience of the elsewhere is destiny for the Jew, whose exceptional character is due to the fact that he must accomplish the implications thereof. To live in the diaspora of meaning, never to be at home, to deny even the very possibility of seeing oneself appointed sovereign subject, to Lévinas, is an enriching experience for one who lives by these principles. A sensitivity to alterity becomes the virtue of that existence on the outside. However, the beauty of exile is that it carries with it an aspiration: “The Promised Land will never be in the Bible ‘property’ in the Latin sense of the term, and the farmer, at the moment of the first born, will think not of his timeless link to the land but of the child of Aram, his ancestor, who was an *errant*.”¹⁴ As opposed to the Ulysses model, reflection as a “return to the self” can not come first. *Difficult Freedom* does not show Judaism through the figure of the circle, but through the amassing of traces that escape all attempts at fixing a center. The Jew thus lives that decentering, because he is refused Being. It is therefore incumbent upon him to live the exodus and to fully experience the spirit of universal responsibility, since he is uprooted from all anchoring in the soil that would limit its applications.

Lévinas’ displacement exceeds geographical dimension. It puzzles epistemology, so dear to Western thought, by submitting reason to the predominance of theological knowledge. From the outset, the contemplative atti-

tude of Judaism signifies much more than piety spread out over the world. An existence lived under the dependence of the indeterminable, backed into invocation more than designation, into metaphor rather than concept, invests the sacred. It must also make room for what Lévinas calls “intellectual excellence,” for “that Judaism is still to be found at the crossroads of faith and logic.”¹⁵ From paganism to Judaism, the debate is played out against the rationalist tradition of philosophy and against the artificial division between the infinite and science, between transcendence and immanence, in short, between Jerusalem and Athens. The invitation to “make Israel” carries with it the double demand of redemption and justice, revelation and lucidity, exile and commitment. Beyond metaphor, the oxymoron of “real transcendence”¹⁶ is perhaps convenient to the discourse of one whose thought willingly practices ambiguity in writing. It means to carefully build the great synthesis of monotheism that analytical reason finally withered. Christianity itself was unable, according to Lévinas, to meet the challenge to civilize Europe while preserving the pre-eminence of the supernatural: Hitlerism and the *Shoah* bear spectacular witness to such a failure.

The analysis made to this point allows us, in brief form, to establish Lévinas’ thought in its moment of extraction from the “fatality of irremissible Being”¹⁷ and to circumscribe the *topoi* of an intelligibility that would no longer be founded on reflexivity as a method. The wager of this project requires the deliverance from ipseity and then the subordination of recovered liberty in ethics. In such a discourse, the ramifications flourish in many directions and cast a shadow on anthropomorphic humanism. The *message*: all meaning comes from elsewhere, it is not a possession of which humans can dispose of at whim. The *provocation*: destabilize the institutions, uproot their foundations, and elevate their referents towards the infinite.¹⁸ The *ambition*: receive the burden of an extreme responsibility that nothing or no one—not even God—could relieve, or remove. The *strategy*: conscience is only a posteriori; the rest is vanity, from whence a position as vocation of unlimited receptivity to metaphysics. Finally, the *manifestation*: the face of the Other alone can express transcen-

LÉVINAS AND THE HOLOCAUST

dence and constitutes the “epiphany,” to use a word that appeared at the same moment as *Totality and Infinity*: “through my relation to the Other, I am in touch with God,”¹⁹ claimed Lévinas.

Remarkably unique, Judaism emerges thus under the intrinsic modality of an *episteme*. Supreme passivity in front of the Torah “accepted and obeyed as primary imperative,”²⁰ it nevertheless contributes to averting *constructivism* and its will of power, to rendering *determinism* null since the referent is not of this world, to castigating *psychologism*, narcissism, and therapeutic culture. As a result, piety evicts the will to dominate, asceticism replaces any self-redemptive finality. While the nineteenth century looked to accomplish the notion of *liberty* through numerous revolutions, the twentieth century has been that of *equality*, through the proliferation of ideologies of that inspiration, but it is henceforth more than ever time, according to Lévinas, to face the implications of *responsibility*. “Being-with-others” includes this appeal; it sorts out the foundations of intimacy, the sharing of an existence that relies on giving and engagement. Solitude is an omie in Durkheim’s sense of this term: “All alone, the I finds itself rent and awry.”²¹ On the contrary, the Other, as long as he vouches for God, does not resemble me; he proves to be incommensurable and asymmetrical compared to me, his position being one of nobility of spirit and ideal. He imposes himself upon me, and not me on him. Lévinas noted that Judaism rests on an unequaled understanding that the other is my destiny, the horizon of my experience.²² In short, the *alter ego* does not exist, since the *alter* subjugates and constrains the *ego* in advance.

How can the *ego* be held responsible in justice when its existence seems submerged by the predominance of the *alter*? The dislocation of the vocabulary of identity by ethics, the migration to wards alterity by Judaism, the avoidance of recourse to contradiction by conversation, and the infinity of argumentation without perspective of synthesis noticeably accentuate the difficulty of judgment. From a conventional perspective, the decision by a magistrate must arrive at the stipulation of a sentence and come to terms with what Lévinas refuses: eliminate all doubt regarding the

determinability of the act—which carries with it an ontological dimension—and dissipate the uncertainty of its origin by risking imputing it to someone. Can justice operate while preserving the enigma and under the inspiration of a philosophy in which the instigator makes sure, to Lévinas, that his statement does not remain enclosed in the framework of its enunciation? And yet, to think Lévinas against Lévinas would be, here, to examine his strategies of evacuation of reflexivity by paying attention to the victim in his reading of the Holocaust. The idea is to demonstrate that identification with the victim reconfigures the modalities of ontology and the superiority of a privileged category.

Towards Responsible Justice: The Moral Superiority of the Victim

Lévinas’ main contribution to twentieth century philosophy is to have brought to attention to the fact that disavowal of the infinite withdrawal from contingency for the benefit of relativist skepticism obstructed the way to the real assumption of responsibility. Such a discourse was held at a time when all types of materialism were particularly popular, above all in France. Its originality was to oppose the a priori of Nazi totalitarianism and Judaism to found his appeal for a more virtuous justice in which the Other is recognized. The recourse to superior finalities drew a demarcation between ontology and metaphysics. Yet Lévinas criticized the prominence of Being in the Holocaust by substituting for it a metaphysics of the victim: the themes of universal culpability and redemptive suffering establish a non-pagan cosmic vision of which the foundations and claims must be here examined.

a) *Culpability and Violence*. For Lévinas, the Holocaust represents the situation of a civilization in which Being prevails and nothing can stand in the way of its triumph. It refers to a world where all finalities have been overcome and absorbed in the immanence to things, in such a way that reflexivity imprisons all available meaning. The tragedy is first authored in philosophical terms: “Being is evil, not because it is finite, but because it is limitless.”²³ A society that allows itself to be absorbed into it is lost. From the start, evil depends on gaps in

vo cab u lary be fore it con sti tutes a moral prob lem. It spec i fies the ineptitude of dis course as a trans port of ex is tence out side of its tau to log i cal cir cuit, where Be ing is de fined on the ba sis of it self, and it dom i nates in an au thor i tar ian way by vir tue of its sole ex po sure: it is as it is, be cause that is the way it is. There is no higher level to seek in the hope of ren der ing jus tice: “all is per mit ted.” The ab sence of pro hi bi tion and Hit ler ian man i fes ta tions of Nietz sche ren der the do mes ti ca tion of hu man na ture in oper a tive. For Lévinas, such a syn drome, ex ceed ing the sole ide ol ogy of the *Führer*, ques tions West ern ci vil i za tion.²⁴

“Any civilization that accepts the idea of Being”²⁵ is termed bar bar ian be cause its val ues go around in circles in their ad her ence to ac tion. Lévinas wrote: “The ex al ta tion of sac ri fice for the sake of sac ri fice, faith for the sake of faith, en ergy for the sake of en ergy, fi del ity for the sake of fi del ity, fer vor for the heat it pro cures, the call to a gra tu itous—that is to say, heroic—act: this is the per manent origin of Hit lerism.”²⁶ De hu man i za tion emerges in those shapes with out con tent, from those ac tions made without the in tellig i bil i ty of thought. Michel Aben sour re marks that Hit lerism sig nifies for Lévinas “en try into serv i tude.” Re calling the words of one who lived be tween the “pre mo ni tion and mem ory of Nazi horrors,” he ob serves that the initial range of the trial re lates back to the “re volt of Na ture against Su per na ture.”²⁷

Among the many signs of rup ture from the su per na tural di men sion, the body rep resents, in the cult re served for it in Nazi ide ol ogy, the en clo sure of fi nal sig ni fi ca tion. While Chris ti an i ty, Ju daism, and lib er al ism al ways treated the body as an el e ment in the ex te rior world to give the soul the priv i lege of hu man dig nity, Hit lerism con sid ers it an ob ject that co in cides in all points with the sub ject. The flesh thus sticks to the self through cause and effect, through a feel ing of see ing one self fas tened to Be ing in a per fect clo sure of goal: phys i o log i cal de ter mi na tion of the face leads to im pris on ment in an iden tity where bi ol ogy, race, and eth nic be long ing em body, it is be lieved, the truth of ex pe ri ence. Lévinas de nounced the fa tal i ty of the bi ol o gi cal fac tor, the “mys te ri ous voices of the blood, the calls of he red ity and of the past for which the body serves as an en ig -

matic ve hicle.”²⁸ The en tire stake of the body in Hit ler ism was to of fer the in stru ment of a re flex ive jus tice and of an im ma nent le gi ti macy through the cat e go ri es of pu rity, health, and per for mance by dis rupt ing all su pe rior fi nal i ties.

Being for Be ing, value for value, body for body, the *lex talionis* of the Old Tes ta ment en shrines the paradigm of this self-referential, pa gan jus tice. An eye for and eye, a tooth for a tooth, damage to the body, compensation by the body: an arith me tic of pain is in sti tuted be tween the act suf fered and the ri poste in flicted. The com plaint of the vic tim sub sides in front of the es tab lish ment of a math e mat i cally cal cu la ble sym me try. Ac cord ing to Lévinas, one is thus po si tioned pre sump tu ously on the side of the law by as sum ing that all de bates can be solved on the basis of re ci pro ci ty of ac tion. The demand for com pen sa tion in kind shows, for Lévinas, a de sire to es cape all re spon si bil i ty to wards others through a reciprocating ven geance. To consider one self even with one’s neigh bor is to pre sume that an act may at once in clude the al ter i ty and defeat within the ap or ias of the afore men tioned tri logy: cir cu lar i ty, iden tity, to tal i ty. The sta tus of the vic tim can only be dissolved for a pa gan, he who knows how to dif fer en ti ate roles, share the work load, and in crim i nate without tran scen dence. The Ho lo caust was, for Lévinas, the re sult of that ex treme dif fer en ti a tion.

The *lex talionis* over estimates the all-powerful na ture of judg ment. The fail ing of this mer can tile jus tice broad ens as the prac ti cal con se quences of its sys tem of equiv a lence be tween the per pe tra tion of the of fense and pay ment of the in dem nity are un der stood: “Vi ol ence calls up vi ol ence, but we must put a stop to this chain re ac tion. That is the na ture of jus tice. Such is at least its mis sion once the evil has been com mit ted.”²⁹ The stakes in volve the rep resen ta tion of a sym bolic jus tice, and re spon si bil i ty to wards the Other. Genu ine hu man i ty be gins, for Lévinas, where pun ish ment for its own sake ends, and where it opens up to the re ed u ca tion of the guilty. Sole re course to the ex e cu tioner is de void of pe da go gy; jus tice must be given a sense of su pe rior fi nal i ty that es capes the logic of the *lex talionis*. All in all, ap pli ca tion of the law must exit the body and en ter the realm of the spirit, to learn to know

LÉVINAS AND THE HOLOCAUST

oneself as in Plato, and integrate alterity into the experience. Lévinas observed: "The justice which will rule the relations between men amounts to the presence of God among them."³⁰ In other words, the just must accept that some things cannot be rendered equal through the simple equivalence between crime and compensation. The asymmetry of the relation must endure, since the unit of measurement and intervention before the misdeed is simply not on the human scale. Apprehension of the Hitlerian syn drome constitutes that occurrence where the establishment of all proportion between wrong and its sanction proves illusory. As a result, Lévinas proposed to reinvent a justice in which the victim remains victim and the guilty keeps his culpability like an atavism no history can erase. The challenge is to come out of the *lex talionis* and demonstrate that human justice is not enough in the face of the *Shoah*, where nothing and none other than the victim can answer for his own status.

b) *Victim and Legitimacy*. Judeo-Christianity is a morality par excellence of the victim whose sacrifice serves to found an ideal justice, entirely irreducible to human evaluation. A philosophy that to day updates this vision in the field of epistemology must, in a way, render every one guilty in order that the debt of meaning towards the victim be complete. All of the anthropological data on human nature must be interpreted to draw up a more real, more *original* representation of it. To this end, Lévinas made sure that his conception of justice is unspeakable, as much in courtroom language as in that of traditional rabbinical hermeneutics. His discourse consists in saying that man is born not evil, but guilty. Because of the anteriority of the fault, responsibility comes first, and liberty, second. As a result, the assumption of innocence as a customary schema of Western justice must cease to prevail: evil is as original as sin is in Christianity. And yet, if all are guilty from the outset, it is the point of view of the victim that becomes the principle of legitimacy of justice. Lévinas writes: "The consciousness of any natural injustice, of the harm caused to the Other, by my ego structure, is contemporaneous with my consciousness as a man. The two coincide."³¹ Conscience and culpability are equivalent; culpability and humanity duplicate one another;

humanity and violence are in contradiction. Evil, Auschwitz being its absolute paradigm, would begin with the disappearance of the equation, when the fear of fault becomes blurred: "The hand that grasps the weapon must suffer in the very violence of that gesture. To answer the pain this brings the revolutionary to the frontiers of fascism."³² The drama associated with the loss of status of the guilty is thus measured alongside the banality of the act it leads to. In other words, the Holocaust would have been impossible, in situated Lévinas, if a solid sense of guilt had prevailed.

Such a philosophy conjures a naturalism and an extreme conservatism on the level of political legitimacy. First, human solidarity becomes the consequence of a hostile nature that, left to itself, can not recognize the face of the Other in the fullness of its meaning. The sharing of guilt makes it necessary that each take upon himself the guilt of others. Then, in a premodern spirit, more precisely preliberal and predemocratic, an appeal to tame human nature is made, in order to fix its limits and domesticate it. As proof, Lévinas noted: "The human being begins at that point where vitality, in appearance innocent but virtually murderous, is mastered through interdiction."³³ The Prince will, obviously, contribute to this task, but without forgetting that God has the last word, which recalls medieval theocracy: "Man's real humanity and gentle nature enter into the world with the harsh words of an exacting God."³⁴ Here, metaphysics curiously meet up with ontology, the opposite point to which Lévinas was leading.

Lévinas' pattern is only held together, in fact, by speculation on the final sense of any Being, despite the criticism he formulated against that type of discourse. His thought, however impregnated with concern for the stranger and his vulnerability, seems limited in its accomplishment by three borrowed ideas: 1) A *Hobbesianism* which depicts an unreasonable human being *ab initio* to whom spiritualist absolutism must serve as palliative: Judaism is the language of its Leviathan. 2) A *Hegelianism* that man infests itself, in Lévinas, by the extradition of the power of the spirit towards that of alterity, in which real conscience becomes responsibility and not identity: ethics is the instrument of its reason. 3) A

Freudianism that supports at once the conceptualization of a rupture, of an original wound, even a traumatization,³⁵ and the formulation of a “structure of Desire”³⁶ for the Other: the infinite is the utopia of this attraction. The Holocaust failed in its attempt to fuse the absolute, ethics, and the infinite. And the suffering it caused bears witness to our failure in regulating human conduct. It serves to call upon messianic justice: “the Messiah will come when the world is wholly guilty.”³⁷

c) *Suffering and Salvation*. Suffering allows us, according to Lévinas, to experience the heaviness of the body, and to live the call for its deliverance. According to him, its pedagogy is that which breaks through the opacity of existence, with draws all substance from the subject, and shelters the word of a helpful language. Persecution gives rise to the emergence of an exceptional vision of the insufficiency of being alone, and manifests *a contrario* the basic precept of all morality, that is to prohibit killing. That is where is accomplished the redeeming virtue of suffering, that which gives the opportunity to have an “extreme conscience” by being longed to the most unfortunate people on earth. Judaism is the fragility of Being; weakness appears to be inherent in the Jewish condition, a *pathos* which vouches for the sense of precariousness of the ephemeral. “The ultimate essence of Israel, derives from its innate predisposition to involuntary sacrifice.”³⁸ To be persecuted in the absence of fault does not amount to having to carry on one’s back the universal burden, nor to taking on the weight of all humanity to suffer in its place. In Judaism, the victim can not be defined in terms of the transfer of suffering. Rather, he remains alone, and his solitude fulfills an exemplary function.

Expiation for others, the basis of Christian doctrine, frustrates Lévinas for reasons that enlighten and limit his thinking. The fact that Christ came to live among men to atone for the original sin does not hold together in his philosophy, since the synthesis of trinity, recovered by Hegel, holds out the prospect of an empirical totality that inevitably contradicts the idea of infinity (cf. *Totality and Infinity*). God does not incarnate; alterity does not show itself; suffering cannot be communicated: “For a Jew, Incarnation is neither possible nor necessary.”³⁹

Faith without signs suffices. The non-substitutability of suffering means that responsibility may not be taken on by someone else. The transitivity of the Other and of the Same that would arise in such a situation, Lévinas reminds us, maintains the wild dreams of the totalitarian system. “Evil is not a mystical principle that can be effaced by a ritual, it is an offence perpetrated on man by man. No one, not even God, can substitute himself for the victim. The world in which pardon is all-powerful becomes inhuman.”⁴⁰ Whence the unity of the victim (a rarity in a world of guilt), the reflexivity of its status (nothing else answers for it), and the ontology of its condition (suffering as proof of Being).

Pardon stipulates the principle of virtual reversibility of the act, the possibility to be have as if it had never happened. It considers suffering a stage on the road to dignity. In a sense, it evokes the promise of an undeniable elevation of Being. However, in the case of a crime against humanity, how can outrage committed against the very species be suspended, and, foremost, who can order remission of a misdeed of that nature? The sheer size of the event surpasses all possibilities of discernment in justice, and goes beyond the limits of judgment. It is a calamity far too immense to be supported and assessed in just measure. To dispose of such a terrible crime requires criteria that would make humanity at once judge and jury, therefore placing it in a self-referential position. And yet, a pardon, rather than compensation in justice, amounts to putting the victim in the role of righter of wrongs; in compensation, it is the guilty who resets the balance through the sentence served. But, in the pardon, it is the victim who takes on the initiative of recreating a symbolic proportion, despite the irreversibility of the act. The good grace of the victim does not erase the wrong done, nor the guilt.

The demand for justice thus faces the incommensurability of the cause and the impotence of the law. Crime against humanity keeps suffering from opening up on a state beyond Being, and obstructs the transcendence of pardon. Lévinas finally opens a door through which surges the possible reconstruction of a principle of justice. From his point of view, only the victim has the right to dispose of the

outrage, and vulnerability authorizes a judgment otherwise forbidden to all who did not suffer the affliction in flesh. "The sin committed against man can be pardoned only by the man who has suffered by it."⁴ Thus, genuine responsibility manifests itself in justice through the will of identification towards the legitimacy of the victim, conferred, as an ontological experience, by suffering as a way to salvation.

Reconstruction of a system of meaning around the victim as extreme speaker, in the case of genocide, takes place on the basis of three main lines of reference that cross Lévinasian thinking and recall the categories of classical philosophy. 1) *A privileged subjectivity* reappears in the notion of victim; the heteronomy of man and the altruism of his determination here cede to the "full autonomy of the human who is offended."² In Lévinas, the idea of election, of a "chosen people," corresponds to the special status conferred to the misfortune of having endured his history as victims. In other words, the subject has no rights, except he who lives in pain. At the very outside, the more one suffers, the more one exists, the more likely one is to be come just: "The just man who suffers is worthy not because of his suffering but because of his justice, which defies suffering."⁴ In this way, all responsible justice must be carried by Judaism: "a Jew is accountable and responsible for the whole edifice of creation."⁴ There is the "last man" who stands up in front of all humanity and dictates its will to power.

2) *An objectivity of reference* surfaces out of an ontological language. Being no longer exists, suggests Lévinas, but Judaism could still salvage it in order to re-establish it in Jerusalem, and no longer in Athens. The world has a renewed interest, and it would suffice to abandon oneself to it in a manner far more suave than that which has prevailed until now: "Judaism has the consciousness to possess, through its permanence, a function in the general economy of Being. No one can replace it. Someone has to exist in the world who is as old as the world."⁴ Circularity and reflexivity complement each other here in conscience.

3) *A messianic becoming* ties the subject to the object; it passes through the historical destiny of the State of Israel, which "achieves the

return of the possibility of an abnegation."⁶ The realm of ends is then incarnated in Jerusalem where reason of the State forms an alliance with the Sacred to reassure the Prince and God in one and the same operation. "The State of Israel will be religious because of the intelligence of its great books which it is not free to forget. It will be religious through the very action that establishes it as a State. It will be religious or it will not be at all."⁷ The Torah will thus become the code of obedience, and the guaranty of servility of the people. It will give to power an authority of divine right, will justify, if need be, suffering as an exceptional experience, and will confer to the law the attributes of mystery by eliminating any criticism against it. At the same time, the definition of a Lévinas ideal type responsibility, while it reminds us of the limits of reductionism, particularly materialist, does not allow to open up onto a formulation of a deontological framework for contemporary society. For social secularization and pluralism make, in fact, unthinkable the prescription of duty and rules on the basis of any messianism bound to a particular faith.

In conclusion, his reconstruction of a system of meaning around the theme of responsibility as debt of all towards the victim leads to the same aporias as those Lévinas denounces: subjectivity (reflexive) of the victim laid down as example before universal guilt, objectivity (ontological) of suffering as an experience of the revelation of being, messianism as legitimation of the State of Israel before God and men. Lévinas' line of argument ties the possibility of a responsible justice to the Jewish will to power, as if their millenary weakness should finally open up onto the reign of their predominance. And yet, in the same manner as Kipling wrote in the last century, that "civilization is a road," Lévinas insinuates that justice is a faith first. And certainly not any faith; his faith, that of triumphant Judaism. The decentering movement, so dear to the French philosopher, reaches its climax with Judeo-centerism and turns against his original ambition. Reflexivity of the victim, the Jew, means to appropriate the virtues of Athens, but to live the experience in Jerusalem. After all, Ulysses was unable to rise to the veritable experience of alterity, and to derive an appropriate pedagogy from it. He

must have been obsessed by an overly proud civilization in which reflection always means a return to the Self, in which no one knows the limits of a thought shut off from the world, in which all have forgotten that another conception of humanity exists, over there, on the far shore of the Mediterranean. Here is proof: “Perhaps the dog that recognized Ulysses beneath his disguise on his return from the Odyssey was a forebear of our own. But no, no!

There, they were in Ithaca and the Fatherland. Here, we were nowhere. This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives. He was a descendant of the dogs of Egypt. And his friendly growling, his animal faith, was born from the silence of his forefathers on the banks of the Nile.”⁸

ENDNOTES

1. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Esays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p. 16. The Plotinus quote by Lévinas is also on the same page.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
3. Richard Kearney, “Postmodernisme et imagination éthique,” in *Emmanuel Lévinas. L'éthique comme philosophie première*, ed. by Jean Greich and Jacques Rolland (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993), p. 359.
4. *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 7–8. The author showed himself more acerbic in the following passage: “In this world without speech” in which “we recognize the West. From Socrates to Hegel, it moved towards the ideal of language. . . . At the end point of this itinerary, the speaking man feels part of a discourse that speaks itself. . . . We have a closed language, and a civilization composed of aphasiacs. . . . By being coherent, speech has lost its speech. From this point on, there is no longer any word that has the authority necessary to announce to the world the end of its own decline” (*ibid.*, p. 207).
5. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronovitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); quoted according to the French original: *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), pp. 76–77.
6. Emmanuel Lévinas. *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshay (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 65.
7. According to the title of an article by Lévinas in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, January 1951. The work was reproduced from the first chapter of *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, pp. 1–11.
8. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 137.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
13. “I am thinking,” wrote Lévinas, “of one persistent current in modern thought, which emerged from Germany to flood the pagan recesses of our Western souls. I am thinking of Heidegger and Heideggerians. One would like man to recede over the world. Men will lose the world. They will know only matter that stands before them, put forward in some way as *anobject* to their freedom. They will know only *objects*” (*ibid.*, p. 231).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 17. He adds in significant fashion: “Freedom with regard to the sedimentary forms of existence is, perhaps, the human way to be in this world. For Judaism, the world becomes intelligible before a human face and not, as for a great contemporary philosopher who sums up an important aspect of the West, through houses, temples and bridges” that matter (*ibid.*, p. 23).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
17. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), p. 61.
18. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, eds., *The Provocation of Lévinas. Re thinking the Other* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); Don Awerkamp, *Emmanuel Lévinas. Ethics and Politics* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1977); Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Lévinas. The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); Richard Cohen, “Ethics and Infinity,” *Cross Currents* 24 (1984): 191–203.
19. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 17.
20. Bernard Dupuy, “Exégèse et philosophie dans l’oeuvre d’Emmanuel Lévinas,” in *Emmanuel*

LÉVINAS AND THE HOLOCAUST

Lévinas. *L'éthique comme philosophie première*, pp. 229–30.

21. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 16.
22. Jean Greisch points out that the pattern of alterity in Lévinas corresponds, in fact, to a perfect inversion of the Augustinian formula “*intimior intimo meo*”—“more intimate to me than my self”—found in the *Confessions* of the Bishop of Hippo. “Éthique et ontologie,” in Emmanuel Lévinas. *L'éthique comme philosophie première*, p. 29. See also in the same work: Pierre-Philippe Jandin, “L'espace de la comparution,” p. 163, and Bernard Dupuy, “Exégèse et philosophie dans l'oeuvre d'Emmanuel Lévinas,” pp. 236–37.
23. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), quoted according to the French original: *Le Temps et l'Autre* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979), p. 29.
24. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1997), pp. 7–8. This article was written in 1934 after the accession to power of Adolf Hitler and was published in 1990 as “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Fall 1990). On the occasion of this new publication, Lévinas wrote a short *post-scriptum*, for the French re-edition, in which he radicalized the relation he had established between Hitlerism and philosophy.
25. Emmanuel Lévinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), p. 98. This specific section, taken from Part I, “De la description à l'existence,” along with the two preceding ones, is omitted from the recent English translation of this work: *Discovering Existence With Husserl*, trans. Richard Cohen (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998).
26. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 149.
27. On the question of the “presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror,” Lévinas made this declaration in an autobiographical text entitled “Signature” at the end of *Difficult Freedom*, p. 291. The premonition had already been explicitly expressed in “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,” while the memory transpires through out the work of the thinker on the secularization of Judaism. Whereas the idea of “the revolt of Nature against Supernature” is, of course, from Lévinas, and quoted by Miguel Abensour in the essay that follows “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism” (p. 36f., quoted according to the French original).
28. *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 18–19.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
33. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), quoted according to the French original: *Au-delà du verset. Lectures et discours talmudiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982), p. 131.
34. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 145.
35. Michel Haar, “The Obsession of the Other. Ethics as Traumatization,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 23 (1997): 95–108.
36. Emmanuel Lévinas wrote on this point in *Difficult Freedom*: “The phenomenology of the relation with the Other suggests this structure of Desire analyzed as an idea of the Infinite” (p. 294). There is also in him an association between the sacred and the theme of fear, of worry (see: *ibid.*, p. 101).
37. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 159. “God is real and concrete not through incarnation but through Law” (*ibid.*, p. 145). On the theme of incarnation, see Lucien Richard's article from which come many of our remarks on this point.
40. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 20.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 141. 44. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Université du Québec, Chicoutimi, Québec G7H 2B1, Canada

PHILOSOPHY TODAY