UTOPIA AND REALITY

THE CONCEPT OF SANCTITY IN KANT AND LÉVINAS

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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 critique 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 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 contrasted with sacredness and numinousity, 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 every day 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 towards 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 something 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

"perfectly good" and whose intentions always conforms to moral law.[18] 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.[19] 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 after life 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 every day 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 responsibility 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 utopism.[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 practi-

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 cannot 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 cannot 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 egocentric 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 sleeping, 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 real. 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

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. [39]

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 deliverering 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. [40] 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

re la tion ship be tween uto pia and re al ity broke with practical philosophy. Though some aspects of his idea of sanctity converge with those of Kant, other as pects il lus trate the un bridge able gap that sep a rated the two phi los o phers. To put it in Levinasian terms, Kant's es capes, or flights, from the realm of on tol ogy do not pre vent him from re turn ing to it. As men tioned above, this is particularly true of the Kantian idea of hu man fini tude that con trasts so radically with Lévinas' conception of the *psyche* as originally invested by the Infinite, i.e., by un lim ited re spon si bil ity for the other.

Lévinas' dis tance from Kant is ex tended by an ad di tional dif fer ence. Whereas Kant's eth ics led to re li gion, that is, to the hope of at tain ing sanc tity and the high est good, or be at i tude in an other world and in an af ter life, Lévinas' eth ics tried to achieve sanc tity here and now, that is, in the realm of politics, science and tech nol ogy. Though I have not dealt with sanc tity in his Jew ish or con fes sional writ ings, tal mudic debate also bears witness to this con stant ef fort to in tro duce sanc tity in ev ery day, concrete re al ity. In this re spect Lévinas' con ception of eth ics con verged sur pris ingly with those of Hegel. Un like Kant, both phi los o phers did not con sider mo ral ity solely as an ideal that is pursued end lessly across eter nity. To them both, the requirements of ethics should be concretized in this life. The Lévinasian rep re sen ta tion of sanc tity as a "hu man pos si bil ity" intersected with the Hegelian concept of an eth i cal life.

Nevertheless, Lévinas maintained that sanc tity is some how uto pian. Ow ing to the as ymptotic as cent of re spon si bil ity to wards in fin ity, we are never done with the task of re al iz ing sanctity concretely. Moreover, the philo soph i cal re flec tion of sanc tity it self is af fected by this uto pian bent. In this re spect, one can view Lévinas' whole work as an at tempt to go fur ther into an in quiry of an in fi nite that will never be bounded by the lim its of think ing.

ENDNOTES

1. The pres ent es say is based on some of my pre vi ous works on Lévinas: an ar ti cle pub lished as "Après vous : The Con cept of Sanc tity in the Phi los o phy of Em manuel Lévinas" in an is sue of *Daat* 40 (win ter 1992) de voted en tirely to Lévinas; two lec tures that were given, re spec tively, at the 27th and 28th con fer ences of the As so ci a tion for Jew ish Studies in Boston in 1995 and 1996.

2. *Totalité et infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961). Trans lated by Alphonso Lingis as *Totality and Infinity* (Pitts burgh: Duquesne Uni ver sity Press, 1969). Con cerning *Totality and Infinity,* see Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Lévinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

3. Vladi mir Jankélévitch, *Traité des vertus* (Paris: Bordas, 1949), Chap ter 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 is sue, see Pe ter Atterton, "The Prox im ity Be tween Lévinas and Kant: The Pri macy of Pure Prac ti cal Rea son" (un pub lished pa per). This ar ti cle con tains nu mer ous ref er ences to the sec ond ary lit er a ture con cern ing both prox im ity and di ver gences be tween the two phi los o phers.

6. Emmanuel Lévinas. "L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?" *Re vue de métaphysique et de mo rale* 56 (1951): 88–98; and *Entre-nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), pp. 13-24. The for mer has been trans lated by Pe ter Atterton as "Is Ontology Fundamental?" *Phi los o phy To day* 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 con tains two lec tures on Kant: "La question radicale: Kant contre Heidegger," pp. 74–78; and "Kant et l'idéal transcendantal," pp. 175–178. As Atterton no tices in his es say, there is not "in Lévinas' cor pus a rig or ous treat ment of Kant com pa ra ble to that ex tended to Des cartes, Husserl, and Heidegger." If we dis count the ar ti cle on "The Pri macy of Pure Prac ti cal Rea son" that ap peared in Dutch and Eng lish (*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 I in its invisible meshes. He is not numinous: 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 infinité*, 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 remains separated in the desire; as desire 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. Immanuel Kant. "The Doctrine of Virtue," in *The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 517–19.
17. Immanuel Kant. *Metaphysics of Morals*, beginning of Section I, pp. 37–109, hereforth *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; Immanuel 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 in cumbent 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, "ontological" 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 cannot 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. Further along, 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 forsaken. 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*), useless 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 oblitération?

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 offered 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 today," 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 another 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 oneself 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-integratability."[23] This quality of "excess"[24] or "transcendence,"[25] which makes up its essence, cannot 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, insupportable, unbearable of itself. Just as a bodily being enjoys enjoying,[27] it suffers suffering. The unwanted and at the same time inescapable character of pained

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 regeneration[28]—the "non-sense of pain . . . pierces beneath reasonable forms."[29] Lévinas wrote of suffering: "in its own phenomenality, intrinsically, 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 forein of 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?

Holocaust: the End of Theodicy

As I have already indicated, the phenomenal or intrinsic meaninglessness of suffering and evil renders them resistant to all theodicy. The enormity of the Holocaust 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 some one 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 Holocaust? If suffering is intrinsically meaningless, and the Holocaust 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, indeed, "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. Indeed, such explanations are themselves immoral, irreligious. Suffering, in short, cannot be made into an object, cannot 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, indeed 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 today":[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 everything. "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 mother. 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 "u-topian" 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 utter most 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 God[72]

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 apoetic 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 inner 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 lawdedicated 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 Torah—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 "innertile 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 institutional izing 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 relation ship 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 moral ity and justice more, apparently, 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 ourselves, joining Yom Kippur[80] 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."[84]

ENDNOTES

1. On the sig nif i cance of the dash in "God," see my *Ele-va tions: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Lévinas* (Chi cago: Uni ver sity of Chi cago Press, 1994), pp. xiv–xv.
2. "The pas sion of Is rael in the sense in which one speaks of the pas sion of Christ—is the mo ment hu man ity be-gins to bleed from the wounds of Is rael." From "Em-manuel Lévinas se souvient . . ." in *Les nouveaux ca hiers: Em man uel Lévinas* , No. 82 (Fall, 1985): 35. Cf., Frank lin H. Littell, *The Cru ci fix ion of the Jews: The Fail ure of Chris tians to Un der stand the Jew ish Ex-perience* (Macon, Geor gia: Mer cer Uni ver sity Press, 1986; orig i nally pub lished by Harper and Row Pub-lishers, 1975).
3. Rich ard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Rad i cal The-ology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill), p. 166.
4. Friedrich Nietz sche, *On the Ge ne al ogy of Morals* , III, 25 (Kaufmann trans la tion).
5. E. Lévinas, "Use less Suf fer ing," trans lated by Rich ard A. Co hen, in *The Prov o ca tion of Lévinas* , ed. by R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (Lon don: Routledge, 1988), p. 161. Hence forth, *Provocation.*
6. Ibid., p. 162.
7. *Les nou veaux ca hiers* , p 1. My trans la tions.
8. Friedrich Nietz sche, *On the Ge ne al ogy of Morals* , Part III, sec tion 28.
9. Friedrich Nietz sche, *Twi light of the Idols* , trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 112.
10. We know, too, that un able to rise to his own chal lenge, Nietz sche's thought fal ters in a long ing for eter nity (per haps more pa thetic than parodic) in its own con-struc tive ef forts to sit u ate suf fer ing within a larger jus-ti fy ing whole, even if that whole is now not only quite small, but in dif fer ent and God-forsaken, and even if that long ing, bravely re fus ing gen u ine el e va tion, is re-duced to an elit ist and sol i tary will to eter nal re cur-rence.
11. *Provocation*, p. 164.
12. "Tran scen dence and Evil," trans. Alphonso Lingis, in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Collected Philo soph i cal Papers* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Pub lishers, 1987), pp. 175–86.
13. Philippe Nemo, *Job et l'excès du Mal* (Paris: Grasset, 1978).
14. *Provocation*, pp. 156–67.
15. Em man uel Lévinas, "L'appel d'Auschwitz," in *Les nouveaux cahiers* No. 65 (Summer, 1986): 15–17. "The Call of Auschwitz" us ing my trans la tions.
16. Emil Fackenheim, *God's Pres ence in His tory* (New York: New York Uni ver sity Press, 1970); *La Présence de Dieu dans l'histoire* , trans. M. Delmotte and B. Dupey (Lagrass: Verdier, 1980).
17. Em man uel Lévinas, "Loving the To rah More Than God," in *Les nou veaux ca hiers: Em man uel Lévinas* .
18. See Ira F. Stone, "Em man uel Lévinas, The Musar Move ment and the Fu ture of Jew ish Eth i cal Liv ing," un pub lished pa per given at the Uni ver sity of Or e gon, "Eth ics Af ter the Ho lo caust" con fer ence, May 6, 1996; Lévinas, *Diffi cult Free dom*, trans. Sean Hand (Bal ti-more: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 142–45. This ar ti cle also ap pears in two short vol umes per ti nent to the themes of this es say, the first writ ten by an Amer i can Je suit priest and pro fes sor, and the sec ond ed ited by an Amer i can Jew ish au thor: Franz Jozef van Beeck, S.J., *Loving the To rah More than God?: To-wards a Cath o lic Ap pre ci a tion of Ju da ism* (Chi cago: Loyola University Press, 1989); Zvi Kolitz, *Yossel Rakover Speaks to God: Ho lo caust Chal lenges to Re li-gious Faith* (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, 1995).
19. *Les nou veaux ca hiers* , p. 15.
20. *Provocation*, p. 157.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 15.
23. *Col lected Philo soph i cal 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 an 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 rightfully 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" toward 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.

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LÉVINAS AND THE HOLOCAUST

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE VICTIM

Gilbert Larochelle

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 consciense. 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 movement 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 someone 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, a reinterpretation 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 history 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, resurfaces 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-

ver sal model of jus tice. The par a dox we wish to ex pose is that the weak ness of the vic tim curiously becomes the instrument of a will of power in which the Jew takes on the form of the "last man" in his tory. To dem on strate these assertions, it seems per ti nent first to try to understand, through a rereading of *Difficult Freedom*, Lévinas' of fen sive against West ern philos o phy and pa gan ism, then to see how Na zism be came its worst man i fes ta tion. Finally, bringing light onto the vic tim will serve to un veil Lévinasian ontology and the failure of his decentering ef fort.

Re flex ivi ty and Iden tity

a) *So lip sism and Cir cu lar ity.* The drama of Western philosophy is its never having been able to con ceive of alterity with out re duc ing it. Re flec tion it self, in terms of "re turn to the self" means that the jour ney of the sub ject in ex te ri ori ty can not be made solely through an tic i pation of a re treat to wards its start ing point. Such an act sup poses, and Lévinas de plores, a loss of mean ing and an ex cess of pre sump tion. It condenses the mis er ies of phi los o phy since its or igins. On the one hand, its exercise infringes upon the de mands of tak ing into con sid er ation the ex cep tional di men sion of the Other by defining the cri te ria of its ap pre hen sion out side of it self. On the other hand, con struc tion of intelligibility assumes that one can self-constitute as a standard for all things, while disregarding that which is essential in dif fer ence. Phi los o phy, he writes, "makes *itself* the doorway into the realm of the absolute." And calling on Plotinus as witness, Lévinas quotes as proof his own for mula against him: "The soul will not go to wards any other thing, but to wards it self"; "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 phi los o pher. It goes back to the imperative "know thyself" of Socrates, that "fundamental pre cept of all West ern phi los o phy."[2] He in te grates par ex cel lence into so lipsism of the con science where the vic tory of the Same is paid for by the with drawal of all ob stacles.

The ex per i ence of re spon si bil ity would then be lim ited by the re flex ivi ty of iden tity, for to think the world is equivalent to recognizing one self in it. For Lévinas, in the *Odyssey*, Ulysses rep re sents the par a digm of dis ori en ta tion with out true alterity. His trag edy does not lie so much in the many challenges he faces on his voy age, as it does in the dif fi culty in reach ing his fi nal ity, wholly cen tered upon the per spective of a return to his native Ithaca. The discourse that emerges from the story of Ulys ses only magnifies the philosophy of its enunciator.

What is the value of a re flec tion that stip u lates in ad vance the mo dal i ties of its en coun ter with others? It de creases pro por tion ally with the lim its of its per me abil ity to ex og e nous factors. Opposite to this perverse effect, the Lévinas model of con ver sa tion looks to un dermine all the heu ris tic pos si bil i ties of ecol ogy. Rich ard Kear ney notes that Lévinas re lies on a "*teaching*" that takes away the sole predominance of the sub ject and, for that rea son, 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 dis clo sure of which the interlocutor is merely a tool, one must, in the clear per spec tive of *Difficult Freedom*, open a breach in the iden tity of the Same so as to contra dict its very dy nam ics. In Lévinas, the apparent ba nal ity of the act opens up onto au thentic pluralism: "To speak, at the same time as know ing the Other, is mak ing one self known to him. The Other is not only known, he is *greeted* [*salué*]. . . . Speaking and hear ing be come one rather than suc ceed one an other."[4]

Through the priv i lege of speech over lis tening, of the af fir ma tion of a vi sion against the face of the Other, the univocality of the West ern point of view becomes com plete through the so lil o quy of an ul ti mate speaker. A num ber of figures represent the manifestation of this van ity along the very path way of phi los o phy: a *cogito* that thinks and throws itself into existence as if observing itself from the outside (Des cartes); a spirit that rec og nizes it self in a phe nom en ol ogy of his tory (Hegel); a lan guage shared out even before reflection has taken hold (Heidegger). In re sponse to these var i ous moments, Lévinas' offensive is launched through the ques tion: "Who is look ing?" The am bi gu ity of the "Who?" is only equaled by that of the "What?" The mir ror of sub jec tiv ity and ontology is shattered by the simple fact that, in the space opened up by that re la tion 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 intimacy 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 another visibility than that which it procures, to demonstrate that something resists or even escapes the phenomenality 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 uproot ing."[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 though 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

with himself, this "usurper," to use Lévinas' own word ing, basks in the glory of be ing "at home," and not be ing able to see him self else - where: "Pa gan ism is the lo cal spirit: na tion al - ism in terms of its cruelty and pitiless - ness—that is to say, in its immediate, naïve, and un con scious sense. The tree grows and re - tains all the earth's sap. A hu man ity with roots that pos sesses God in wardly, with the sap ris - ing from the earth, is a for est or pre-human hu - man ity. One must not be fooled by the peace of the woods."[12] Heidegger is the per fect pa gan, he who wanted to re dis cover the world, to live as a poet in the calm of the Black For est by go - ing deep into the roots of Be ing.[13]

On the con trary, to be Jew ish as sumes im - mersion in the infinite, and heteronomy to - wards im preg na ble forces. Noth ing falls due to this con di tion that was not first a her i tage of foreign origin. The experience of the else - where is des tiny for the Jew, whose ex cep tional char ac ter is due to the fact that he must ac com - plish the im pli ca tions thereof. To live in the di - aspora of meaning, never to be at home, to deny even the very pos si bil ity of see ing one self ap pointed sov er eign sub ject, to Lévinas, is an enriching experience for one who lives by these principles. A sensitivity to alterity be - comes the vir tue of that ex is tence on the out - side. How ever, the beauty of ex ile is that it car - ries with it an as pi ra tion: "The Prom ised Land will never be in the Bible 'property' in the Latin sense of the term, and the farmer, at the mo ment 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 Ulys ses model, re flec tion as a "re turn to the self" can not come first. *Difficult Freedom* does not show Judaism through the fig ure of the cir cle, but through the amass ing of traces that es cape all at tempts at fix ing a cen ter. The Jew thus lives that decentering, be cause he is refused Being. It is therefore incumbent upon him to live the ex o dus and to fully ex pe ri - ence the spirit of uni ver sal re spon si bil ity, since he is uprooted from all anchoring in the soil that would limit its ap pli ca tions.

Lévinas' displacement exceeds geographical dimension. It puzzles epistemology, so dear to West ern thought, by sub mit ting rea son to the predominance of theological knowledge. From the out set, the con tem pla tive at ti - tude of Ju da ism sig ni fies much more than pi ety spread out over the world. An ex is tence lived under the dependence of the indeterminable, backed into in vo ca tion more than des ig na tion, into met a phor rather than con cept, in vests the sacred. It must also make room for what Lévinas calls "intellectual excellence," for "that Ju da ism is still to be found at the cross - roads of faith and logic."[15] From pa gan ism to Judaism, the debate is played out against the ra tio nal ist tra di tion of phi los o phy and against the ar ti fi cial di vi sion be tween the in fi nite and science, between transcendence and im - manence, in short, between Je ru sa lem and Ath - ens. The invitation to "make Israel" carries with it the dou ble de mand of re demp tion and jus tice, rev e la tion and lu cid ity, ex ile and com - mit ment. Be yond met a phor, the oxy mo ron of "*real* tran scen dence"[16] is per haps con ve nient to the dis course of one whose thought will ingly practices ambiguity in writing. It means to care fully build the great syn the sis of mono the - ism that analytical reason finally withered. Christianity itself was unable, according to Lévinas, to meet the chal lenge to civ i lize Eu - rope while pre serv ing the pre-eminence of the supernatural: Hitlerism and the *Shoah* bear spec tac u lar wit ness to such a fail ure.

The anal y sis made to this point al lows us, in brief form, to es tab lish Lévinas' thought in its moment of extraction from the "fatality of irremissible Being"[17] and to circumscribe the *topoi* of an in tel li gi bil ity that would no lon ger be founded on reflexivity as a method. The wager of this pro ject re quires the de liv er ance from ipseity and then the sub or di na tion of re - cov ered lib erty in eth ics. In such a dis course, the ramifications flourish in many directions and cast a shadow on anthropomorphic hu - manism. The *message*: all meaning comes from else where, it is not a pos ses sion of which hu mans can dis pose of at whim. The *provoca - tion*: destabilize the institutions, uproot their foundations, and elevate their referents to - wards the in fi nite.[18] The *ambition*: re ceive the bur den of an ex treme re spon si bil ity that noth - ing or no one—not even God—could re lieve, or re move. The *strategy*: con science is only a pos te ri ori; the rest is van ity, from whence a po - sition as vocation of unlimited receptivity to metaphysics. Finally, the *manifestation*: the face of the Other alone can express transcen -

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] 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 anomie 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 towards 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 underthe 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 Hitlerian man i fes ta tions of Nietz sche ren-der the do mes ti ca tion of hu man na ture in op er-a tive. For Lévinas, such a syn drome, ex ceed-ing the sole ide ol ogy of the *Führer*, ques tions Westerncivilization.[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 adherence 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 gratuitous—that is to say, heroic—act: this is the permanent origin of Hitlerism."[26] Dehumanization emerges in those shapes with out con tent, from those ac-tions made without the intelligibility of thought. Michel Abensour re marks that Hit ler-ism signifies for Lévinas "entry into servi-tude." Re calling the words of one who lived be-tween the "pre mo ni tion and mem ory of Nazi horrors," he observes that the initial range of the trial re lates back to the "re volt of Na ture against Supernature."[27]

Among the many signs of rup ture from the supernatural dimension, the body represents, 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-tianity, Ju da ism, 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 ler ism con sid ers it an ob ject that co in cides in all points with the subject. 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 identity where biology, race, and ethnic belonging embody, it is believed, the truth of ex pe ri ence. Lévinas de nounced the fa-tal ity of the bi o log i 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 enig-matic ve hi cle."[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 git i macy through the categories of purity, 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 ba sis of rec i proc ity 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 ity to-wards others through a reciprocating ven-geance. To consider oneself even with one's neigh bor is to pre sume that an act may at once include the alterity and defeat within the aporias of the aforementioned trilogy: circu-lar ity, iden tity, to tal ity. The sta tus of the vic tim can only be dissolved for a pagan, he who knows how to differentiate roles, share the workload, and incriminate without transcen-dence. The Ho lo caust was, for Lévinas, the re-sult of that ex treme dif fer en ti a tion.

The *lex talionis* overestimates 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 between the perpetration of the offense and pay ment of the in dem nity are un der stood: "Vi-o lence calls up vi o lence, 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 representation of a symbolic justice, and re-sponsibility towards the Other. Genuine hu-man ity 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 ped a gogy; jus tice must be given a sense of su pe rior fi nal ity 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

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 syndrome 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 today updates this vision in the field of epistemology must, in a way, render everyone 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 anaesthetize this pain 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, insinuated Lévinas, if a solid sense of guilt had prevailed.

Such a philosophy conjugates 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, cannot 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 spiritual istabsolutism must serve as palliative: Judaism is the language of its Leviathan. 2) A *Hegelianism* that manifests 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 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, withdraws 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 belonging 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 cannot 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 some one 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."[41] 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."[42] In Lévinas, the idea of election, of a "chosen people," corresponds to the special status conferred to the misfortune of having endured 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 become just: "The just man who suffers is worthy not because of his suffering but because of his justice, which defies suffering."[43] In this way, all responsible justice must be carried by Judaism: "a Jew is accountable and responsible for the whole edifice of creation."[44] 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 conscious ness 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."[45] Circularity and reflexivity complement each other here in consciences.

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."[46] 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."[47] 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 Levinas 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 legitimization 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 ob sessed by an overly proud civ i li za tion in which re flec tion al ways means a re turn to the Self, in which no one knows the lim its of a thought shut off from the world, in which all have for got ten that an other con cep tion of hu man ity ex ists, over there, on the far shore of the Mediterranean. Here is proof: "Per haps the dog that rec og nized Ulys ses be neath his dis guise on his re turn from the Od ys sey was a forebear of our own. But no, no! There, they were in Ithaca and the Fa ther land. Here, we were no where. This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to uni ver sal ize max ims and drives. He was a de scen dant of the dogs of Egypt. And his friendly growl ing, his an i mal faith, was born from the si lence of his fore fa thers on the banks of the Nile."[48]

ENDNOTES

1. Em man uel Lévinas, *Dif fi cult Free dom: Es says on Ju daism*,trans. Seán Hand (Lon don: The Ath lone 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 au thor showed him self more acer bic in the fol low ing pas sage: "In this world without speech" in which "we recognize the West. From Soc ra tes to Hegel, it moved to wards the ideal of language. . . . At the end point of this itin er ary, the speak ing man feels part of a dis course that speaks it self. . . . We have a closed lan guage, and a civ i li za tion com posed of aphasiacs. . . . By be ing co her ent, speech has lost its speech. From this point on, there is no lon ger any word that has the au thor ity nec es sary to an nounce to the world the end of its own de cline" (ibid., p. 207).
5. Em man uel Lévinas, *Nine Tal mudic Read ings* , trans. Annette Aronoviwicz (Bloomington: In di ana Uni ver sity Press, 1994); quoted ac cord ing to the French orig i nal: *Quatre lec tures talmudiques* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), pp. 76–77.
6. Emmanuel Lévinas. *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other* , trans. Mi chael B. Smith and Barbara Harshay (New York: Co lum bia Uni ver sity Press, 1998), p. 65.
7. Ac cord ing to the ti tle of an ar ti cle by Lévinas in *Revue de métaphysique et de mo rale*, Jan u ary 1951. The work was re pro duced from the first chap ter of *En tre 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 think ing," wrote Lévinas, "of one pres ti gious cur rent in mod ern thought, which emerged from Ger many to flood the pa gan re cesses of our West ern souls. I am think ing of Heidegger and Heideggerians. One would like man to re dis cover the *world*. Men will lose the world. They will know only mat ter that stands be fore them, put for ward in some way as *anobject* to their free dom. They will know only *objects* " (ibid., p. 231).
14. Ibid., p. 17. He adds in sig nif i cant fash ion: "Free dom with re gard to the sed en tary forms of ex is tence is, per haps, the hu man way to be in this world. For Ju da ism, the world be comes in tel li gi ble be fore a hu man face and not, as for a great con tem po rary phi los o pher who sums up an im por tant as pect of the West, through houses, tem ples and bridges" that mat ter (ibid., p. 23).
15. Ibid., p. 274.
16. Ibid., p. 16.
17. Em man uel Lévinas, *Ex is tence and Ex is tents* , trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Ac a demic Pub lishers, 1988), p. 61.
18. Rob ert Bernasconi and Da vid Wood, eds., *The Prov o ca tion of Lévinas. Re thinking the Other* (Lon don and New York: Routledge, 1988); Don Awerkamp, *Em man uel Lévinas. Eth ics and Pol i tics* (New York: Re vi sionist Press, 1977); Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Lévinas. The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The HaguE: Nijhoff, 1974); Rich ard Co hen, "Eth ics and Infinity," *Cross Cur rents* 24 (1984): 191–203.
19. *Difficult Freedom*, p. 17.
20. Bernard Dupuy, "Exégèse et philosophie dans l'oeuvre d'Emmanuel Lévinas," in *Emmanuel*

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

21. *DifficultFreedom,* p. 16.
22. Jean Greisch points out that the pat tern of alterity in Lévinas cor re sponds, in fact, to a per fect in ver sion of the Augustinian formula "*intimior intimo meo*"—"more in ti mate 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: Pi erre-Philippe Jandin, "L'espace de la comparution," p. 163, and Ber nard Dupuy, "Exégèse et philosophie dans l'oeuvre d'Emmanuel Lévinas," pp. 236–37.
23. Em man uel Lévinas, *Time and the Other* , trans. Rich - ard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), quoted according to the French original: *Ie Temps et l'Autre* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979), p. 29.
24. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Riv ages, 1997), pp. 7–8. This ar ti cle was writ ten in 1934 af ter the ac ces sion to power of Adolf Hit ler and was pub lished in 1990 as "Re flec tions on the Phi los o - phy of Hit ler ism," *Criti cal Inquiry* 17 (Fall 1990). On the oc ca sion of this new pub li ca tion, Lévinas wrote a short *post-scriptum*, for the French re-edition, in which he rad i cal ized the re la tion he had es tab lished be tween Hit ler ism and phi los o phy.
25. Em man uel Lévinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), p. 98. This spe cific sec tion, taken from Part 1, "De la de scrip tion 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. Em man uel Lévinas, *DifficultFreedom,* p. 149.
27. On the ques tion of the "pre sen ti ment and the mem ory of the Nazi hor ror," Lévinas made this dec la ra tion in an au to bio graph i cal text en ti tled "Sig na ture" at the end of *Diffi cultFree dom,* p. 291. The premonition had al - ready been ex plic itly ex pressed in "Re flec tions on the Phi los o phy of Hit ler ism," while the mem ory tran spires through out the work of the thinker on the sec u lar iza - tion of Ju da ism. Whereas the idea of "the re volt of Na - ture against Supernature" is, of course, from Lévinas, and quoted by Miguel Abensour in the es say that fol - lows "Re flec tions on the Phi los o phy of Hit ler ism" (p. 36f., quoted ac cord ing to the French orig i nal).
28. *DifficultFreedom,* 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 ac cord ing to the French orig i nal: *Au-delà du verset. Lectures et discours talmudiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982), p. 131.
34. *DifficultFreedom,* p. 145.
35. Michel Haar, "The Ob ses sion of the Other. Eth ics as Traumatization," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 23 (1997): 95–108.
36. Em man uel Lévinas wrote on this point in *Difficult Freedom*: "The phe nom en ol ogy of the re la tion with the Other sug gests this struc ture of De sire an a lyzed as an idea of the In fi nite" (p. 294). There is also in him an as - so ci a tion be tween the sa cred 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 con crete not through in - car na tion but through Law" (ibid., p. 145). On the theme of in car na tion, see Lucien Rich ard's ar ti cle from which come many of our re marks on this point.
40. *DifficultFreedom,* 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.

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