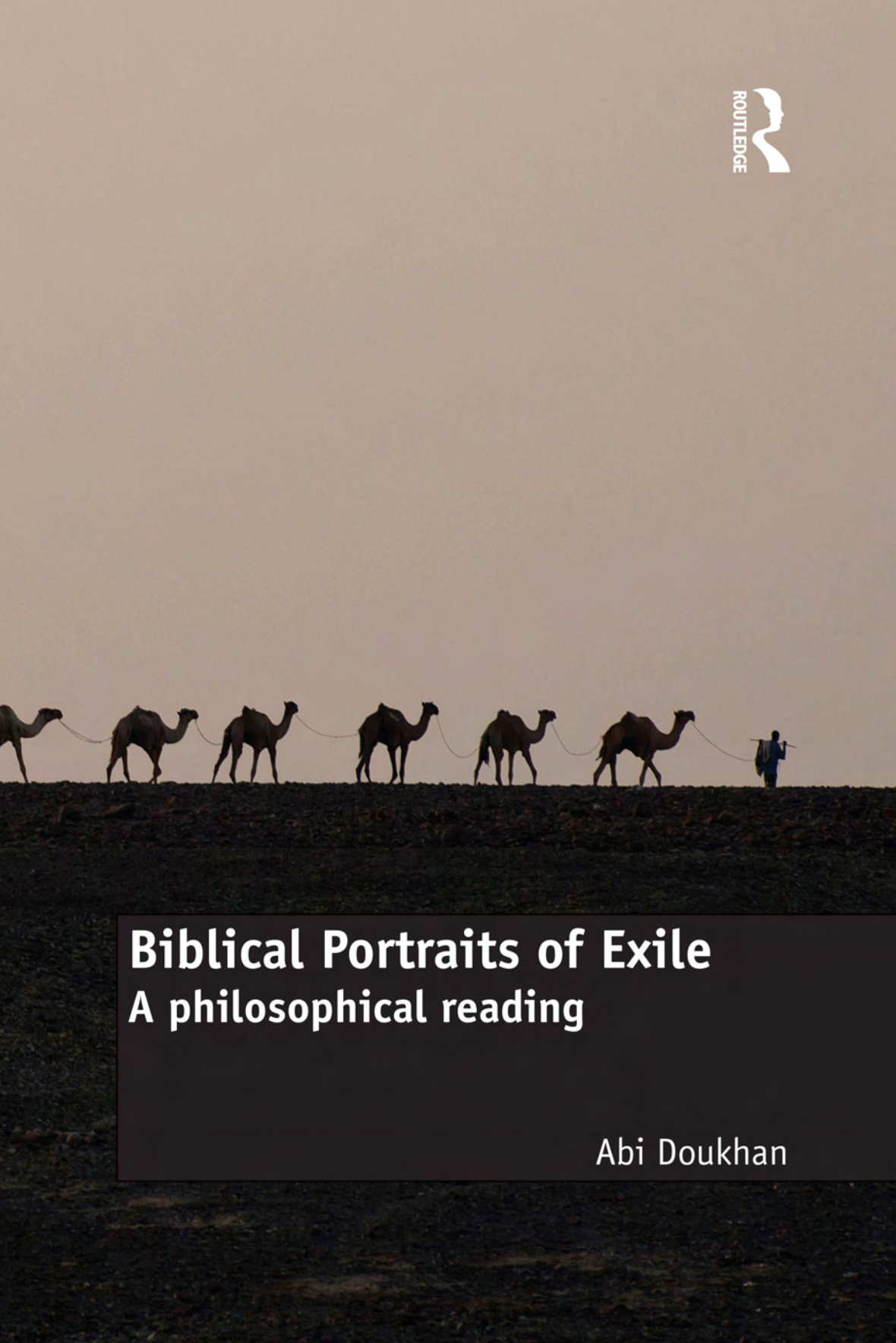
ROUTLEDGE
Biblical Portraits of Exile
A philosophical reading
Abi Doukhan

Biblical Portraits of Exile

Exile constitutes one of the most central experiences in the Bible, notably in the book of Genesis. The question has rarely been asked, however, as to why exile plays such an important role in the lives of biblical characters. *Biblical Portraits of Exile* proposes a philosophical reading, largely inspired by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, of the experience of exile in the book of Genesis. Focusing on eight portraits of exile – those of Adam, Eve, Cain, the sons of Shem, Abraham, Rebekah, Jacob and the sons of Levi – the book draws out the ethical and redemptive implications of exile and thereby paves the way for a renewed description of the human subject, one that situates ethics at its very core.

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Biblical Portraits of Exile

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I would like to dedicate this book to the Syrian refugees who didn't make it to their Promised Land as well as to those who are still struggling on their journeys. May they find compassion within our borders and may we come to see in them a reflection of our own humanity.

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This book is a marriage of two loves: my love for philosophy and my love for the Hebrew Bible. I am indebted to my father for awakening both in me. I am grateful for his sensing the philosopher in me and for giving me my first philosophy book. And I am grateful for his initiating me to the treasures of the Hebrew Bible, for the prophetic fire of his teaching and for the way his words would make my heart burn within me. But most of all I am grateful to him for anchoring my wandering soul in streams of living water to which I might come time and time again to dip my thirsting and restless mind.

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Images throughout are courtesy of Benjamin de Loenen.

Introduction

Thesis of the book

In an article entitled "The Bible and the Greeks," Emmanuel Levinas comments on the dual Greek and Hebrew inspiration of our present culture, "What is Europe? It is the Bible and the Greeks."[1] He adds almost immediately, however, that biblical thought constitutes the very antithesis of Greek thought. Our present Western worldview would then be caught in a philosophical tension between Greek and Hebrew thought:

> The Bible: an ontological inversion? The original perseverance of realities in their being—the inertia of material objects, the enrootedness of plants, the struggle between wild animals, the war among "owning and interested" men, as Bossuet calls them—is inverted in the man announced to humanity in Israel. Thus, for being that is dedicated to being, for being that has no other purpose than to be, the human self might also signify the possibility of interrupting its *conatus essendi*, the possibility of answering for the other, who "is none of my business," who is nothing to me.[2]

This quote by Levinas constitutes a pointed critique of the Western concept of the subject and presents an alternative conception of subjectivity: an exilic subjectivity which, as such, can be understood as rising above the mere preoccupation with being, over and against the Western concept of subjectivity as grounded in being, as "perseverance" in "being." Thus, what Levinas is attempting to show here are the limitations of the Western concept of subjectivity as grounded in being, as "enrooted" in existence with all the ensuing struggles and wars for survival such a definition entails. Such a subjectivity, inasmuch as it is solely concerned with itself, suffers from what Levinas will call a "deafness" to the dimension of the other. As such, Western subjectivity still finds itself in need of an awakening to this dimension, that is to say, to ethics. Such an awakening, arguably, can only come upon an abandonment of this "enrootedness" for the experience of exile, which, as such, will contain ethical and redemptive implications. But more needs to be said about this Western concept of subjectivity if the "ontological inversion" that Levinas describes is to be genuinely understood.

In his short essay *On Escape*, Levinas sketches out a rather disturbing portrait of the contemporary condition. Commenting on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century concept of the subject, Levinas observes, "The individual is called upon to loosen the grasp of the foreign reality that chokes it, but this is in order to assure the full flowering of its own reality."[3] In other words, although the Western subject seeks transcendence, seeks to overcome its own self-enclosed limitations, it does so in the name of its own fulfillment, of its own development and affirmation of itself as a subject. Levinas proceeds to explain that the Western concept of subjectivity has never been able to pursue an end beyond the establishment or freeing of the *self*:

> And Western philosophy, in effect, has never gone beyond this. In combating the tendency to ontologize, when it did combat it, Western philosophy struggled for a better being, for a harmony between us and the world, or for the perfection of our own being. . . . The insufficiency of the human condition has never been understood otherwise than as a limitation of being, without our ever having envisaged the meaning of "finite being."[4]

In other words, according to Levinas, Western thought has never attempted to think of a dimension beyond being, beyond that of the establishment of the subject within being and/or the freeing of the subject from alienated forms of existence towards the fulfillment of its own being. Levinas further comments on the Western establishment of the subject as the central preoccupation of philosophy:

> If "know thyself" has become the fundamental precept of all Western philosophy, this is because ultimately the West discovers the universe within itself. As with Ulysses, its journey is merely the accident of a return. . . . When a Gide recommends fullness of life and variety of experience as the fulfillment of freedom, he searches in freedom for the *experience* of freedom, not for the movement itself by which one moves out of oneself. It has to do with taking delight, experiencing oneself as a miraculous centre of radiance and not with radiating.[5]

Such a centrality ascribed to the self, running from the Greek "know thyself" to the Gidean search for freedom is epitomized in Cartesian philosophy, the first to situate the foundation of being and meaning in the subject. The *cogito ergo sum* is more than a simple truism: it situates the self at the very foundation of being, not only of its own being but, as will ensue in the *Meditations*, of all of being. Such a self finds itself ascribed the prerogative of first cause and origin of the world. As such, it features at the very center of the world, holding the first and last word upon existence. This view of the self as origin and foundation of being was perpetuated from Descartes to much of the ensuing Western philosophy from Kant's *a priori* judgments to Nietzsche's radicalization of the self as solitary demiurge and creator of values. Thus, the definition

of the self as autonomous, masterful, central and solitary, was perpetuated in a version of Western thought. A self is fully a self once it has achieved autonomy and mastery upon the world.[6]

Yet, while the Western concept of the self as autonomous and masterful—and this goes for both the male and female self—has achieved much in terms of its liberation not only from nature, but also, in the case of women, from societal modes of oppression, it fails to account for a central dimension: that presented by an Other. Levinas defines such a liberation in terms of ontology and sees there a limitation which has naught to do with the self's lack of freedom but, rather, with its total incapacity to genuinely transcend itself towards an other, "Ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom—the freedom that is identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other."[7] In other words, the self's quest for self-liberation and self-fulfillment is done in complete oblivion of the dimension of the other. The self individuates itself without any reference to alterity and as such, according to Levinas, never genuinely transcends itself, renounces the "marvel of exteriority"[8] and therefore remains locked within itself.

Indeed, it is arguably disturbing that the Western concept of the self individuates and achieves maturity without any reference to another. One has to wait for the works of Buber, Kierkegaard and Levinas to arrive at a redefinition of the self as intrinsically connected to another and this, in the looming shadow of a totalitarian worldview ever more threatening to the dimension of the other. One has to wait for post-Holocaust thought to genuinely understand the urgency of a redefinition of the self in terms of its human interconnectivity. Can one not indeed see in the totalitarian regimes which tore the twentieth century apart, an extrapolation of the Western self in its autonomy, centrality and obsession with power?

It is the preoccupation with what constitutes the evidence of the profoundly disturbing character of the Western concept of the self that is at the origin of this work. The purpose of this book is to recover an alternative definition of the self, one that is no longer merely autonomous, self-sufficient and masterful as the Western concept of the self, but one which finds the dimension of the other at the very moment of its individuation. It will be argued that such a self can no more be a grounded and enrooted self in being, but rather must have experienced the trauma of exile and de-centeredness for only as such will it be able to allow for a space to open up for the other. It is then from a wholly different perspective that I intend to approach the concept of the self, one which will constitute, as Levinas put it, a veritable "ontological inversion" and will reverse the Western view of the self. Such a radically different view is that of biblical thought. The purpose of this project will be to show that far from attaining its full maturation in an act of possession or mastery, the biblical self individuates in relationship; the true self awakens, emerges through a process of de-centralization, of exile. Self is thus defined in the Bible in reference to an other; the biblical self is therefore essentially an ethical self.

The biblical view of the self thus brings in a wholly new conception of the self, one that is no more central, autonomous, masterful—and as such, isolated, fragmented, amoral—but de-centered, exiled, vulnerable, but only as such, intrinsically relational and ethical. Levinas comments:

> The Jewish man discovers man before discovering landscapes and towns. He is at home in society before being so in a house. He understands the world on the basis of the other rather than the whole of being functioning in relation to the earth. He is in a sense exiled on this earth, as the Psalmist says, and he finds a meaning to the earth on the basis of a human society. This is not an analysis of the contemporary Jewish soul; it is the literal teaching of the Bible in which the earth is not possessed individually but belongs to God. Man begins in the desert where he dwells in tents, and adores God in a transportable temple.[9]

Exile finds itself therefore at the very heart of the Hebrew worldview and narrative. It constitutes the very fiber of Jewish existence and the very impulse of its ethical orientation.

Indeed, the biblical view is permeated with exile, starting with the exile of the first human couple, the exile of the Patriarchs, that of the Exodus, followed by the first and second Babylonian exiles, to the present Diaspora. One can readily make the case that the Bible is a book about exile. Interestingly, however, the argument can be made that exile in the Bible is not so much a curse as an opportunity for redemption holding ethical implications. Levinas comments on the exilic condition of the Hebrews in Egypt as follows:

> The condition—or incondition—of strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt brings man closer to his fellow man. Men seek one another in their incondition of strangers. No one is at home. The memory of that servitude assembles humanity.[10]

In other words, although exile is often undergone as a curse, or punishment, the biblical view always uncovers, beneath the pain and humiliation of exile, a deep ethical undertone. Such an exile is what constitutes the beginning of an awakening to the dimension of the other and, as such, holds redemptive and ethical potentialities.

This work will limit itself, however, to the study of exile in the biblical book of Genesis. The focus on this particular book stems first and foremost from its universality. Indeed, the whole first part of the book of Genesis (Gen. 1–11) has nothing to do with the story of the Jews, but rather with the story of mankind. Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Nimrod, and so forth are all non-Jewish characters who are depicted as the common ancestors of mankind. The struggles and journeys of these characters are thus meant to speak to the general condition of humanity. The exilic journeys east of Eden of the characters drawn from this section of the book of Genesis thus hold a universal meaning

pertaining to the human condition in general. In the first part of this work, I shall analyze the signification of the exiles of Adam, Eve, Cain and of the sons of Shem—that is to say, the builders of the tower of Babel.

But this work does not want to limit itself to these first eleven chapters, but will also attempt to uncover the meaning of the exiles of the individuals figuring in the history of election. Indeed, the remaining chapters of the book of Genesis have to do with the chosen people of God; it is the story of the patriarchs and matriarchs whose exiles will contain lessons of spirituality in addition to general wisdom as to the human condition. From these, I have chosen the exiles of Abraham, Rebekah, Jacob and the sons of Levi, that is to say, the Levites. These exiles contain hidden lessons of spirituality and outline the structure of all great mystical and spiritual journeys. In fact, these four exiles will journey no longer eastward, but westward towards Eden, as though retracing humanity's steps back to the origin of its encounter with the divine. It is then a total of eight portraits of exile, eight exilic journeys, that will be sketched out through the course of this work.

The main purpose of this work will then consist in showing the guiding thread behind these exiles. It will be shown that, at each moment, there exists, in each of these individual journeys, a pedagogy of exile. Something is to be learned through the event of exile. It will be shown that exile is not just a curse, or a misfortune, but holds redemptive, ethical implications. There is thus, arguably, in the Bible, notably in the book of Genesis, a leitmotif of exile, a philosophy of exile, where exile is seen as a key moment in the individuation of subjectivity. As such, this work will attempt to show that exile constitutes, in each of these eight characters, a key moment in their individuation as subjects, a turning point wherein the ego becomes a full-fledged self. Furthermore, it will be shown that all these men and women found their true destiny and identity in exile, in a movement of decentralization and of going-to-another or of living-for-another. This book will tell of their journey into exile and the emergence of their true identity as a man and as a woman.

Methodology

Some words must at this point be said as to the methodology that will be adopted here in approaching the biblical text. My approach wills itself less exegetical than philosophical, by which I mean that the text will be approached with an inquisitive and questioning mind in an attempt to uncover the meaning and significance behind each of the exilic journeys studied. The approach will then be one that constantly interrogates the text in order to uncover a meaning of philosophical value. The text will, then, not be approached in order to abstract from it a set of rules—as would a legal reading—or to uncover meanings about God—as would a theological reading—but to uncover meaning and wisdom about the human condition in general. It is then not as a theologian that I would like here to encounter the biblical text,

but as a philosopher, and, more specifically, as a Levinasian philosopher that I would like to offer a reading of the stories chosen for the purpose of this work. It is in light of Levinas's philosophy that I will approach the eight exilic journeys of this work.

One might wonder, however, how Levinas would have anything to say about exile. Indeed, Levinas is primordially known in academia as a philosopher of ethics. Not much has been written about him as a philosopher of exile. It can be argued, however, that Emmanuel Levinas can be read as the philosopher of exile *par excellence*.[11] Not only is he someone who has experienced exile in his flesh, but, as a post-Holocaust thinker and writer, he understood the relevance of working out a redefinition of subjectivity, no longer as a central and masterful being and therefore oblivious to the other, but as a de-centered, exilic being and, as such, capable of ethics. In his response to the twentieth-century crisis of subjectivity, *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas sketches out the necessity of such a redefinition of subjectivity if the West is to maintain its humanistic tradition in the face of the all too recent horrors which have undermined it: "This is a challenge of consciousness, not a consciousness of the challenge."[12] In other words, we are at a point where consciousness is no longer the one judging its surroundings, as with the Cartesian ego, it is no longer "consciousness of the challenge," but rather, where consciousness itself is judged, itself challenged.

Levinas further describes this challenge that consciousness is to undergo if it is to retain a place in the discourse of the West in these words:

> The Ego loses its sovereign coincidence with self, its identification where consciousness comes back triumphantly to itself to reside in itself. In the face of the obligation of the Other, the Ego is banished from that repose, is not the already glorious consciousness of this exile.[13]

That is to say, the challenge that consciousness is to undergo if it is to be conserved in the discourse of the West is the one posed by the human face of the other, which, as such, ever challenges the self's central position in the world. Only upon heeding this challenge and allowing the deep transformation of its structure from a central being to a de-centered, exiled being this challenge entails, will consciousness survive the "crisis of subjectivity." Such is then the "challenge of consciousness" that the Levinasian corpus intends to describe and articulate ever more clearly in the course of his works.

Thus, the essence of Levinas's ethical philosophy will rest, sooner or later, upon this reformulation of the structures of subjectivity from a central, masterful stance to a de-centered, exilic stance, inasmuch as only the latter is susceptible of allowing for an ethical space to be opened. Only a self that has undergone exile, which has relinquished its central position in the world, is capable of encountering an other in that world. The structure of the ethical encounter then is necessarily exile. Levinas's ethics must then be understood as an ethics of exile. The structure of the ethical subject must have

undergone exile if the awakening to ethics is to occur. This is summed up in a statement by Levinas in *Difficult Freedom* commenting on the Jewish exilic way in the world:

> Freedom with regards to the sedentary forms of existence is perhaps the human way of being in this world. For Judaism, the world becomes intelligible before a human face and not, as for the great contemporary philosopher who sums up an important aspect of the West through houses, temples and bridge.[14]

We now better understand the application of Levinas's philosophy to the biblical narrative of exile. What better way to elucidate the respective exiles of each of the chosen individuals than in the light of a philosophy that has already explicated the redemptive and ethical implications of that exile? Thus, it is the Levinasian analysis of exile, his work on the exilic structure of subjectivity and his articulation of the ethical implications of this exile that I intend to apply to each of the eight exilic journeys at hand. The purpose of the present work will then be to clarify with greater precision and depth the significance of each of these exilic journeys in light of Levinas's philosophy of exile. The methodology adopted throughout this work will be to apply the Levinasian analyses on the exilic structure of the ethical subject to these stories. Levinas will thus be oft quoted in this work at key moments where the biblical narrative rejoins his own analyses of subjectivity. Thus, this work will attempt to offer a Levinasian reading of the biblical passages chosen in order to see how the Levinasian analyses of exile can illuminate these passages and bring a clearer understanding of the ethical and redemptive undertones of each of the exilic journeys chosen.

This philosophical approach to the biblical text brings to the fore, however, a number of questions. Can one indeed bring such a foreign lens to the Bible without distorting its original meaning? Can one approach an ancient Middle Eastern religious scripture from a twentieth-century philosophical perspective without doing violence to the original intention of that scripture? This view can be proposed, however, only if the meaning of a given text is understood as already given apart from the one who reads it and interprets it, that is to say, as a static, already ever "said" rather than a living "saying," ever speaking, ever being addressed to an interlocutor. It is the latter which, according to Levinas, constitutes the structure of revelation. In an essay on the Hebrew concept of revelation, Levinas observes that:

> [T]his invitation to seek and decipher, to *Midrash*, already constitutes the reader's participation in the Revelation, in Scripture. The reader, in his own fashion, is a scribe. This provides us with a first indication of what we might call the "status" of the Revelation: its word coming from elsewhere, from outside, and simultaneously dwelling in the person who receives it. More than just a listener, is not the human being the unique "terrain" in which exteriority can appear?[15]

In other words, far from distorting revelation, the reader's participation, his or her questions and inquiries, constitute the very mode of manifestation of revelation. Revelation is not jeopardized by the human mind that applies itself to understand it, but rather occurs, unravels in this very partnership with the human. To approach the biblical text philosophically is then not to distort its message, but on the contrary, to unravel, explicate its meaning. But what of the temporal lapse between the interpreter and the biblical text? Can this not lead to further distortions? On the contrary, argues Levinas: only upon opening up the text to a contemporary interpretation will this text be preserved as a living text and not as a dead word.

> One may wonder whether the book, as a book, before becoming a document, is not the modality by which what is said lays itself open to exegesis, calls for it; and where meaning, immobilized in the characters, already tears the texture in which it is held. . . . The infinite life of texts living through the life of the men who hear them.[16]

And yet, one might still be wary of such an approach to the biblical text. Does not the opening up of the biblical text to a philosophical interpretation still run the danger of its meaning being reduced to the arbitrary interpretations of the philosopher? This danger is not denied by Levinas who makes the observation that, while the text needs to be heeded by an interpreter in order to come alive, the latter needs to show himself or herself capable of heeding significations transcending his or her own interpretation, if he or she is to prevent the distortion of its intended meaning. Levinas writes:

> This in no way means that in Jewish spirituality the Revelation is left to the arbitrariness of subjective fantasies . . . this is made both by a necessary reference of the subjective to the historical continuity of the reading, and by the tradition of commentaries that cannot be ignored under the pretext that inspirations come to you directly from the text.[17]

Thus, according to Levinas, the best way to protect the original meaning of the text is to prevent the isolation of the interpreter by inserting his or her interpretation in the historical line of interpretation.

Interestingly, Levinas does not encourage here a purist approach to the text whereby the meaning of the text is preserved through a monological hermeneutical approach. That is to say, the intention of the text is not safeguarded by reducing it to one possible meaning—which would, in itself, constitute an act of arbitrary violence—but, rather, in opening it up to multiple interpretations each serving to limit and balance each other. Such an interpretation merits, in its opening up to an intersubjective mode of hermeneutics, the denotation of ethical and it is precisely this hermeneutical approach which the present work adopts in its interpretation of the biblical text. Thus, it might be possible to insert the present Levinasian interpretation in the wider corpus of

already existing interpretations. As such, this Levinasian investigation of the biblical text will attempt to resonate with the interpretations of other exegetes and commentaries, such as the Midrashim, the Medieval commentators, and more recent exegetical commentaries on the Bible. This project will, then, constitute a philosophical investigation of exile in the book of Genesis, with constant attentiveness to the oral and philosophical tradition which carries it; for only as such, will the present work's interpretation remain, as Levinas has shown, an ethical one inasmuch as it avoids the pitfalls of arbitrariness and violent solipsism.

Outline

This work is divided into eight sections, each taking up a different narrative or story of exile. These eight exiles can, in turn, be divided into two segments: the exiles journeying east of Eden—away from the divine origin of humanity—and the exiles journeying westward back to Eden—that of the elect chosen to journey back towards their spiritual destiny. The first set of exiles will be seen mainly as a punishment—and yet, I will show that each exile also holds redemptive possibilities; such will be the exiles of Adam, Eve, Cain, and of the sons of Shem. The second set of exiles are seen mainly as a calling—that of the chosen ones of God called to journey towards Canaan; such will be the exiles of Abraham, Rebekah, Jacob, and of the sons of Levi.

The present work begins with the nature of Eve's exile. It will be shown that Eve remains an ambiguous figure, either cursed (by traditional scholarship, mostly) for her leading Adam astray, or praised (by feminist readership, mostly) for assuming her autonomy and independence in the face of man. While this chapter's analysis will recognize the progress achieved by a feminist reading of the text, it will beg to question the validity of such a claim for progress. While the woman achieves her independence and individuation, she does so, it seems, at a terrible price: that of man's individuation, freedom and capacity for discourse. This chapter will thus problematize Eve's individuating stance and claim for autonomy and this, in light of the very intention of the biblical text. It will be argued that throughout our text, it is a de-centered subjectivity—one that is, as such, capable of ethics, that is to say, of opening up a space for the other—that is praised as worthy of consideration. The expulsion of Eve from the garden must then be seen in a completely different light, not as a punishment but as holding redemptive possibilities allowing for a recovery of Eve's original de-centeredness and, as such, ethical stance in the world.

The second chapter will introduce the figure of Adam. Traditionally, the figure of Adam has been interpreted as having been given a central and masterful stance in the world by his creator. Feminist critiques of the story of the creation of Adam have undermined this definition and shown the dangers inherent in such a definition of man thereby, however, accusing the biblical narrative of emerging under the influence of patriarchy; this remains to be seen, however. This chapter will attempt to understand whether the definition

of man as a central figure is truly a biblical one. It will be argued that the biblical definition of man presents, rather, a subjectivity structured as de-centered and exiled within the material world and ever striving for a metaphysical destiny which transcends it. The fall of man would, then, no longer constitute a loss of his central stance in the world—as can be inferred from traditional interpretations—but, rather, a loss of his exilic destiny. In this light, however, the expulsion of Adam from Eden takes on a completely different signification as holding the redemptive possibility of Adam recovering his original exilic, and as such, metaphysical stance in the world.

The story of Cain is another intriguing narrative in the book of Genesis, featuring exile again. From the onset of the story, Cain is described as a masterful, central figure in the biblical text. This centrality finds itself, however, soon thereafter undermined by God's seemingly unjust favoritism towards his brother Abel. If the present work's thesis is correct, however, and the Bible indeed ascribes greater value to an exilic subjectivity than to a central and masterful one, it becomes possible here to interpret God's actions as an attempt to de-center the Cainesque subject in order to awaken it to ethics. This action on God's part fails lamentably, however, leading not to an ethical awakening but, on the contrary, to the first murder in the history of humankind. One is now in a position to better understand the punishment of exile given to Cain by God as an attempt, perhaps, to give Cain again a chance to redeem himself through the experience of exile necessary to any ethical awakening.

This section will conclude with the exile of the sons of Shem, that is to say, of the builders of Babel. There are a lot of parallels between the story of Babel and the story of Cain: both feature a will to power, a central and masterful stance (albeit a collective one in Babel), both feature a punishment of exile. The problem of Babel is, however, harder to understand than that of Cain, inasmuch as the Babelians are, in contrast to Cain, a peace-loving people intent on dwelling in unity with their neighbors. What is, then, the problem of the Babelians? Our chapter will analyze this very problem and will attempt to situate the roots of the Babelian evil precisely in a central and masterful will to power oblivious to the dimension of the other. Only in the light of such a diagnostic of the Babelian evil will it be possible to understand the redemptive potentialities hidden in God's confounding of the languages and the exile that ensues therefrom.

This section on the sons of Shem constitutes the junction point, with the ensuing section featuring no longer an exilic journey east of Eden, but a call to journey westward back to Eden. Exile is now no longer a punishment but a divine calling. It is no longer a curse, but, as we shall see, a source of blessing. Such will be the character of the next exilic figures portrayed in this work: Abraham, Rebekah, Jacob, and the sons of Levi. This new section begins with the exile of Abraham, exilic figure *par excellence*. Again, our story begins with a call to exile from the land of his ancestors, his people, and his father's household. Again one wonders as to why this exile is necessary. Is it not possible to worship the true God from within one's own people? Why such a harsh

command? The exile of Abraham is further radicalized in the rite of circumcision whereby he finds the source of his very power and life force marked by divine touch. The rite of circumcision might then be understood as a ritual whereby the subject finds itself de-centered or exiled from its own powers in its very flesh. One wonders again as to the significations of this exile. Finally, one witnesses the final exile of the Akedah wherein Abraham finds himself torn from his son, that is to say from all of the possibilities that the future holds for him, from any hope at possession or inheritance of the land of the promise. And again one wonders as to the ethical/redemptive possibilities of such a horrifying test.

The exile of Rebekah mirrors Abraham's exilic calling on several points. This time, however, the woman is not called to journey towards a land, but towards a person. The ethical implications of Rebekah's exile are thus from the start explicit. Her encounter with Isaac also has exilic implications in the act whereby Rebekah veils herself, thereby signifying an absence, an exile from his world. Again, the implications of such a gesture must be explored. Her exile to the land of the promise finds itself, furthermore, much like Abraham's, radicalized in her experience of barrenness. Barrenness is significant and its exilic connotation blatant inasmuch as birth constitutes the seat of the woman's powers, the promise of her finding a place in a given community. In such a context, barrenness constitutes a painful experience of exile and estrangement not only from her community, but from Rebekah's very experience as a woman. Such an exile would incidentally be shared by all but one matriarch. What then is the significance of such an exile? What ethical lessons are contained within such a painful experience?

The path of Jacob follows that of his mother's in a twofold experience of exile; one that leads him to Bethel, the other to Peniel. Interestingly, both of these exiles take place at night and lead to a direct encounter with God. It is as though Jacob's exile was a necessary stage to the encounter with God. But why is that? Why is exile a fundamental moment of the encounter with the divine? Moreover, both exiles are connected to a state of powerlessness whereby Jacob finds himself stripped of his powers. In the first instance, Jacob finds comfort in God's presence, or house, thereby finding a sense of protection. In the other instance, however, Jacob finds himself struck at the very seat of his powers, this time no longer in a figurative sense as with Abraham, but in an actual sense by the Angel's hand. It is this painful ordeal which, however, marks the beginning of a new life for Jacob as well as that of a new destiny. Again one wonders as to why this experience of de-centering or exile would have been central to Jacob's finding a new direction and new orientation to his life.

Finally, the last chapter will explore the exile of the sons of Levi, or the Levites. Although this chapter anticipates passages in the book of Exodus, the stage is set in the book of Genesis wherein the exilic destiny of Jacob's son Levi is viewed as a punishment for his rash act of vengeance upon and murder of the men having defiled his sister Dinah. This exile finds itself, however, albeit not reversed, but transformed in the book of Exodus in a way to honor the

tribe of Levi for its faithfulness to God in the midst of rampant idolatry. The exilic curse of Jacob remains but is transformed in a blessing when the tribe is given the Levitical role of teachers and priests in Israel and commanded to hold no part or inheritance in the land of the promise. This association between the priestly calling and exile deserves further exploration as one wonders why the priestly function must be associated with exile or landlessness.

Notes

1 Emmanuel Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2007), 119.
2 Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, 119.
3 Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 49–50.
4 Levinas, *On Escape*, 51.
5 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 10.
6 Recent feminist thought has, it seems, adopted the same model in its attempt to describe the feminine self. Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*, refuses the heretofore-accepted definition of woman as a derivative being, whose destiny and *raison d'être* is man. She strives, rather, in her book to depict the awakening of woman's identity in the face of patriarchy as an independent, autonomous, and proactive self. The ensuing feminist thought has followed in Beauvoir's footsteps and attempted to reclaim woman's identity from the once passive, silent, submissive, and derivative roles it had been reduced to. Feminist thought has thus accomplished much in reclaiming for women an active, discursive, proactive, and central role in their self-individuation and fulfillment as women.
7 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 42.
8 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.
9 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 22.
10 Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 66.
11 See my *Emmanuel Levinas: A Philosophy of Exile* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).
12 Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, 33.
13 Ibid., 33.
14 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 23.
15 Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, trans. Gary D. Mole (London: Continuum, 2007), 131.
16 Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 110.
17 Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 132.

1 Eve

The undoing of a woman

Introduction

The figure of Eve has mostly been read in the history of biblical interpretation as a fallen figure responsible for the downfall of man and the origin of the curse which was to befall the whole earth.[1] This reductive and unfair portrayal of Eve has thankfully been countered by a number of modern interpretations. Modern feminist interpretations have achieved much in rediscovering the hidden potentialities in Eve. For example, Sun Ai Lee Park's poetic re-reading of Genesis 3 unveils in Eve's partaking of the forbidden fruit a key moment of her individuation.[2] Other feminist commentators such as Phyllis Trible see Eve's behavior as demonstrating initiative and decisiveness.[3] These feminist interpretations do much to restore woman's dignity in the face of massive historical condemnation.

While I recognize the invaluable contribution of these feminist readings of Eve in restoring her character and dignity, I cannot help but feel somewhat uneasy with this interpretation. Indeed, although offering a more balanced vision of what happened in Genesis 3, such interpretations seem to go against the biblical intention which consists in finding fault with Eve's behavior. The question is, of course, what does this fault consist of? Modern feminist interpretations have done much to laud Eve's stance of independence and initiative. Such a stance seems to constitute a priori a moment of liberation of woman from her heretofore secondary and relative position to man. Eve is praised by feminist commentators for her refusal to figure as the "second sex," as Simone de Beauvoir would put it. Indeed, Eve shines in the story for her centrality and proactiveness, moreover, she emerges as the first philosopher, the first being to desire wisdom!

Eve's individuation as a woman thus seems to coincide with her partaking of the fruit—her emergence as a central, speaking, and proactive being all figure as moments of this individuation. The question arises, however, as to what genuinely constitutes the structure of individuation, and whether centrality and proactiveness can be understood as moments of this individuation. What feminist interpretations seem to overlook is that the centrality of Eve comes at a price, inasmuch as it seems to coincide with the obliteration of *man*'s centrality,

proactiveness and capacity for discourse. The thinking, speaking, proactive Eve finds herself, at the end of her individuation, alone in the world. Such a stance might be pleasing to the modern conception of subjectivity as central, solitary, and masterful, but it emerges, problematically, in the total absence of reference to an other While Eve finds herself, she loses the other.

It is this problem that this chapter proposes to address. In the face of the Western/Cartesian conception of the self as central, proactive, and masterful, I would like to uncover an alternative structure of subjectivity that figures in the biblical narrative—one that is, on the contrary, de-centered, exilic, and vulnerable. In Genesis 3, Eve's stance coincides with the Western conception of subjectivity of centrality and masterfulness. This is why she is praised by modern interpretations. The biblical narrative takes issue, however, with this stance and strikes Eve with the punishment of pain and exile. She is expulsed from paradise and condemned to a life of hardship, pain, and submission. Such a punishment seems very harsh indeed and it is difficult not to see there a return of patriarchy in the narrative.[4] Indeed, why such a heavy punishment? Why exile? Why so much pain?

The purpose of this chapter will be to understand the significance of exile in Eve's life. This exile is, in fact, not only given to her at the end of chapter 3, but finds itself interwoven, arguably, in the very substance of her being. We shall see that within the very core of the femininity ascribed to her by the creative act lies an exilic orientation to the other: she is to be man's helper. We shall also see that it is, however, precisely this calling that Eve relinquishes at the moment of her temptation for the more self-serving goals of wisdom and knowledge. But one might protest: what is wrong with seeking wisdom? More importantly, is not the moment of temptation crucial for the individuation of woman as a person with her own desires and aspirations? These questions are important ones and necessitate a closer analysis of this moment of individuation on the part of woman. Only then will we be equipped to understand the *raison d'être* of the curse ascribed to woman. Indeed, far from debilitating the woman, I shall argue that the curse has a redemptive purpose: that of reminding her of her exilic calling as for-the-other.

The essence of womanhood

The Lord God said,
"It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a helper suitable for him." . . .
So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep;
And while he was sleeping,
He took one of the man's ribs
And then closed up the place with flesh.
Then the Lord God made a woman
From the rib he had taken out of the man,
And he brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:18, 21–22 (NIV)

What is striking upon reading about the creation of woman in the second narrative of Creation (Gen. 2:21–22) is the blatant passivity of woman at every stage of her creation. Although both man and woman undergo creation, God's role in woman's creation is much more pronounced and necessitates three action verbs on the part of God: "he took," "he made," and "he brought her" (Gen. 2:21–22). There is thus a three-fold passivity on the part of woman during the work of creation versus only two moments of passivity for man ("[he] formed" and "[he] breathed" [Gen. 2:7]). Moreover, man is right away ascribed a central position in the world. He is "to work" and "take care of" the world (Gen. 2:15). Likewise in his relationship to woman, the man's role is active. He is to "leav[e] his father and mother" and "[be] united to his wife" (Gen. 2:24). The woman, on the other hand, is not given any such activities.[5] She is not, in the second narrative of creation, required to position herself in the world and is never invited to rise above her condition of passivity as Adam is.

This is interesting and gives rise to a number of reflections: indeed, it seems in this whole passage that, although Adam rises to a certain degree of individuation with regards to his creator through the invitation given him to rule and master the universe, Eve never reaches the same level. This lack of individuation on her part is further accentuated by her silence throughout the stages of her creation. Both God and Adam speak. God speaks her into being and Adam speaks upon meeting Eve (which is in itself an interesting phenomenon: as though Adam's individuation occurred only upon meeting Eve). Eve, on the other hand never speaks. She is, furthermore, never spoken to. While God commands Adam to not eat of the tree, he does not reiterate the command to Eve. Adam speaks upon encountering Eve, but does not address her. He only speaks *of* her: "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23).

This lack of discourse as far as Eve is concerned is extremely disturbing. Her silence is all the more striking insofar as everyone around her seems to be talking. It is as though she does not exist as a separate, individuated being worthy to be addressed. This lack of discourse betrays this lack of individuation on her part inasmuch as discourse constitutes a way of welcoming another's perspective, that is, of acknowledging them as a subjectivity. Indeed, discourse is what allows the other to emerge as a person, that is, as an other separate and distinct from the self. One does not speak to objects but only to subjects. To be addressed is thus to be recognized as a subject, as someone who can, in turn, address me, unlike the material and inert objects of the world. The fact that Eve is never engaged in any discourse, whether from man or from God, seems to imply that she is not yet seen as a subject worthy of being spoken to, that is to say, as a distinct other in the context of creation.

It is no small wonder, then, that upon being addressed by the serpent, woman seems to come alive. All of a sudden, she is *addressed*, talked to, spoken to. Her place in the world is acknowledged. And for the first time, Eve speaks. One cannot help but see in the scene of temptation a key moment in the individuation of woman. The serpent seems to be the only one in the world who, up to this point, has addressed her, in other words, has acknowledged her as a

face, as an other, and as a person. And she, for the first time, becomes aware of her own desires and aspirations distinct from a preordained design ascribed to her. Indeed, one can read the moment of temptation and the fall of woman as a blatant refusal of her preordained passive and silent essence. The question remains, however, as to whether this refusal on the part of woman genuinely elevates her to individuation or whether something else is not at play beneath the figures of discourse?

While many feminist interpreters see the moment of the temptation and the fall as a necessary stage towards the woman's individuation as a woman,[6] one might wonder, however, whether this event does not, on the contrary, constitute the loss of woman's femininity. This, however, remains to be argued. One must first understand what really constitutes woman's femininity. One must come to a deeper understanding as to the significance of woman's passivity and of woman's silence, both of which are profoundly problematic notions inasmuch as woman's silence and passivity have heretofore been associated with man's domination over woman. Woman is traditionally understood as holding a passive role with regards to man's actions and decisions in the face of which she is required to hold her peace. The question arises, however, as to whether this is the brand of passivity that has been given to the woman upon her creation.

Indeed, while the creation of Eve discloses feminine essence as essentially passive, this passivity is interrupted in the rapport with the man. Far from having been given a passive role in the face of man, one realizes upon reading the biblical passage, that she has been given an active role: That of the *ezer* [help-meet]. When in relation to man, the woman has not been created to be passive, but, far to the contrary, to actively engage in the role of the *ezer*, which contains a redemptive connotation. The passivity of woman is thus not to be understood in connection to man. Her passivity is not related to man. Far to the contrary, in her relationship to man, she is given an active, even redemptive role. To understand woman as passive with regards to man is a false interpretation of the biblical text and traces its roots rather to the Greek view of woman as constituting matter and man the form.[7]

How, then, are we to understand the passivity of woman? Our passage shows passivity as the very structure of woman's rapport with God. This is emphasized in the three-fold action that God performs not only to bring her to life but also to relate her to Adam: "[h]e took," "[he] made," "he brought her." Not only is woman's essence relative to a divine action, but her destiny as a partner for man is also dependent on divine intervention. In that, she differs profoundly from Adam, who although deriving his essence from God's actions, finds that his destiny rests in his own actions: he is to work and take care of the earth, as well as leave his parents to unite to his wife. The man is thus required, upon his creation, to position himself in the world. This gives rise to an interesting distinction: while Adam is commanded to take an active stance in the world, Eve retains the passive stance of dependence upon God's actions. She is not commanded, in the second narrative of creation, to "work," or "take care

of" the earth. The only actions ascribed to her are in the passive tense, as initiated by God: she is "taken," "made," "brought" to man. Thus, while Adam is required to act on his own, she finds herself through and through *acted* by God. In other words, what seems to characterize woman, in distinction to man, is an intrinsic capacity to yield to divine design. Woman, from the beginning, is attuned to God, and maintains the inherent receptivity of her created state throughout her individuation.

One might wonder, however, at what can be described as an act of violence on the part of God towards woman. Whereas man is allowed to rise above his passive condition of creature and spoken to as a rational, separate being, woman is never given this privilege. She remains creature, she remains matter to be acted upon and never seems to rise up to the level of her form-giving (and name-calling) husband. Whereas man is commanded to act and position himself in the universe, woman is described as acted upon in a way that seems to forfeit any attempt on her part to act on her own and to position *herself* in the universe. Woman is thus defined as an intrinsic attunement to otherness, to a design other than her own and beyond herself. What seems to constitute the femininity of woman is this attunement or sensitivity to divine wisdom. But does this attunement constitute woman as a lesser being? Is she less of a person inasmuch as she never reaches the degree of individuation that Adam reaches as a separate and positioned being?

It depends on one's definition of individuation and subjectivity. In a Western framework, where subjectivity is defined as independent and separate, as the center of the world and the origin of all meaning, as for example, the Cartesian subjectivity, Eve seems to impersonate a lesser subjectivity, having not yet reached a full degree of autonomy. Yet, one can wonder whether the passivity of woman necessarily signifies an inferior, still un-individuated state on her part or whether this passivity does not precisely constitute her elevation or dignity among the created beings. Indeed, is not subjectivity characterized, far to the contrary, by its capacity to transcend itself and relate to a dimension of exteriority beyond itself, that is to say, by its capacity for exile? Is this not how Edmund Husserl, the great thinker of consciousness, defined the subject as always oriented, turned towards an other than itself? What characterizes the subject, thus, is its capacity to relate, to be sensitive to otherness, to a dimension beyond itself.

Subjectivity finds itself in this context redefined from substance to subject, from enrootedness in its essence to an exile beyond its own essence. Whereas Adam is called to position himself in the world as a central being, Eve's destiny seems to call her ever beyond her own natural substance to a destiny willed not by herself but by an other. As such, woman ever maintains an exilic stance within the world, ever attuned to a calling beyond any attempt at positioning. Her attunement to otherness, her essential receptivity and permeability to divine wisdom, and her natural state of exile is, therefore, what paradoxically constitutes her as a full-fledged subject without any prior need for individuation and positioning. Her essence is defined not as position or substance but as de-position and exile, ever attuned to a calling beyond herself.

It is, then, this natural sensitivity to otherness, and above all, to the otherness of God, which characterizes woman in distinction to man. Thus the subjectivity of woman is structured differently from that of man. Whereas man's subjectivity is structured, as we shall see, as a separation from the dust of the earth but, then, as a positioning of itself in the world through work and toil, the feminine subjectivity individuates in a wholly different manner. She individuates in the moment of inspiration, in the heeding of a call which constantly exiles it from its own self. Thus, what makes woman a subject, what raises her to personhood, is not an act of self-positioning in the world on her part, but an acknowledgment, a heeding of the other's voice within her and an acquiescence to the transcendent orientation given to her by that call. Thus it is this sensitivity or passivity to the divine other and an acquiescence of the exile it entails which raises woman to personhood and constitutes the essence of her femininity rather than, as for man, a positioning or activity.

The essence of femininity does not then lie, as for man, in a separation as a subject positioned in the world, but, on the contrary, in sensitivity and permeability to the divine. The essence of femininity is thus intrinsically de-centered and exilic. Womanhood is thus not achieved through an act of position, through a striving or becoming as Beauvoir indicates in her book *The Second Sex*,[8] but in recovering an original attunement to the divine action. The feminine is thus characterized by an essential de-centeredness, or exile. She is not at the origin of her actions, but, on the contrary, allows her actions to be inspired by an orientation which transcends her. To be feminine is thus to decenter oneself, to exile oneself, to suspend one's actions, and allow for an other to inspire one's actions. A woman in the biblical sense is never in charge of her own destiny but, rather, remains ever attuned to a calling which transcends her.

While woman's destiny has been inspired and brought about by a divine command, it remains painfully relative to man. We have now understood that woman's passivity signified an attunement to God and not submission to man. However, feminist commentators remain profoundly disturbed with a definition of womanhood as essentially *relative* to man, a feature which the biblical text emphasizes by the play on words *ish/ishah*.[9] Although the two words do not share the same root, the play on words betrays an intention, on the part of the author of our passage to show a derivation, a relativity of the female essence from the male essence. This relativity is alluded to by God himself when he speaks of the creation of Eve as being *for* man (Gen. 2:18). She has been created *for* man, as a helper fitted for him. Finally, man himself establishes this relativity upon meeting Eve by exclaiming: "flesh of *my* flesh and bone of *my* bones" (Gen. 2:23). Here again, Eve is defined as the one who is *like* man. She is the perfect alter *ego*. She is the other self, the other man.

Feminist scholars have taken issue with this derivation, notably Simone de Beauvoir who questions such a definition of woman as being solely there *for* man. In her work, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir observes: "She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is

the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other."[10] This passage could well be a commentary on our text. Indeed, our text describes woman as differentiated in relation to man. She comes from man, emerges from an act of differentiation. But as such, Simone de Beauvoir comments, she is only a relative, inessential, accidental being, versus man who is the origin, the absolute, the essential being. In such a reading, man is situated at the center of the universe, with the woman holding a mere marginal, exilic position in that world. The question of course remains as to whether Simone de Beauvoir's interpretation of the status of woman is the one held by our passage. Does the fact that the woman is created *from* and *for* man make her a second-class citizen? Does her emergence from man and orientation towards man make her an accidental being versus man as the central and essential originary being?

It is interesting that although our text describes woman as relative to man, it does not mean that she is *derived* from him and therefore constitutes a lesser version of himself as Aristotle thought, woman being for him a "*lack* of qualities."[11] Neither is woman seen in our passage as an "accident" of man in the Aristotelian sense of an inessential addition to man. Finally, woman is not seen as subservient to man on account of her being made *for* him. On the contrary, far from being a derivation of man, woman signifies in our passage an *interruption* of man. Far from being accidental and subservient, woman is defined as playing a leading role as the *ezer kenegdo* [help-meet] of man. But we need to further define the status of *ezer kenegdo*. The Hebrew term *kenegdo* is an ambiguous term that implies both the meaning of "being-with" and "being-against" man. Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi comments on this ambiguity and interprets the term *kenegdo* as meaning literally, "opposite, opposed to him."[12] He then elaborates and says, "[i]f he is worthy she shall be a help to him; if he is unworthy she shall be opposed to him, fight him."[13]

Woman in Rashi's commentary is thus much more than a mere continuation or support of man's aspirations and endeavors. Rashi's commentary of our text shows that woman can, on the contrary, constitute an opposition or interruption of man's desires and aspirations. One might wonder, however, how this opposition of woman, her interruption and confrontation, can be described as a "help" for man? The Midrash offers an interesting perspective on this problem. In its commentary on the creation of man, the Midrash Rabbah explains that the reason man was put to sleep was for the angels to realize his difference from God and not, in their admiration for him, to fall into the error of worshipping him.[14] In this Midrash, the need for a limitation of man is described in the context of man's being put to sleep, which coincides, interestingly, with the creation of Eve. Perhaps it is possible to see here an implicit connection between man's need to be limited and the creation of woman. Indeed, what better limitation for man than woman?

The Midrash thus recognizes that there is a need for man's powers to be limited and that this limitation is good. Only in his limitation will man remain human and not be taken for a god. The woman would then serve to remind the man of his own humanity and limitations, thus ensuring that he never falls

into the temptation of taking himself for a god. As such, far from holding a de-centralized and exilic position in the world of man, woman is the one who exiles and depositions *man*. Her role is to limit his central stance in the world, thereby reminding him of his own derived essence, of his own creaturiality. But there is a deeper meaning to this limitation, this opposition of woman to man. Indeed, it is only through this limitation, this opposition from woman, that the solitude of man is genuinely broken and that he finds himself capable of relating to someone or something other than himself. It is this limitation that awakens man to otherness. Levinas comments, "[t]he 'resistance' of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical."[15] The resistance of woman is thus not a negative act serving to diminish man. On the contrary, it has a positive structure: that of awakening man to an other, and therein, of awakening man to ethics. The woman thus ushers an era of ethics into the world through her intrinsic limitation and opposition to man. Before woman, there could be no ethics and, as such, no genuine rapport.

It is thus woman who teaches man to relate, who initiates him to a dimension beyond himself, to exteriority. And as such, she elevates him to his genuine humanity and subjectivity. Before the encounter with woman, man was not yet a subject. His individuation and separation as well as his mastery over the world were not yet subjectivity in the Husserlian sense as an opening onto otherness. It is woman who ascribes to man his own subjectivity. Far from being a lesser subject, woman becomes in our passage, the originary moment of human subjectivity in its highest form. The Midrash recognizes this and observes that it is only upon meeting woman that man speaks, that is, becomes a face, a person, a human individual: "[t]here is no possibility for a man without a woman, nor for a woman without a man, nor for the two of them without the Presence of God."[16] Far from being a derivative product of creation, woman presents herself in our passage as its climax, as the very passage from animality to humanity.

Yet, woman maintains throughout our text a derivative role. While she serves the central function of awakening man to his own subjectivity, of introducing him to ethics, and to the delights of otherness, she still does not seem to have any personhood of her own apart from this role *for* man. The text emphasizes this relativity of woman to man in God's words: "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). In this passage, woman is clearly defined as having been conceived *for* man. Does woman then have no identity of her own? Must she not at some point choose herself, and against all odds—this is not the easy path—shake off preordained roles and find herself as a distinct being? Simone de Beauvoir again ventures this possibility:

> Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential. How, in the feminine condition, can a human being accomplish herself? What paths are open to her?"[17]

What is interesting here is the way that Simone de Beauvoir defines subjectivity: as position and essentiality. If such is the definition of subjectivity then indeed, woman, in her de-position and exile is a lesser subject. However, the biblical understanding of subjectivity is a wholly different one from positionality and essentiality. What makes for genuine selfhood is not the capacity to find oneself or to posit oneself, but, on the contrary, the ability to efface oneself for the other and to be for-the-other, that is to say, the capacity for exile beyond oneself. Levinas comments, "[i]t is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself."[18] In other words, I find myself, as a human subject, as consciousness in the Husserlian sense, in attending to another. Before the irruption of the other in its world, the self is thus not yet a self in the full sense of the term. It might be central and posited, but it is not yet a human self, it has not yet opened unto the dimension of exteriority, it is not yet capable of journeying towards or relating to another.

Far from losing herself in this for-the-other, the woman thus finds herself. Far from needing to posit herself and strive for essentiality, the woman, in her de-position and exile towards otherness has already an access to genuine selfhood, holds already the elevated position of sensitivity to otherness and concern for otherness. The true destiny of woman lies then not in being for-herself, as Simone de Beauvoir seems to imply, but in being for-the-other. The true destiny of woman lies not in her establishing herself and positioning herself in the world, but in the ability to de-posit herself and exile herself towards an other. Luce Irigaray recognizes this being for-the-other as characteristic of the gendered being, both male and female. As sexually differentiated beings, we are, according to Irigaray, destined to the other, essentially for-the-other, "[i]n so far as I am a sexuate being, I represent a meaning for the other and I am, in a way, destined to him."[19]

The feminine thus marks the beginning of ethics not only in her limitation of man, but in her very being. At the core of the feminine being lies a for-the-other. Far from being a lesser subjectivity, the woman testifies to the beginning of ethics. Woman is already immediately and essentially consciousness *of* human subject. While, as Levinas says, "*the very femininity of woman is this initial 'after the event'*,"[20] that of coming after man's creation, this after-event spells out the dawn of an ethical stance in the world. Far from being a mere accident of man's essence, woman harbors a unique destiny, distinct from man's aspirations and desires: that of being the very origin and locus of ethics. Such is, according to Catherine Chalier, "the meaning of the feminine in the human being."[21] The destiny of woman is, thus, again structured as an exile. Once more, the biblical definition of the subjective goes against Western conceptions of the subjective as position and essentiality. Indeed, the biblical understanding defines the subjective, the human as de-position and being for-the-other. To be a subject in the biblical understanding is to be sensitive to a destiny beyond one's self, is to have awakened to otherness. In this sense, in her de-position and as an "after-event," the woman embodies the highest form of the subjective. And it is precisely this sensitivity to otherness that woman will forfeit at the moment of her temptation by the serpent.

The temptation of individuation

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals
The Lord God had made.
He said to the woman,
"Did God really say,
'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' . . .
When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree
Was good for food
And pleasing to the eye,
And also desirable for gaining wisdom,
She took some and ate it.

Genesis 3:1, 6 (NIV)

The passage narrating the temptation of Eve by the serpent constitutes a major turning point in the destiny of woman and a clear contrast with the persona she had been playing heretofore. While the preceding text on her creation was marked by her passivity and silence, we now see a woman engaging in discourse, thinking through, weighing her options, and choosing her own course. It is difficult not to see here a central moment in Eve's individuation as a person.[22] Phyllis Trible sees in this moment not the fall of Eve, but her rising up to personhood and to independence: the initiative and decision are hers alone, "[s]he acts independently."[23] For the first time, woman is addressed. It is disturbing that the serpent is her first interlocutor. Neither God nor Adam had heretofore addressed her directly. It is almost tragic that the first one to acknowledge woman as a person and a face and address her as such through discourse would be the tempter. And indeed, woman seems to have been waiting all along to be addressed: she seems to blossom forth in the dialogue. We notice things about her that we had not noticed before: a sensitivity to beauty, a desire for goodness, and, most importantly, a thirst for wisdom.

This desire for wisdom has been, in fact, identified by the Hebrew sages as essential to woman. The Midrash comments that the creation of Eve has been performed with a much more intricate action than the creation of Adam. The verb used to describe Eve's creation signifies to "build," whereas Adam is simply "formed." The sages comment on this verbal difference by referring to the etymological connection between the verb "build" and the word for "understanding," i.e. wisdom, thus implying that Eve, being more complex, more intricate, is also wiser than her husband: "'build,' which uses the consonants that bear the meaning of 'understand,' we conclude that understanding was given to the woman more than to the man."[24] This desire for wisdom on the part of woman is thus praised by the ancient Hebrew sages as constituting an essential part of her femininity. Why then does our passage ultimately condemn it and situate it at the origin of not only her downfall, but also the downfall of all of humanity? Why this rejection of Eve's individuation as a face and interlocutor, of her awakening to her own particular desires? It is possible to answer these questions in the light of the analyses conducted in our previous section.

The problem does not lie in Eve's engaging in discourse, nor in her taking the initiative. It does not even lie in her audacious desire for wisdom. The Hebrew Scriptures are replete with positive examples of women addressing men and taking bold initiatives. Abraham is commanded by God to listen to his wife's voice. Rahab, Ruth, and Esther are all praised in the Hebrew tradition for their bold initiatives. Abigail addresses David and confronts him with the mistake he is about to make. The problem then cannot lie with Eve's engaging in dialogue or taking an initiative. Perhaps, however, it is possible to situate the problem in the intention behind her action. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that Eve's actions and words have lost all reference to the divine and, as a result, all ethical orientation.

What is striking in Eve's behavior at the tree is the complete reversal of her behavior up until then. Whereas before she was silent and passive, she is now verbal and active. But it is neither her discourse nor her initiative which are the problem. We have seen that, while woman is passive with regards to God's will and action, she is called to be a helper, to be active and sometimes even confrontational vis-à-vis man. The way she is behaving with Adam is thus not the problem *per se*. The problem then lies perhaps with the inspiration and intention behind her behavior. And indeed, this intention is betrayed in the serpent's words, "you will be like God" (Gen. 3:4). Therein lies the key to her downfall. But one wonders what exactly was meant by these words and how they color her actions. How did Eve understand those words? And why did they have such an attraction to her? After all, Eve does not strike us as a person wanting to rule the universe. Her desire lies elsewhere: she seeks beauty, goodness, wisdom. She is in this sense the first philosopher. Her desires are not political, they are not "of this world." She is not coveting power or earthly domination. She *is*, however, coveting one thing: control over her own destiny.

"To be like God": in other words, to be her own creator, to be her own origin, to have control over her own destiny and actions. In Sun Ai Lee Park's words: "I want to be a person of myself/ . . . Nor being ordered neither dependent/Not even on God, the Controlling Almighty."[25] Therein lies Eve's great temptation and downfall: in her refusal of her own creaturiality and intrinsic dependence, and, more particularly, attunement with the divine will. Eve's sin lies thus not in her individuating, but in her doing so in blatant negation of her femininity, her intrinsic receptivity to the divine will and action and capacity for exile beyond herself. No longer content with being inspired by God, she wants to take matters in her own hands. No longer content to be a vessel for God, she wants to *be* like God. André LaCocque makes a similar observation when he says that:

> The primal couple, on behalf of all humanity across time, want to possess that knowledge for the power it conveys of deciding for themselves what is good and what is bad. To become (like) God means to be liable to no one for one's choices and actions, the moral scale being in one's own hands.[26]

Thus, Eve *strives* rather than *receives*. She renounces her de-position and exile for a central, godlike position in the universe. Her specifically feminine wisdom, her intrinsic attunement with divine wisdom is abandoned and replaced by her will to be her own origin and own creation.

But again, one might question the problem with this desire in Eve for self-creation. Is it not legitimate for the creature to at one point demand independence from its creator in order to individuate and come to full personhood? The Plotinian myth of the soul alludes to this intrinsic desire of the created soul to separate from its origin in order to individuate and find independence. Such a separation seems healthy, as the separation of a child from its parents. Why is Eve forbidden such an opportunity for growth and maturation? Is God jealous of his powers of creator and thus seeking to keep humanity from itself rising to the task of creation? Rashi alludes to this problematic, "[e]very artisan detests his fellow-artisans. . . . *The serpent suggested to her*: God ate of the tree and created the world. . . . *so if you eat* . . . ye will be as God—Creators of worlds."[27] In other words, God did not want humankind to partake of the tree because he was jealous of his own power as creator. In this light, Eve's desire to be her own creation and relinquish her exilic stance for a central position in the universe would constitute a threat to God's sovereignty as creator and thus lead to her downfall and condemnation.

This idea of a God somehow jealous of his own power to create does not, however, fit in with the rest of the story. Indeed, part of Eve's curse (or perhaps blessing) has to do with her capacity to give life, thus elevating her to the role of co-creator with God. Eve herself recognizes this honor when she exclaims, upon the birth of her first child, "[w]ith the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man" (Gen. 4:1). The problem does not then lie with Eve somehow posing a threat to God's sovereignty through her desire to be her own creation. The problem is elsewhere. More than in her desire for autonomy and independence, Eve's problem lies in her repositioning herself at the center of the universe in a way that allows no room for an other. But more needs to be said on this. Indeed, it is possible to show that Eve's refusal of her femininity, that is, of her de-centeredness and exile in the face of the divine will and action, will lead to a refusal of man's otherness. Her abandonment of her attunement with God will lead to her obliteration of the dimension of otherness in the world, and ultimately to the destruction of the world.

What is interesting about the woman's quest for wisdom is that it passes through a desire for her to overcome her natural limitations as a creature. More than wisdom, what is at stake is for her to be like God, that is, relinquish her exile in order to become her own origin, and as such, limitless, autonomous, and at the center of the universe. What the woman is actually seeking behind her desire to be her own creation is to overcome any limitation put on her and be whoever she wants to be. The refusal of attunement with God betrays a desire to be no longer submitted and limited by this God but to follow her own desires and choose her own destiny. This stance hides, however, a profound threat: not to God's sovereignty, but to the existence of other beings in

the world. It is not incidental that Eve's downfall brought about the death of the world. Her desire for centrality and positionality—to be, like God, creator of worlds—already contained the negation and obliteration of anything alien to her desire and will.

Levinas comments on this stance of centrality as a natural stage towards individuation yet, at the same time, as essentially negating the other,

> [e]goist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not 'as for me . . .'—but entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate—without ears, like a hungry stomach.[28]

Eve's position resembles this original subjective stance, which for Levinas constitutes the natural state of the self. The self, for Levinas is naturally egoistic and, as such, naturally oblivious to otherness and incapable of communication. And indeed, a central self concerned only with its own aspirations and desires has no room for another. It is ironic that it is precisely Eve's desire for overcoming her limitations in order to find a more elevated state which brought about her own imprisonment in solitude. The stance that Eve aspires to—limitless and transcendent—only throws her back onto her own solitude. In such a world, she finds herself alone.

What is interesting, moreover, in Levinas's statement is the incapacity of the central self for genuine communication with another. Interesting because one sees now that the discourse that Eve was engaged in with the serpent was never a genuine discourse, never a genuine communication inasmuch as true communication demands the presence of an *other.* In the dialogue between Eve and the serpent there is no other but Eve. Eve is both the subject and object of the dialogue. In this context, the serpent is only a mirror to Eve's own desires and aspirations. Her incapacity for genuine discourse is actually played out in her interaction with her husband and, more specifically, manifest in his behavior towards her.

Most traditions see Adam as weak and having no backbone in his dealing with Eve. Philo sees him as losing all mastery and dignity in the face of woman: "Man's sin is that he gave up his rightful position as master to subordinate himself to woman."[29] Man is seen here as one who cedes to his wife in a way that is undignified and below his status. Phyllis Trible is even less charitable:

> His presence is passive and bland. The contrast that he offers to the woman is not strength or resolve but weakness. No patriarchal figure making decisions for his family, he follows his woman without question or comment. She gives fruit to him, "and-he-ate." . . . If the woman is intelligent, sensitive and ingenious, the man is passive, brutish, and inept. This portrayal of his character in scene two contrasts with his ability in scene one to recognize sexuality, to speak sensitively of its delight and then to decide the direction of his life by leaving father and mother and cleaving to his woman.[30]

This weakness or blandness on the part of man might, however, find an origin in Eve's behavior towards him. Indeed, the woman by the tree is entirely imbued with herself and with her own aspirations. Her quest for wisdom conceals a desire for self-creation, for centrality and for a position of origin. In offering the fruit to her husband, Eve is reframing the order of creation: she takes the place of God. It is no longer God who gives sustenance and life, but she. God is no longer at the center—creator and provider—but she is. The universe runs no longer according to divine plan, but she runs the universe. The delicate balance of the cosmos achieved through her exilic stance is now jeopardized by her casting off that exile for a central position in the world.

In such a world, there can be no room for an other, let alone for man. His behavior testifies to this "Copernican revolution" brought about by Eve in her desire for centrality. He does not speak but takes the fruit and eats. Their exchange is completely silent. The absence of discourse is significant—especially on the part of one who had heretofore been quite verbal—and testifies to an obliteration of otherness. His wife's repositioning of herself at the center of the universe has stripped him of his own personhood and caused his own downfall. André LaCocque sees the silence of man as testifying precisely to this ethical disruption on the part of Eve: "[w]hat is blurred are Eve's femininity and Adam's masculinity. Adam's silence signifies that the dialogue is interrupted."[31] Thus, according to LaCocque, in negating man's masculine self, the woman destroys her own femininity. In wanting to be God, the woman has forfeited her calling as an *ezer* and become the very cause of man's downfall. In losing her attunement with God, her role as recipient of the divine wisdom, and her exilic stance, the woman has lost her ethical destiny, her calling to be for-the-other. The sin of the woman consists thus in much more than causing man's downfall and loss of masculinity, as well as the destruction of the world: it consists in the negation of her own femininity, of her own calling as a woman, and the loss of her own identity. It is this identity, this feminine essence, and as such, this exilic stance, which God will attempt to recover through the utterance of the curse, which as we shall see, contains a number of hidden blessings.

The expulsion from Paradise

> *I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;*
> *With painful labor you will give birth to children.*
> *Your desire will be for your husband*
> *And he will rule over you.*
>
> Genesis 3:16 (NIV)

The curse ascribed to the woman in Genesis 3 raises a number of questions. First, one wonders what the connection is between this punishment and the sin of woman. If woman's sin is, as we have seen, to have relinquished exile and coveted a central position in the universe as well as be her own creation

to the detriment of otherness, we do not immediately understand the connection between this desire for centrality and pain in childbirth. The insertion of the child is surprising; one would not have expected this. The first curse given to woman thus seems to contain both an element of light and of darkness, of despair and of hope. There is pain, but there is also a child at the end of that pain. But we do not yet understand the connection between the childbearing pains and the original sin of woman.

Likewise, we are struck by the strange curse that ensues, having to do with the woman's rapport with man. This curse seems more *a propos* in light of our analyses on woman's negation of man's otherness. Yet, we do not understand why woman is now commanded to *desire* man. Is this a curse? Is this a blessing? What is the connection between the gift of desire and her original sin? Likewise, one does not understand the curse of man's rulership over woman. This rule has been understood in the tradition as a just reversal of the situation.[32] Just as woman dominated man in seducing him into eating the fruit, now man will dominate woman. But if woman's sin was the coveting of a central position at the detriment of the other, how is now man's positioning of himself at the center to the detriment of woman going to make things better? Is the position of man at the center of the universe not just as dangerous as woman's in its threat to the other of woman and of nature? Are we not seeing now the disastrous effects of this (erroneous?) understanding of man's rule over woman in nature and in relationships?

This curse is, then, anything but clear. Our analysis will attempt to read this curse (or blessing?) as the very antidote to the woman's sin—her coveting a central position to the detriment of the other. Far from being a mere punishment of woman, this curse, I shall argue, has a redemptive value:[33] that of breaking the spell of woman's central position in the world, awakening her anew to her exilic destiny as for-the-other and, more surprisingly, restoring the lost balance and reciprocity in her relationship with her husband. But for this, woman must again recover her natural attunement to otherness and to transcendence. This is possible, however, only through the difficult ordeal of pain.

The first thing that strikes us as odd in the woman's curse is the place of pain. Why pain? And how is this pain connected to her sinful coveting of a central position in the universe to the detriment of another? Indeed, what is God trying to teach her through these pains of childbirth? What redemptive value is there, if any, to this pain? We shall see that, far from being a marginal experience, pain operates a profound transformation on the self and constitutes a complete reversal of the person's heretofore closure for-itself in an awakening to a dimension beyond and exterior to itself. In other words, the experience of pain can be identified with the experience of exile. But this reversal brought about by pain must be further analyzed. According to Levinas, it is difficult to thematize pain, inasmuch as it is an experience which completely traumatizes the self undergoing it. Indeed, someone in pain finds him/herself powerless, overcome, overflowed with something over which they have no control.[34]

This overflowing of pain, in turn, operates a rupture in the self's heretofore self-enclosed being. Levinas points out that a subject in pain "does not have a hold on itself, does not 'join up the two ends.'"[35] In other words, the experience of pain is such that one's integrity is ruptured, one is no longer in charge or in control, but overcome, submitted to an experience that one has not willed. Pain in that sense is more of a violence to the will than to the flesh. It awakens a being to the fact that it is powerless to act and, more importantly, to will. Pain is thus not a marginal, accidental experience. It is an experience that strikes at the very root of personhood: the will. It is an experience that destroys the very essence of subjectivity, i.e. of being a subject, a will having an impact on the outside. Pain reverses, flips over the condition of the subject into its opposite. Thus, for LaCocque, the woman wanted to "play God, and she is now reminded of her humanity in her torn flesh."[36] The subject experiencing pain is no longer subject and origin of an action, it is now acted upon by a force that it does not control and which does not find its origin in itself. It is exiled from itself.

And, as such, the exilic experience of pain constitutes the first genuine awakening of the subject to an *other*. Levinas comments on the experience of pain as follows: "Pain penetrates into the very heart of the for-oneself."[37] The self, heretofore for-itself, finds itself shattered in the experience of pain. It is no longer for-itself, but for-other. For in suffering, Levinas explains, "the other grasps me."[38] The shattering of the self in the exilic experience of pain thus coincides, according to Levinas, with the revelation of an *other*, of something exterior, beyond, and stronger than the self. The curse of pain thus conceals a hidden blessing: that of a rupture of a heretofore self-enclosed self to the revelation of transcendence. And, as such, pain constitutes a first step towards an experience of another *human* being. Levinas writes, "Is not the evil of suffering . . . a half opening, and, more precisely, the half opening that a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh slips through—the original call for aid, for curative help, help from the other me whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation."[39]

This passage by Levinas is incredibly rich and merits our full attention. The first interesting feature of this passage is the fact that the evil of pain opens the subject to the inter-human. This is not the first thing one might think of pain. Indeed, pain often has the opposite effect: that of closing one upon oneself, that of a recoiling of subjectivity, of its involution into itself. How then is pain a factor of an inter-human relationship? Precisely in the following: in that the experience of pain points out the limits of a given subject's power and mastery. For it is only when a subject recognizes the limits of its powers that an *other* can appear in its world. It is only when a subject relinquishes, or, in the case of pain, is stripped of its prerogatives as master of the universe and finds itself exiled from itself, that another subject can appear in this universe. A subject entirely masterful of itself and of its environment has no room for another. Only a subject who has known the contraction, exile, and defeat of its powers through the experience of pain is able to welcome another into its world.

We can now better understand the meaning of the curse of pain as far as it is ascribed to Eve. The pedagogy of pain would thus, in the case of Eve, have the effect of rupturing her central position coveted in her eating of the fruit and reminding her of her intrinsic exilic stance, that is, of her limits, her vulnerability, her fragility, and her intrinsic passivity. But far from throwing Eve back into a diminished state of being, this pain contains the hidden blessing of restoring in her a sense of transcendence and of otherness. The recurring curse of pain would then serve to periodically remind Eve of her intrinsic vulnerability, but as such, of her infinite dependence on the one who made her. Pain would then serve to restore Eve's original exilic stance and attunement to God. In pain, she realizes her limitations and is compelled to resort, through "a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh," to an "original call for aid, for curative help, help from the other . . . whose alterity . . . promises salvation."[40] Pain is the only experience strong and traumatic enough to awaken in Eve a need for her creator and an acknowledgment that her destiny rests in his hands. Pain brings on the acute awareness of her own powerlessness while, simultaneously, pointing her to the one who has the power to bring renewed life and direction into her being.

But the curse of pain has yet another orientation in our text. It ushers in the birth of the child. Again we are struck with the strangeness of this curse (or blessing?). Why children? And how does childbirth somehow contain a redemptive power for Eve's sin? The idea that childbirth constitutes the woman's salvation is actually not a new one. The New Testament already implies that woman, unlike man, is saved through childbirth.[41] But no explicit reason is given for this redemptive power of childbirth. In the light of our analyses of Eve's original sin, we can, however, now better understand the introduction here of the dimension of the child. Indeed, woman's desire for a godlike, central position in the world led not only to the loss of her attunement with the divine (here restored through the experience of pain), but to the loss of her sense for the other, of her condition as for-the-other. The woman thus lost, through her downfall, her ethical orientation as for-the-other. What is interesting is how this orientation finds itself restored, yet redefined through motherhood.

While the orientation of for-the-other was heretofore defined as for man and had to do with woman's being *preceded* by man, now the for-the-other of the woman is oriented towards the future and *towards* the child. More will be said later about this opening up of the dimension of the future by the child. What is fundamental here is the recovery for woman of her lost orientation as for-the-other in her new task as a mother. While the child emerges into the woman's life through the experience of pain, both in birth and in childrearing, it constitutes, at the same time, an opportunity for her to again reconnect with her lost orientation as for-the-other. While the child effectually *interrupts* the woman's for-itself, her dreams, her aspirations, her autonomy and independence, it also contains a hidden blessing: that of giving her a renewed orientation, away from the closure of the for-itself to the transcendence of

the for-the-other. Thus, although the child seems to confine the woman, her movements and her actions, it also constitutes an opportunity for genuine transcendence out of the immanence of her being for-itself.

The child thus, in effect, awakens woman once again to her destiny as for-the-other, giving again to her life an ethical orientation. Levinas comments thus on the state of motherhood: "In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others."[42] In other words, for Levinas, maternity constitutes one of the figures of responsibility. How so? And what is responsibility? What is interesting is that, for Levinas, responsibility is never the result of a decision. What marks the peculiarity of responsibility is that it is never chosen, but intrudes on the self's innocent being for-itself and re-orients it, without its consent, towards an other. Responsibility, or being for-others, is thus, according to Levinas, not the product of a central and willful subjectivity, but a state of being that precedes the self and demands its help before it ever willed it. The responsible self, or ethical self, is then never a central originary self. The structure of responsibility demands, on the contrary, a de-posed and de-centralized self; a self preceded and subjected to an *other.* Only such a self is capable of responsibility and ethics for Levinas. Likewise, motherhood, as a mode of interruption of the self and orientation towards another, constitutes, for Levinas, a figure of responsibility and of ethics.

But there is a deeper significance of the woman's maternity, beyond the lesson of ethics. The child constitutes much more than an awakening of woman to her destiny as for-the-other inasmuch as it opens up the temporal dimension of the future. Heretofore the only dimension of temporality was that of the past: Eve being preceded by Adam. The only form of transcendence was thus that of responsibility towards another which precedes one, or ethics. The child, however, brings in a whole new temporal dimension, that of the future. But what is the significance of this temporal dimension? And how does it contribute to the woman's, even perhaps the world's redemption? What is relevant about the dimension of the future is that it signifies, in our text, the very essence of life inasmuch as the future is associated with the child, and as such, to renewed life. Contrary to the Greek conception of the future as constituting an orientation towards death—one might only consider Heidegger's commentary on the being for-death[43]—the future in the Hebrew tradition is associated with fecundity, and, as such, understood as ushering in the possibility of new life and, hence, has a redemptive quality.

This is evident in Levinas' writings where the dimension of the future holds a redemptive, even atoning quality. Levinas comments, "this triumph of the time of fecundity over the becoming of the mortal and aging being, is a pardon, the very work of time."[44] What is interesting about this quote is the connection it establishes between fecundity and mortality. In this passage, fecundity is seen as the answer to mortality, as the victory of life over death and, as such, as having an atoning quality. This atoning quality is, however, particularly significant for Eve. Commentators agree on the following point: that Eve is the one who, through her sin, ushered death into the world.

Childbirth thus constitutes the very reversal and atonement for her downfall and ensuing ushering of death into the world. Once the origin of death, she becomes, in her husband's words, the source of life, *Hava*. Although some feminist scholars have taken offense in Adam's exercising of the prerogative of naming Eve,[45] our passage does not constitute, in my view, such an exercise. Adam does not here name Eve, but exclaims, "she shall be called" Eve. The use of the passive here is indicative of God being the subject of this naming rather than Adam. Yet, Adam is the one who recognizes this shift in the character of Eve and, as such, his words may be interpreted as having an atoning quality for her downfall. Heretofore the source of death, Eve's destiny has become reversed into the origin of life. But our text further explores the emerging relationship between the man and his wife by introducing a new element between them: that of desire.

This sudden appearance of desire is unexpected. One does not understand right away why woman is given this desire for her husband and whether this constitutes a curse or a blessing. Feminists have argued that this desire is a curse in that it brings about a dependence of woman on man.[46] Previously independent and strong, she is now weakened in this desire for man. Her desire thus is understood as the very cause of the domination that ensues: "And he shall rule over her." He rules over her because she desires him. It is her desire that makes her want to yield to him, that makes her turn a blind eye to his faults, and sometimes to his abuse. This desire is thus seen in feminist interpretations as a curse, as that which strips woman of her independence and strength and causes her to submit to man.

This desire [*teshuqah*] has, however, a completely different connotation in the Hebrew context. It has the connotation not of domination but of love and of reciprocity. The next time this word is used in conjunction with woman is in the Song of Songs where her desire for the man finds itself reciprocated in his desire for her.[47] Incidentally, our text also gives evidence to reciprocity, but this reciprocity is that of man's domination over the woman as a response to her desire. The man does not, in our text, respond in love but in domination. Feminist scholars thus see in our text a perversion of desire, as that which creates an unhealthy hierarchy between man and woman.[48] The Song of Songs would then constitute the restoration of a broken harmony in speaking about a reciprocal desire where both man and woman desire each other. There is, however, another way to understand the woman's desire in our passage. In light of our analyses of the nature of the sin of woman, it is possible to understand this emergence of desire in woman as a renewed experience of exile and, as such, a first awakening to otherness and to the presence of her husband as a person.

It is possible to see this desire as containing a hidden blessing and not only as a curse. Previously self-sufficient and independent, the woman is also unaware of the dimension of otherness. Her desire for centrality and "to be like God" betrays this callousness of woman as far as the dimension of an *other* is concerned. Eve is aspiring to a position where there is no other, no limitations

placed on herself, and where she is the master of her own destiny. We have seen how this desire of woman for centrality has brought about a loss of her ethical orientation and the destruction of the world. In this context, it is easier to understand the *raison d'être* of this passion—desire—given to woman. Indeed, what is desire but the sensation of a lack that only an other can fulfill? What is this desire but the urge to journey beyond oneself, to exile oneself from oneself towards another?[49] The Midrash has a similar understanding of desire as that weakness which gives rise to the salvation by an other. Commenting on the verbal root of desire the Midrash says: "'His desire' yields consonants that stand for 'weak,' hence: 'Even though we are weak, we hope for the salvation of the Holy One, blessed be he.'"[50] Desire constitutes, thus, according to our Midrash, the first awareness of a lack, of a weakness, and as such, of a need for another.

The desire given to woman thus constitutes the very inversion of her desire for centrality and "to be like God" into the renewed possibility of an exile towards an other. Heretofore oriented towards autonomy and centrality, the woman's desire now carves within her a searing sense of loss and, as such, orients her, exiles her towards an *other*, towards Adam. The desire given to her in the curse thus operates a profound transformation in her psyche. Previously yearning for autonomy and centrality, she now finds herself exiled by the inescapable pain of solitude and loss which brings her to long for Adam's companionship. Her desire is a wound that will never close, ever longing, ever yearning for one other than herself. In other words, desire marks the end of the reign of the subject as an autonomous and independent being, or substance, and the beginning of an exile. But, as such, desire marks the beginning of relationship, of an orientation for-the-other.

Thus the woman as an exiled being, as for-the-other is restored through the awakening to desire. Desire marks the wound which, in Eve, will always remind her of her exilic destiny as for-the-other. She is actually not alone in carrying such a wound and such a desire. Adam had it all along. His wound appeared at the creation of woman, when God took some of his own flesh and blood to make woman. Man also carries an infinite wound, an infinite desire for the one who once was part of him. The Midrash speaks to that effect of a "theft" from God during the creation of woman.[51] God stole from Adam, wounded him, in order to create a space for woman. Without this original wound, there would have been no desire in man for woman. The original wound carved by desire is thus the very prerequisite of relationship.[52] Only desire, in the trauma or exile it inflicts on subjectivity can interrupt the self's central position in the world, and, as such, open the possibility of the inter-human.

In his description of erotic desire Levinas observes that "voluptuosity transfigures the subject himself, who henceforth owes his identity not to his initiative or power, but to the passivity of the love received. He is passion and trouble, constant *initiation* into a mystery rather than *initiative*."[53] The woman's quest for "initiative or power" sees itself interrupted in the moment of desire. In that

moment, her subjectivity is "transfigured" from for-itself to for-the-other and, as such, becomes initiated into "mystery" rather than being mere "initiative." The wisdom that woman was actively seeking in her eating of the forbidden fruit is thus not a divine state over and beyond her own human condition. It is not to be found in another world or divine dimension. On the contrary, it hides within the immanence of her own creaturiality, in the complexity of the human rapport, and can be approached through the inter-human, through desire of another human being, and through a renewed exilic orientation towards that being. Such is precisely LaCocque's observation. Commenting on the temptation of woman he says: "what is at stake is the substitution of knowledge for relationship. It has been said that 'the Bible makes relationality prior to knowledge' . . . Perverted knowledge is narcissistic."[54] It is in light of this perversion that we then ought to understand the intention behind the woman's curse: to restore a wisdom of relationality versus a strictly narcissistic form of knowledge. Therein lies the key to the wisdom desired by woman: in the mystery of interpersonal relationships, whether with the child or with the man. Therein lies her possibility of transcending herself: in being for-the-other, in her recovering of her original ethical orientation and coming out of the prison of the self.

The question remains, however, as to the nature of man's response to the woman's desire: "and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Several interpretations go in the direction of this "rule" as constituting a mode of control over woman because she was more prone than man to succumb to temptation. Because of this original weakness towards temptation, woman must be constantly subdued by man. The question that arises, however, is whether Adam is the right man for the job. Indeed, man appears just as weak as woman at the moment of temptation and succumbs to it without so much as a word: "he ate it" (Gen. 3:6). Far from showing himself strong in the face of temptation, man, on the contrary seems even weaker than Eve when tempted. She was deceived, whereas he knew full well what he was doing and did it anyway. It thus seems strange that our passage would choose man as the guardian of Eve in the face of temptation when he showed himself so incompetent in the face of it himself.

Other interpretations see in this passage a restoration of a broken balance in Adam and Eve's relationship. Nachmanides sees in Adam's domination over Eve a just reversal of Eve's domination over Adam:

> [T]his punishment was measure for measure, i.e., it corresponded to the sin exactly. . . . For *she gave also to her husband* . . . and he ate . . . by her directive (i.e., encouragement), . . . so her punishment was that she would no longer command him; . . . rather, *he* would command *her* regarding whatever is his desire.[55]

The idea of a reversal of roles is interesting. Eve's behavior with Adam is one that, we have seen, fundamentally destroys his status as a person distinct and other from her. Nachmanides shows effectively how the curse serves to redeem and restore a broken relationship. Where I would beg to differ from

Nachmanides is in the last clause of his statement, "regarding whatever is his desire." The response to Eve's usurpation of God's centrality in the universe would then be replaced by Adam taking over a central role. This idea seems to me out of sync with the intention heretofore of the text of creation in that, throughout our passage, an emphasis is placed on a de-centering of subjectivity for the sake of otherness.

Indeed, Eve is not the only one who is given a de-centralized and exilic role. We saw that the purpose of Eve's creation was the setting up of a limitation of Adam's prerogatives and powers in order to save him from the temptation of setting *himself* up as a God. Eve was created in confrontation with Adam in order to constantly remind him of *his* own limitations and humanity, thus reminding Adam of his own exilic condition and awakening him to intersubjectivity and ethics. To thus give to Adam a central role to the detriment of Eve, to allow him to "do whatever he pleased" over and against woman's desires would constitute a dangerous reversal of man's creaturiality and humanity, setting him up as a God over Eve. Such a stance would, however, fall into the same problems as Eve's own desire for centrality and autonomy: the callous refusal of otherness and the consequent destruction of the world. But we have all too much evidence of the catastrophic results—both on the environment and in relationships—of such a central and limitless position ascribed to man. The proposition "and he will rule over you" thus cannot signify man's central position and limitless exercise of his powers to the detriment of the other, in this case woman. But what then does this proposition mean?

Again, we must place this injunction in the context of the sin that it is supposed to redeem, in this case, Eve's desire for centrality and ensuing neutralization of the other. The injunction that man "rule over her" is here interesting in that it introduces, for the first time, a limitation on the heretofore limitless powers of the woman, thereby again opening up a space for an other. We are reminded here again of the Levinasian observation that "the 'resistance' of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical."[56] The man's limitation on woman is thus an ethical one and performed in the name of ethics and of otherness. Such a limitation is not there to destroy woman's otherness to the profit of man, but, on the contrary, to restore, through the act of limitation, the dimension of otherness, both of man and of woman. This limitation is, then, not to be understood as a violence to the woman, but as the restoration of the possibility for otherness and for ethics. The man's resistance to the woman should not be understood (or enacted) in order to put an end to woman's otherness, or to subdue her and control her, but, on the contrary, to allow for a space to open for otherness.

As such, for the first time, man appears to woman as more than a bystander and an inessential being in her quest for wisdom. He appears to woman as a person with his own volitions and desires. In fact, it is only in this capacity to resist the self that the other emerges qua other in a world previously revolving around the self. Up until now, Adam had no distinct personhood, no subjectivity in the face of Eve. His passivity testifies to his not yet being apprehended

as a person worthy of discourse by Eve. Only upon acquiring the capacity to resist her will he emerge as more than a bystander in her drama, but as a person in his own right. Nachmanides was right in saying that the curse restores Adam in the face of Eve. But it does not restore him as a dominating power, exercising complete freedom over an *other*, but rather, in his emergence as a subject, capable of resisting the infinite, and sometimes lethal will, of the *self*. Thus Adam recovers his subjectivity not in taking over Eve's central position, and playing the role of a central *self*, but simply in limiting and interrupting that very position from the de-centralized stance of an *other*. We have here a reversal of Beauvoir's critique of the woman as the eternal *other* of man. In our passage, it is the man who is the woman's *other*.

The command to resist, or limit woman, is not then performed in order to avenge man from his prior humiliation and to restore him in the face of woman, but to restore the dimension of otherness in the world, and, thereby, prevent the destruction of the world. The limitation on woman is thus not done for the sake of man, but for the sake of the world. In setting herself at the center of the world, in taking the place of God and relinquishing her exile, woman jeopardized the existence of the universe itself and brought about its destruction. The limitation that man puts on woman's desire is thus operated in order to restore woman's creaturiality, to restore the lost balance brought about by her desire for centrality, and, as such, to restore the world. Just as Eve was created in order to limit man's powers and prevent an imbalance caused by his taking on a central position in the world, Adam is now enjoined to limit woman's powers in order to prevent a similar imbalance. It is in this sense that we may read the curse as a restoration of a lost reciprocity in Adam and Eve's relationship, of a reciprocity that was, perhaps, never even there.

A renewed reading of the creation story shows either man engaged in monologue about woman, "bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh," never addressing her in person; or woman engaged in a dialogue from which man is excluded only to manipulate him into eating the fruit, without receiving one single word from him. What is striking in both moments is the absence of dialogue between the man and the woman. This incapacity is symptomatic, however, of a deeper problem between them: that of never having recognized fully the presence of the other as a distinct person. Inasmuch as discourse is the sign that an other is addressed as other and not just as an element in the world of the self, it is symptomatic of a reciprocal awakening to ethics.[57] In a world where discourse is absent, however, one can wonder as to the existence of an ethical awareness in the partners involved, of an awareness of the other as an *other*. This ethical awareness is, however, awakened in woman at the moment of desire, and confirmed in her rapport with a man capable of resisting her. In a way, the desire of woman for man and the man's rising up to the status of a face capable of resisting the woman is a form of mutuality. It is a difficult mutuality, in that the woman has to undergo the wound of desire as well as the man's ethical resistance, but it is one that enables the restoration of an ethical rapport between the two partners.[58]

But our text also contains the key to the restoration of the universe in the face of its imminent destruction: the restoration of an ethical rapport between the man and the woman, and the relinquishing of a central position for both of them for an exilic stance in the world. Only in this mutual limitation and exile, where the woman limits the man as his *ezer*, and the man limits the woman as a face, will the world escape destruction. Only in this mutuality, this intersubjectivity, this mutual limitation, can the world be faced, built and repaired. The restoration of the world begins in a restoration of mutuality and reciprocity between man and woman. Thus, according to LaCocque, "That is why, consequently, ancient Israel finds in love the sole redemptive factor in life. . . . Human intimacy is restoration of paradisiac conditions; it is an encounter with God."[59] It is this intuition that the ancient Hebrew sages had when they dared "to place among the ten 'words' that served to create the universe the one that declares that 'it is not good for man to be alone.'"[60] Man alone (or woman for that matter) would succumb to the temptation of a limitless use of his/her powers and, as such, endanger the world. Only upon undergoing a limitation of his/her powers through the resistance of his/her partner can the human couple successfully subdue and rule over the universe. Levinas speaks rightly when he says that "[t]he foundation of consciousness is justice,"[61] that is, the limitation of the self for the sake of the other is the foundation of true selfhood and, by extension, the only safeguard of the universe.

Conclusion: the exile of woman

Far from signifying her downfall as a woman, the creation story reveals to us a woman in the making. From the story of creation, where woman's femininity emerges as de-position and exile in the face of God's actions, as well as containing an ethical calling of being for-the-other, to the moment of the curse where she finds her femininity restored through the wounds inflicted by the exilic experiences of pain and desire as well as through the difficult opening of a dialogue with a man capable of resisting her. Our whole passage can then be read as the drama of a woman struggling with her own destiny as a woman, but also with her own individuation as a person in the face of indifference and deceit. The difficulties of woman's individuation both as a woman and as a person is furthermore accentuated with the fact that this individuation does not occur, as would be expected, in the position of a central subjectivity in the Cartesian sense. The Hebrew understanding of selfhood, on the contrary, signifies towards a de-position and exile of a self having accepted the ethical calling of being for-another. This is a difficult calling which does not come naturally to the subject: it is the calling of exile, of never being able to claim a central place in the world, of never being at home in the world. But it is also a calling that opens up the possibility of a human world, one that is shared, built, and redeemed in cooperation with an *other*.

Notes

1 See Jean Higgins, "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 4 (1976): 639–641. Phyllis Trible also observes the predominance of this interpretation in her commentary on Genesis 2–3: "According to traditional interpretations the narrative in Genesis 2:7–3:24 . . . is about 'Adam and Eve.' It proclaims male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. It portrays woman as 'temptress' and troublemaker who is dependent upon and dominated by her husband. . . . —Woman tempted man to disobey and thus she is responsible for the sin in the world (3:6); she is untrustworthy, gullible and simpleminded." Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 72–73.

2 Sun Ai Lee Park, "Poem (Untitled)," in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, ed. Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 420.

3 See Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 110.

4 See Trible's re-telling of the dialogue between the serpent and the woman in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 105–115.

5 Except in Genesis 1 where God gives an active role to the couple, to both man and woman, the command being given in the second person plural: "God blessed *them* and said to *them*: 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen. 1:28).

6 See, for example, Sun Ai Lee Park's poetic re-reading of Genesis 3 as a key moment of woman's individuation: "I want to be wise/I want to be a person of myself/Knowing all and being empowered/Nor being ordered neither dependent/Not even on God, the Controlling Almighty/I want to use good sense of mine/And pursue the infinite realm/Of knowing to have access/To the governance/Of life of mine and my people/ Expanding our world to the boundless bountiful/And to the horizons of eternity." Park, "Poem (Untitled)," 420.

7 De Beauvoir reiterates this view in *The Second Sex* as follows: "Man seeks the Other in woman as Nature and as his peer. . . . Man sinks his roots in Nature; he was engendered, . . . life in man's eyes has taken on a dual aspect: it is consciousness, will, transcendence, it is intellect; and it is matter, passivity, immanence, it is flesh. Aeschylus, Aristotle, and Hippocrates proclaimed that on earth as on Mount Olympus it is the male principle that is the true creator: form, number, and movement come from him; Demeter makes corn multiply, but the origin of corn and its truth are in Zeus; woman's fertility is considered merely a passive virtue. She is earth and man seed; she is water, and he is fire." Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 2011), 163.

8 De Beauvoir deplores the fact that woman has always been considered as the Other and therefore never as subject: "Insofar as woman is considered the absolute Other, that is—whatever magic powers she has—as the inessential, it is precisely impossible to regard her as another subject. Women have thus never constituted a separate group that posited itself *for-itself* before a male group; they have never had a direct or autonomous relationship with men." De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 80.

9 Phyllis Trible contests any possible inference of derivation of woman from man based on this passage, seeing rather an indication of interconnectivity between the two genders: "But no ambiguity clouds the words *isha* and *ish*. One is female, the other male. Their creation is simultaneous, not sequential. One does not precede the other, even though the time line of this story introduces the woman first. . . . Accordingly, in this poem the man does not depict himself as either prior to or superior to the woman. His sexual identity depends upon her even as hers depends upon him." Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 98–99.

10 De Beavoir, *The Second Sex*, 6.

11 Ibid., 5.
12 Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary Translated into English and Annotated*, vol. 1, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine and Co., 1945), Gen. 2:18, [11].
13 Rashi, *Pentateuch*, Gen. 2:18, [11].
14 In the commentary to Genesis 1:26–28, we read that, "[s]ince man is in God's image, the angels did not know man from God. Only that man sleeps distinguishes man from God." Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation — Volume 1 Parashiyyot One through Thirty-Three on Genesis 1:1 to 8:14*, Brown Judaic Studies 104 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Parashah Eight, Gen. 1:26–28, VIII:X, [83].
15 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 197.
16 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Eight, Gen. 1:26–28, VIII:IX. 2f, [82].
17 Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 17.
18 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 178.
19 Luce Irigaray, *To be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (New York: Routledge, 2001), 33.
20 Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 173.
21 Chalier writes, "If we have to shake the easy conscience of the beings who persevere in their being, in order to see peace occur, a peace that will be a life for the others, a peace that will be as concernful as love, then we have to understand the meaning of this disruption of being by goodness. Is this not the meaning of the feminine in the human being?" Catherine Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine," in *Re-reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 128.
22 Such is the view of Anthony York in his article "The Maturation Theme in the Adam and Eve Story," in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, ed. Joseph Coleson and Victor Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 393–410.
23 Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 113. This view will be opposed by André LaCocque who, far to the contrary, will see in this event a "regression" to pre-creation chaos. Cf. André LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock, 2006), 120.
24 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Eighteen, Gen. 2:22–25, 3:1, XVIII:I. 1b, [189].
25 Park, "Poem (Untitled)," 420.
26 LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 77.
27 Rashi, *Pentateuch*, Gen. 3:5, [13].
28 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 134.
29 Philo, *De Opificio Mundi*. Cited in Kvam, Schearing, and Ziegler, eds., *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, 42.
30 Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 113.
31 LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 36.
32 Medieval biblical commentator Nachmanides [also know by his acronym Ramban] explains, "Now, this punishment was measure for measure, i.e., it corresponded to the sin exactly. . . . For she gave also to her husband . . . and he ate . . . by her directive (i.e., encouragement), . . . so her punishment was that she would no longer command him; . . . rather, *he* would command *her* regarding whatever is his desire." Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, vol. 1, The ArtScroll Series (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), Gen. 3:16, [129–130].
33 In this I oppose Trible's view according to which the curse is neither a punishment nor holds redemptive value but is read in a strictly negative light of the consequence of sin: "These judgments describe consequences; they do not prescribe punishment. . . . The man dominates the woman to pervert sexuality. . . . Both their positions result from shared disobedience. God describes this consequence but does not prescribe it as punishment."

Cf. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 123, 128. I differ here also with LaCocque according to whom the curse inaugurates "[m]ale dominion," "[r]ulership" having "replaced love," and "egotism generosity." Cf. LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 217.

34 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 91.
35 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 55.
36 LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 219.
37 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 56.
38 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 238.
39 Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 93.
40 Ibid.
41 See 1 Timothy 2:15.
42 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 75.
43 See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 279–304.
44 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 282.
45 Phyllis Trible sees this act as an act of domination on the part of man: "While this language differs radically from the portrait of female and male in episode four of scene one, it chillingly echoes the vocabulary of dominion over the animals in episode three. . . . Now, in effect, the man reduces the woman to the status of an animal by calling her a name. . . . Ironically, he names her Eve, a Hebrew word that resembles in sound the word life, even as he robs her of life in its created fullness." Cf. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 133.
46 Cf. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 72, for traditional interpretations of woman's desire for man as God's way of keeping her faithful and submissive to her husband.
47 Cf. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 139.
48 See note 46 above.
49 Such is incidentally Levinas's definition of desire: "The metaphysical desire does not long to return; for it is desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves." Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33–34.
50 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Twenty, Gen. 3:13–21, XX:VII, 1g, [221].
51 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Seventeen, Gen. 2:18–21, XVII:VII, [186].
52 Such is also LaCocque's interpretation of Adam's wound: "For Adam's so decisive experience, the infliction of a wound to his identity was a worthwhile but deep trauma. No one comes out of his isolation but through the sacrifice of his ego." LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 128.
53 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 270.
54 LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 143.
55 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary*, Gen. 3:16, [129–130].
56 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197.
57 See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 72–77.
58 André LaCocque speaks positively of this mutual limitation as constituting the very basis of relationship: "The text is amazingly perspicacious about the necessary poise of difference and commonality for a true mutual recognition. 'True differentiation sustains the balance between separateness and connection in a dynamic tension.' . . . Bonhoeffer speaks of 'the other person who stands next to me, limiting me . . . I love this limit and I shall not transgress it because of my love.'" LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 125.
59 LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 208.
60 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 32.
61 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 160.

2 Adam

The expulsion from Paradise

Introduction

The traditional reading of the creation of man has seen in him the precursor of the modern and Cartesian figure of the self. In fact, Descartes can be seen as alluding to the passage on the creation of man when elaborating his definition of the self as "maste[r] and possesso[r]" of nature.[1] And indeed, inasmuch as man is, unlike other creatures, depicted in the image of God, he is given a central, masterful stance in the world. He is, as such, the climax of creation and given the prerogative of dominating the world. The text elects man to "subdue" the world (Gen. 1:28), whereby he is urged to master and conquer nature around him. His domination will be extended later in our passage beyond the realm of nature to encompass woman. In the curse of woman, man is erected as a being which holds dominative, even oppressive power over her.

It is hard not to acknowledge here, with feminist commentators, how the biblical narrative has been dominated by the patriarchal worldview whereby man is erected as a powerful and masterful being having a hold over all of nature, including over woman. It is also hard not to predict the danger that such a definition of man entails. Indeed, feminist scholars trace a number of contemporary ills from the degradation of the environment, the fragmented character of our society, to the oppression of women and children to a modernist worldview deeply imbibed, albeit unconsciously, by the biblical narrative and conception of subjectivity as central and masterful.[2] It remains to be seen, however, whether such a definition constitutes the genuine biblical view and whether it is not, rather, the modernist worldview of man as "master and possessor of nature" which could have influenced our reading of the story of creation.

Thus, the question remains as to whether such a definition of subjectivity as central and masterful reflects the biblical understanding and definition of subjectivity. A closer reading of our passage reveals a more nuanced definition of the masculine subjectivity. A renewed reading of the story of the creation of man reveals a subjectivity which is far from central. Profoundly differentiated from its origin—the dust of the earth—through its partaking of the divine essence—the breath of God—such a subjectivity finds itself ever having to rise

above its earthly origin towards a spiritual calling. But as such, the masculine subjectivity constitutes itself as a stranger in the world, with a destiny taking it ever over and beyond its own materiality. Such a subjectivity is, then, anything but central and at home in the universe. It is, on the contrary, defined as intrinsically de-centered or exiled in the world. The story of the fall and the ensuing curse must then be read in a completely different light.

Man's downfall would then no longer constitute a loss of his central position in the world through the seductive voice of the woman but, on the contrary, a forgetting of his original exilic destiny, of his essence as a spiritual being called to rise above his materiality. The recovery of man's dignity would henceforth no longer merely entail his recovering a dominating stance towards woman and restoring his central and masterful stance in the world but, rather, would have more to do with his recovering a masterful stance over his own natural urges. As such, the curse of man must be understood not as a punishment aiming at destroying him, but rather as attempting a restoration of man's exilic destiny through the experiences of pain and death. Far from constituting a mere punishment, the man's painful toil and intuition of death would then serve to remind him of his original exile and de-centeredness in the world and, as such, restore his lost virility. The woman's curse likewise, with its allusion to man's ruling over woman must be read in a different light. Against the background of our analyses of man's essence as exilic, it is improbable to read here a return of man to an original central and masterful stance over woman. Far to the contrary, the curse will reveal man's profound precariousness and alienation within the realm of nature but, as such, will constitute a renewed orientation of his exilic destiny and of his metaphysical calling.

The exile from the earth

> *Then the Lord God formed a man*
> *From the dust of the ground*
> *And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,*
> *And the man became a living being.*
> Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

Contrary to the traditional modern understanding of man as a simple and masterful being, we are faced, from the onset, with a complex and vulnerable being. On the one hand, dust of the ground and on the other hand, breath of life. The Hebrew tradition recognizes this inner duality:

> To create a man was to create in one creature two. . . . And this does not refer to woman. . . . What is the human being? The fact that a being is *two* while remaining *one*. A division, a rupture in the depth of his substance or simply consciousness and choice: life at the crossroads, between two possibilities, between two tendencies which exclude or oppose each other.[3]

Thus, far from being a unified being, man is described, from the onset, as torn between two different possibilities and tendencies which seem directly opposed to each other: spirit and matter.[4]

There have been several interpretations of these two dimensions. Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi proposes that man's essence is composed of both "earthly and of heavenly matter," which mirrors the composition of the universe itself as constituted of "heaven and earth."[5] The question remains of course as to what constitutes this earthly and this heavenly dimension in man and in the universe. Is man given a soul consisting of heavenly substance to rule over the materiality of his body? And if so, of what consists the soul? Can we understand its workings as well as its substance?

The Hebrew understanding of the breath of life does not, however, seem to go in the direction of an inner principle of unity or of organization as was thought by Plato and Aristotle. The Hebrew tradition recognizes the "breath" as signifying, rather, an essential dependence between the creature and God. Old Testament scholar Phyllis Trible comments on the duality of the created being as follows:

> Only two ingredients constitute its life, and both are tenuous: dusty earth and divine breath. One comes from below; the other from above. One is visible; the other invisible. Combined by Yahweh, these fragile ingredients unite to form the creature who is totally dependent on God.[6]

In other words, man is a being whose dual essence points to an origin which is both worldly and otherworldly. Man is a being condemned to draw his identity from a dimension beyond himself—from his creator. Adam is, then, much more than mere earthly matter; his "breath-like" identity also points to another destiny, to a higher calling: one attuned to the divine breath. But what does such an attunement to the divine breath entail for man?

Emmanuel Levinas interprets this attunement to the divine breath as a sensitivity to a calling higher than that of materiality. Levinas comments, "I am still torn . . . but between the high and the low. The specifically human would be to be caught between my Creator, that is, the Law he gave me, and existence . . . between the Law that is given me and my nature."[7] The two tendencies of man, according to Levinas's reading would thus be between man's material and bodily inclinations and the law breathed into his being, between the height that the command expects of man and the lowliness of his creaturiality out of the dust.[8] As a receptacle of the divine breath, man becomes the vessel of the divine word, or command, breathed into him alongside the divine breath. As such, man's nature is quintessentially "inspired." He is a being ever attuned to the voice of an Other, to the divine word breathed into his very core.

Man's nature would thus consist in a painful tension between his vulnerability as a creature from the dust and the elevation of the law intrinsic to his being. Levinas finds an interesting clue to this tension in the Hebrew verb

chosen to describe the formation of man by God, *vayyitzer*, which when read as two words *vay yitzer* signifies "woe" [*vay*] to the creature [*yitzer*]:

> *Vayitzer*, broken down into *vay-yitzer* would mean "woe to the creature" . . . woe when I obey my Creator (for in obeying my Creator I am constantly disrupted by my creaturely nature), but woe is to me also when I obey my essence as creature, my inclinations (for the idea of the Creator, that is, his Law, spoils my pleasure in sinning!).[9]

Far from being a unified being, serenely overlooking the world in a masterful stance, the first man shows evidence of a deep traumatism and tension between two seemingly irreconcilable tendencies. Far from residing in a masterful stance, the masculine identity emerges from a painful tension between two dimensions that seem to war within himself in spite of himself. I say "from" because, while still in a state of tension, man does not yet reach his full potential as a virile being. It is, on the contrary, in his capacity to resolve and transcend this tension that resides his dignity as a man.

This resolution is, however, not to be found, as Plato thought, in a separation of the material from the spiritual and a journey of the soul back to its divine origin. Indeed, when faced with the tragic constitution of man as a tension between earthly and heavenly tendencies, the Greeks proposed an elevation from the earthly tendency towards the heavenly part of himself. In his *Symposium*, Plato proposes that one relinquish all earthly attachments in order to elevate the mind to the spiritual dimension of truth and wisdom. Thus one could never speak of a resolution of the tension between matter and spirit in man, but rather, of a relinquishment of matter for spirit.

The Hebrew tradition will not seek to escape the intrinsic tension between matter and spirit in man, but rather attempts to resolve it, to harmonize it. For the Hebrew, matter must not be abandoned or relinquished for spirit, but rather submitted, dominated, informed by spirit. Matter and spirit must be thought together, not as hierarchical, but as complementary. We are not far from the Aristotelian perspective on matter and form as expounded in his *Metaphysics*. Just as in Aristotle, the ideal form must work with matter to give rise to a substance, in the Hebrew tradition, the inspired word, or command, must work with matter to give rise to a living being. Thus, it is not the capacity to escape the material that makes for the nobility of the masculine being, as thought by Plato, but, on the contrary, his ability to harmonize the tension between the inspired command and his creaturiality, his ability to inform the material part of his being with the spiritual command uttered upon his creation.

What defines virility is, then, not as seemed to be implied in Genesis 1, a position of mastery within the world, but an ethical calling extirpating him from the material towards a higher destiny: that of a mastery of self. Levinas describes as such the virility of man: "It is not freedom which defines the human being. It is obedience which defines him."[10] What defines man is no longer a limitless freedom, the ability to do whatever he sets his heart and mind

on, but, on the contrary, a limitation placed on his material essence by the command of ethics.[11] Man's essence then signifies to the fact that he is more than a mere physical or material entity submitted to the forces of nature. He is also called to rise above nature, both without and within himself. Man is a material being, but he is also a spiritual being with a calling, not to separate himself from his own materiality, but to subdue and master it through the obedience to the command breathed into his being upon his creation. Higher than the calling to subdue and master the earth is, then, the ethical injunction for man to master himself, his own materiality.

This calling to obedience, in turn, does not degrade or infantilize man but elevates him to become the very partner of God in the creation of the world. Just as God gave form to the chaos and *tohu bohu* through his word, likewise, man is called to give form to the materiality and *tohu bohu* within himself. The ethical injunction given to man thus signifies towards an act of creativity on his part. Man is called to an act of creation, that is, to an act of giving form to the matter or *tohu bohu* that still inhabits him. Thus, far from obstructing man's powers and creativity, ethics constitutes an act of creation and of creativity on the part of man. Here ethics is no longer to be understood in a Nietzschean sense as a dwarfing or castration of man's creative impulse, but, on the contrary, as that very impulse. Twentieth-century Jewish philosopher and rabbi Soloveitchik comments, "[c]reation is the lowering of transcendence into the midst of our turbid, coarse, material world; and this lowering can take place only through the implementation of the ideal Halakhah in the core of reality."[12] In other words, creation can be defined as the act of lowering of transcendence within immanence and of subsuming the material to the divine command, here defined as Halakha.

Thus man participates or rather continues the creative act of God by an ongoing attempt to transform the matter or *tohu bohu* within himself into actions molded by the divine command. Man's essential calling is an ethical calling leading to what Soloveitchik terms the redemption of the world:

> The ideal of halakhic man is the redemption of the world not via a higher world but via the world itself, via the adaptation of empirical reality to the ideal patterns of Halakha. . . . A lowly world is elevated through the Halakhah to the level of a divine world.[13]

It is in this sense that one is to understand man's mastery over the universe. Such a mastery is not one seeking to establish man as center of the universe with an unlimited freedom. On the contrary, such a mastery *implies* a limitation of the freedom of man and rests on man's ability to master *himself*. For only upon mastering within himself the natural dimension, will man successfully master the nature outside of himself and achieve the redemption of the world.

It is then not from a central position that man will achieve mastery of the universe, but, on the contrary, in the realization that he is precisely not at home in the universe but bound to a higher calling: the calling of ethics. It is, likewise, not from a position of domination of the world that man will attain

his full potential as a man, but from a stance of exile whereby man realizes that he neither is at home in the world, nor within himself. Characterized by the painful tension between two powerful tendencies, man individuates himself as a man, reaches his full potential as a virile being in the resolution of this tension into ethics. Thus it is not mastery of the world that characterizes masculinity but mastery of self. It is not man's establishing himself in the world that proves his manhood, but, on the contrary, his realization that his calling lies beyond being, that he has also a spiritual destiny: that of raising himself above materiality in response to a command coming from above and beyond materiality. Yet, it is precisely this command that Adam seems to have forfeited upon eating the forbidden fruit. It is, then, to the temptation, fall and punishment of Adam that we now turn.

The refusal of exile

> *To Adam he said*
> *"Because you listened to your wife*
> *And ate from the tree*
> *About which I commanded you*
> *'You must not eat from it'"*
> Genesis 3:17 (NIV)

Interestingly, the passage describing the sin of Adam alludes not to one infraction but to two: "Because you listened to the voice of your wife" and "ate of the tree." Although it is possible to understand how his eating of the fruit constitutes a sin inasmuch as it constitutes a blatant disobedience to God's command, one does not understand immediately why listening to the voice of the woman would constitute a sin. After all, the woman was created by God to be precisely this: an interlocutor for man, an alternative perspective. The voice of woman is, as such, important for man. The Bible is, in fact, replete with examples of women speaking to men and men listening to them and finding therein salvation—think of the voice of Sarah when she asked Abraham to part with Hagar. In this case, God himself told Abraham to listen to Sarah. Think of Esther speaking up for her people. Think of Abigail preventing David from shedding innocent blood, and again of Bathsheba ensuring that the rightful heir to the throne is chosen. It is thus not the voice of woman *per se* which is the problem here. What, then, is Adam's sin here?

Commentators have long debated this problem. According to Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo, the problem lies not in listening to the woman's voice, but in submitting himself to it, "[m]an's sin was that he gave up his rightful position as master to subordinate himself to woman."[14] According to Philo, Adam's sin lies in forfeiting his position as master of woman and succumbing to her domination. The biblical injunction of mastery differs, however, profoundly from Philo's interpretation inasmuch as man was never, as Philo thought, given mastery over woman. Rather, mastery is given to *both* man *and* woman as is clear from this passage:

> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
>
> (Gen. 1:27–28)

To include woman in the scope of mastery of man alone not only counters the clear meaning of the above passage, but it assimilates woman to nature. This, however, constitutes a Greek perspective on woman whereby she sees herself reduced to the dimension of materiality, chaos, and *tohu bohu*, with man enjoying, in this context, the status of spirit, form and creative initiative.[15] This is not the biblical understanding of woman. In fact, in the biblical view, man is closer to nature than woman inasmuch as he is formed directly from the dust of the earth, whereas woman is formed from man. As such, the female essence can be understood as radically other than nature and therefore can never be submitted, as nature, to the mastery of man. Man's sin cannot lie then in his loss of mastery over woman, since he was never given that prerogative in the first place.

Medieval Jewish commentator Nachmanides brings, to this effect, an interesting nuance to Philo's view. According to Nachmanides, man's sin lies in his succumbing to the "directive" of woman: "*she gave also to her husband* . . . and he ate . . . by her directive."[16] Again we have the idea of woman's voice as a "directive" exercising a coercive function on her husband. Nachmanides is here, however, making an important point in his describing the woman's voice as a "directive." As such, the woman's voice is replacing God's voice who also uttered a command. The sin of the woman would then lie in taking the place of God and herself uttering commands. This interpretation of woman's sin as a desire to take the place of God, as we have seen in Chapter 1, is betrayed in the serpent's words: "you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). Nachmanides' interpretation of woman's commanding man is thus in line with the intention behind both her eating the fruit and giving it to her husband. While woman sins in wanting to take the place of God and take on the prerogative of the "command," man sins precisely in his acknowledgment of this transfer of power. He no longer listens to the command of God spoken to him, but rather to the voice of his wife. The sin of man would then be his obeying his wife *instead* of God and shows him to be guilty not only of disobedience, but also of idolatry.

A reading of the ensuing passages does not seem, however, to situate man's primary fault there. Indeed, had the sin of man been in his submissiveness to woman, the ensuing curse would then most likely have to do with him somewhat regaining his mastery over her. Yet, the curse contains nothing of the sort, describing instead a rapport between man and the earth. This allusion to the earth is uncanny and we do not see right away the connection between man's sin and the emerging difficulties in his relationship to the earth. Yet, this is what our passage chooses to focus on rather than his rapport with

woman. This indicates to us that perhaps the sin of man lies elsewhere than in his losing his mastery over woman. Our text seems to indicate, rather, that man's sin might lie in his losing mastery over the earth. But what does this mean? What did his primordial mastery over the earth entail and how did he lose it upon eating the fruit?

Our analyses on the dual identity of man are here particularly illuminating. Indeed, we found that man was a dual being, constituted of both earth and spirit with the latter signifying God's command in its function of inspiring, orienting and subduing the earthly dimension in man. We saw that, before subduing nature outside of him, man's destiny consisted in learning to subdue the nature and materiality residing within himself. Thus the virility of man lies principally in the capacity to master the materiality or *tohu bohu* within and without himself. The sin of man, signified by the curse over his rapport with the earth, would then lie less in his losing his mastery over woman than in his losing mastery over the ground from which he comes. In other words, man, at the moment of his temptation, is seen succumbing not only to woman, but also to the materiality from which he had been called to rise.

Thus man's sin is then not as Philo indicated the fact that he gave up his position as master of woman, but that he gave up his position as master of his own inclinations. Man's sin is not his submission to woman, but his submission to his own appetite. Phyllis Trible sees there precisely man's sin. Speaking of Eve, she observes, "[t]he initiative and decision are hers alone. . . . She acts independently. By contrast the man is a silent, passive, and bland recipient . . . His one act is belly-oriented, and it is an act of quiescence, not of initiative."[17] According to Trible, man sins precisely in his lack of initiative, that is, in his lack of mastery, of strength in the face of his own inclinations and materiality. It is thus not primordially to woman that man succumbs, but to his own desires and physicality. The mastery he has lost is then not his mastery over woman, but over himself. In doing so, however, man loses not only his mastery over nature within and without, but his very identity as a man. Indeed, this relapse into the realm of materiality, where everything is within his reach, and where the quest for pleasure is quintessential, is reminiscent of the intrauterine life where the child finds itself surrounded and nourished by the mother's life-giving fluids. Man's succumbing to materiality thus signifies man's regression to the maternal dimension and, consequently, his loss of virility in the face of the world.

The only way for man to rise to virility in this context, would be to create a separation between himself and the material. This separation is described in our passage as the introduction of ethics within the heretofore purely pleasurable realm of materiality. Levinas mentions the necessity of an interruption of enjoyment which "incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself"[18] in order for a given subjectivity to rise above immanence and reach its full potentiality as a subject. Man's sin lies then not in seeking pleasure, or in following his desires, but in doing so without any reference to ethics. It is then in the limitation of the pleasure principle that man's virility lies and not in the limitless indulgence of his desires and inclinations. Levinas comments,

"[s]ubjection and elevation arise in patience above non-freedom. It is the subjection of the allegiance to the Good."[19] The nobility and elevation of man lies then precisely in this "non-freedom." But this is not a non-freedom that restricts and dwarfs man's capacities, but precisely one which allows him to rise, within this very non-freedom, to manhood.

But the manhood described here by Levinas has nothing to do with the Cartesian definition of subjectivity as mastery, but rather describes an "allegiance" to a dimension beyond that of materiality. What makes for a man's virility is, paradoxically, his capacity to rise above his own inclinations to a destiny beyond what Levinas terms the "narrowness" of the sensible, towards the good. Thus man attains masculinity, not in establishing himself in the world, or in finding his place in the sun, but rather in a separation from the world, in a distance, an exile with regards the sensible realm in the name of a higher calling, that of an allegiance to the good, or ethics. Contrary to the Cartesian view on virility as centrality and mastery in the world, the biblical definition of virility lies in man accepting the calling of an exile in the world, of a differentiation, a separation from the material in the name of the good. Thus the sin of man lies in his refusal of the condition of exile in the world, in his refusal to leave the realm of immanence, to resist his own inclinations and desires in the name of the spoken command, thus leading to the very loss of his virility. It is precisely this virile essence that the curse will seek to salvage in its introduction of two new experiences in the life of man: pain and death.[20]

The expulsion from Eden

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
Through painful toil
You will eat food from it
All the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you
And you will eat the plants of the field
By the sweat of your brow
You will eat your food
Until you return to the ground
Since from it you were taken
For dust you are
And to dust you will return"
Genesis 3:17–19 (NIV)

This curse gives rise to a number of interrogations. The first thing that strikes the reader as strange is the cursing of the ground. If it is Adam who sinned, why then is the ground cursed? Although it is possible to understand the mention of the ground as alluding to Adam's sinful loss of mastery over his own materiality, one does not understand why the ground *per se* is cursed. The mention of painful toil also seems strange. Although it is true that Adam's sin lies in a lack

of mastery over the pleasure principle, how does toil, let alone painful toil, remedy this problem? Is the abolition of pleasure by pain really a solution to the problem of man's loss of mastery over the sensible? Finally, the sentence to death seems extremely severe. Why such a severe punishment for succumbing to materiality? Indeed, the punishment of death, of a return to the dust, seems precisely to go in the direction of Adam's sin, of his relapse into materiality, into the dimension of the dust. If Adam's sin constitutes precisely a relapse into his material nature, into the dust where he comes from, why then the curse of death, of a "return to the dust"? Where is the redemptive function of the curse?

Why is the ground cursed? It seems strange that Adam's sin should condemn the earth. What is the connection between man's sin and the earth? We saw that Adam's calling consisted in his mastery of the earthly dimension within himself, of his subduing the materiality, the *tohu bohu* within himself to the ethical injunction breathed into his very being. What makes up Adam's virility would then be less his ability to master nature without than his ability to master nature within himself. Yet, we do not see how the two are connected. Why does Adam's failure to master the earthly dimension within himself lead to the destruction of the earth? Rashi offers an interesting take on this question and observes an intrinsic connection between man's dual nature and that of the cosmos at large. Indeed, just like man, the cosmos, according to Rashi, is composed according to a dual nature: the heavens and the earth. The story of creation alternates systematically between these two dimensions until the creation of man, who, likewise will see himself composed of a heavenly element and an earthly element. Rashi comments:

> Consequently . . . there had to be created *a being composed of both*, of heavenly and of earthly matter, for otherwise there would have been envy (lack of harmony) among the works of Creation, in that there would have been devoted to one class of them one day more of the Creation than to the others.[21]

In other words, man's capacity to harmonize (or not) the two poles of his dual nature has an influence on the harmony in nature at large. If man's nature tips towards chaos, an imbalance will enter the rest of nature and destabilize it. If man's nature reaches equilibrium, likewise, nature will remain in balance.

Man thus constitutes a microcosm of the macrocosm and, as such, finds himself responsible not only for the harmony between heaven and earth within himself, but also for that of the universe at large. Soloveitchik comments:

> The contradiction that one finds in the macrocosm between ontic beauty and perfection and monstrous "nothingness" also appears in the microcosm—in man—for the latter incorporates within himself the most perfect creation and the most unimaginable chaos and void, light and darkness, the abyss and the law, a coarse, turbid being and a clear, lucid existence, the beast and the image of God.[22]

This intrinsic connection between man's dual nature and the cosmos' dual nature constitutes an interesting perspective in that it connects man's capacity to master himself with his calling to master and subdue nature. Only inasmuch as he is able to master his own materiality and inclinations will he be able to master nature's chaos and *tohu bohu*. The state of nature and of the world thus depends on man's attunement with the command breathed within his being. To lose his self-mastery and to succumb to his own materiality would then bring about an unleashing of the chaotic forces of nature. Thus man finds himself from the onset responsible for the state of the world at large. His actions have a scope that goes beyond his own personal destiny, and takes on cosmic proportions.

Commenting on Adam's curse, Levinas observes precisely this responsibility in the first man who is "asked to account for things which he did not will and which were not born from his freedom."[23] This quote is interesting in that it broadens the calling of man to include a world beyond his own existence. Man is not only responsible for his own actions, but for those of the world at large. His calling is thus not one of mastery of the world, whereby he controls and disposes of it for his own purposes, but rather one of responsibility for the world and for the maintenance of the delicate balance between matter and spirit. We now better understand why the ground finds itself cursed upon man's sin. Inasmuch as man's balance between earth and spirit has an impact on that of the world, man's loss of balance thus entails a loss of balance in the world at large. Man's succumbing to the chaos and materiality within himself thus brings about a corresponding triumph of chaos and materiality over spirit in the universe at large. Yet, likewise, the redemption of the world will come about from the restoration of man's mastery over himself. But, for this, a deeper understanding of the curse of toil is needed.

The curse of work also seems strange in light of Adam's sin. We do not see right away the connection between man's succumbing to the pleasure principle and the curse of painful toil of the earth. We must then analyze the structure of work in order to understand the connection between the two, and, more importantly, the redemptive potentiality of work with regards to man's sin. Commenting on man's regression to the material, Levinas observes that "there must be produced a heteronomy that incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself."[24] In other words, the only way for man to again recover his masculine essence and his dignity is for there to be "heteronomy," or a disturbance of his complacent regression to immanence and materiality. Painful toil precisely introduces such a heteronomy. Through pain and toil, man is raised from his "animal complacency" in enjoyment and finds himself extirpated, separated, exiled, in spite of himself, from the matrix of enjoyment. Levinas comments, "pain comes to interrupt an enjoyment in its very isolation, and thus tears me from myself."[25] Thus, the pain of toil operates a rupture in man's complacent regression to the material, tearing him from his coincidence with nature, to another destiny.

Therein lies precisely the redemptive character of painful toil: to restore man's calling to master and subdue nature and materiality rather than to

succumb to its magnetic pull. Man has a destiny other than to sink into the immanence of materiality, and to follow the magnetic pull of his desires and inclinations. He is also spirit, also breath, that is to say, also commanded to rise above his own materiality in order to subdue and master it. Man is not just a being among beings, but the being called to a destiny beyond being and otherwise than being. Old Testament scholar André LaCocque comments, "[b]y tilling, Adam puts his mark, his seal, on the world, and he 'guards/keeps' it as to prevent it from absorbing him so completely that he would become an object in the midst of other objects."[26] In other words, work is what ensures that a separation is effectuated between Adam and the materiality of the world; it is what ensures that Adam rises forth from his previously narcissistic immersion in the world, from his infantile assimilation with the sensible world to a higher destiny.

This redemptive character of toil has also been observed in the Midrash. The Midrash Rabbah makes an implicit link between the virtue of waiting and the reversal of man's immersion in the material. Commenting on the three years ascribed to a tree before it is to bear fruit, the Midrash chastises Adam for his own incapacity to defer his hunger:

> For you could not abide in the commandment that applied to you for even a single hour, and lo, your children can wait for three years to observe the prohibition of the use of the fruit of a tree for the first three years after it is planted: "Three years shall it be forbidden to you, it shall not be eaten." (Lev. 19:23)[27]

In this Midrash, the deferment of pleasure of the children of Adam is put in direct correlation with Adam's incapacity to distance himself from his own desires. Perhaps it is possible to see there a reversal of Adam's immersion in the material through the introduction of the three-year temporal span separating man from the enjoyment of the fruit. The deferment of pleasure of the children of Adam would then serve the redemptive purpose of raising man above the immediacy of enjoyment and restoring his dignity as a being above the materiality of nature.

Thus, the pain of work would have the redemptive purpose of reminding man that he is more than materiality, more than dust, more than the earth that nourishes him.[28] The pain of toil thus testifies to an alienation, an exile of man within a world where he was previously at home. But in so doing, the exile of toil also serves to remind man of his destiny as the only being whose preoccupations go beyond materiality. Toil reminds man that dust and materiality is not his home, and that he has been called to rise above this materiality, to master and subdue it. Only in this differing, this separation between man and earth will man again recover his lost virility and dignity. Soloveitchik comments, "[d]ignity is unobtainable as long as man has not reclaimed himself from coexistence with nature."[29] Man's destiny does not coexist with being, it does not coincide with materiality. His dignity and virility lies, on the contrary,

in his capacity to rise above nature, to subdue it both within and without himself. Nachmanides makes the same observation: "'(thou) has crowned him with honor and glory,' which refers to his . . . intelligent, wise, and technically resourceful striving."[30] The painful striving of man is thus the condition of the restoration of his lost virility and masculinity. It is thus through the painful experience of exile from the earth that once sustained him, of his differentiation from the dust of his origins, that man rises again to manhood.

And it is precisely from within this exile, through this painful toil, that man's work has a redemptive impact on the earth which found itself cursed because of him.[31] Indeed, inasmuch as Adam succeeds in re-establishing a balance between the material and spiritual dimensions coexisting within him, he likewise restores the balance between the elements of the world, which, upon his loss of mastery, sank into chaos and disruption. LaCocque comments:

> *The human is not in nature; nature is in the human*. He is not only the king of creation, creation is in his embrace and depends on him. That is why, as long as the humans live in peace in Eden, everything else is at peace. When they fall, everything falls with them. The world with its convulsions and its glories is mirror to their soul. Paradoxically, the human is the macrocosm.[32]

Thus, according to LaCocque, the inner balance between the material and the spiritual brought about by toil brings a similar balance to the heretofore convulsing universe, "[o]nce again, . . . Adam is able to bring things back to their primeval perfection by his creativity and work, and by his integrity and righteousness. Paradise is *retrievable here and now*."[33] And yet, the last part of the curse seems to testify to the very opposite of this observation.

The curse to return to the dust seems, indeed, to go against everything we have said so far concerning the redemptive intention of the curse.[34] We saw that the pain of toil was uttered in order to restore man to his original exile and separation from the earth, to raise him from the dust and materiality from which he had emerged to a higher calling: that of a creative ordering of matter. Why then not stop there? Why the punishment of death? What redemptive function, if any, does death have for man? Far from containing the possibility of redemption, death signifies, on the contrary, a return to the dust from which he had been called to arise. Far from opening up new temporal possibilities—as the effort of toil—death destroys all possibilities, including the possibility of a redemption or rehabilitation of man after the curse. Death emerges from the curse as the impossibility of redemption *par excellence*. Death is the end. There is no more hope.

There exists, however, another signification of death, one that does not neutralize the redemptive character of painful toil, but, on the contrary, complements it. Indeed, man's rehabilitation through his work, through his mastery of nature, can, when unfettered, lead to man's self-glorification to the point of his forgetting his creaturiality and metaphysical calling. We remember here the arrogant endeavor of Babel, which, through work, proposed to "reach

the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). While work can restore man's dignity and elevate him from the materiality from which he has emerged, unchecked, work can lead to the temptation of idolatry, that is, of man's erecting himself as center and origin of his resources and possessions. The creative power of work can go to such lengths as to lead man to forget his own dependence on another for his sustenance. Work can lead man to think that he has not received his life and everything attached to it, but that he has somehow brought it about through his own power. Thus, while work does serve to elevate man from the dust from which he emerged, it also can lead him to forget those very humble origins that account for his dependence on God.

The injunction to "return to the dust," the consciousness of death, would thus constitute a reminder to man of his origins in the dust, thereby serving as a constant reminder of his creaturiality, of his dependence on God. Distinguishing between two Adams, the first Adam whose dignity lies in his masterful stance within nature, and the second Adam, who has never forgotten that he is dust, Soloveitchik observes:

> The Bible has stated explicitly that Adam the second was formed from the dust of the ground because the knowledge of the humble origin of man is an integral part of Adam's . . . experience. Adam the second has never forgotten that he is just a handful of dust.[35]

The reminder to man, through the consciousness of death, that he is but dust thus serves to constantly orient man back to his creator. The awareness of his precariousness, of his vulnerability, points man back to one stronger than he. Soloveitchik comments:

> The Halakhah has linked human distress with the human capability of renewal and self-transformation. Man's confrontation with evil and suffering must result according to the Halakhah, in the great act of *teshuva* . . . "In thy distress when all these things are come upon thee . . . thou wilt return to the Lord thy God and hearken unto His voice" (Deut. 4: 30).[36]

The awareness of man of his upcoming death thus serves a redemptive purpose in that it points man back to his creator, to one who can raise *him* from the dust and elevate him again to the dignity of manhood. Soloveitchik comments, "[e]ach great redemptive step forward in man's quest for humanity entails the ever-growing tragic awareness . . . of his loneliness and insecurity."[37] In other words, redemption is an event that occurs in man's life only inasmuch as he has come to an awareness of his own insecurity and loneliness, that is to say, of his origins in the dust. Whereas the first Adam, according to Soloveitchik, works out his own salvation through the painful discipline of work, the second Adam realizes that all his efforts are naught in the face of death, and that only a hand stronger than his can truly raise him from the dust and restore his dignity as a man. Thus, far from signifying the end of man's destiny and calling to rise

out of the dust, the awareness of death can reorient him to this very destiny inasmuch as it reminds him of his creator.

Conclusion

Contrary to the Western conception of the virile subjectivity as central and masterful in the face of the world, the biblical account of the masculine identity reveals to us a being whose rapport with the world is, rather, profoundly de-centered. Called to rise above the dust from which he has been formed, the first man sees his destiny to be, from the onset, an exilic one with regards to the world at large. His succumbing to Eve shows, moreover, a man struggling with such a lofty destiny, his first impulse being that of a regression into the very materiality from which he had been called. Adam's listening to the voice of the woman signifies in fact the surrender of man to the realm of the sensible at the detriment of his ethical and spiritual orientation. At the woman's command, Adam forfeits his dignity as a man, that is to say, his allegiance to the good, thus bringing about the destruction of the world. The curse must be then understood against this background as the possibility for man to regain his dignity as a man and to recover his exilic calling. Both the curse of work and of death serve this purpose. The temporal deference introduced by work in the sensible realm of enjoyment seals this separation of man from matter. Painful toil reminds man, time and time again, that he is not at home in the universe, and that he must wrench his survival from a now reticent and uncanny context. As for death, it constitutes the perennial reminder to man that he is dust, and therefore, a mere temporary traveler on the surface of the earth. But, as such, death also reminds man of his other calling beyond being and towards the orientation of the good breathed into him at the beginning of the world.

Notes

1 See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 35.
2 See Carol J. Adams, ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993).
3 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 165.
4 This duality has, incidentally, been observed by thinkers of the philosophical tradition. From Plato to Aristotle to the modern explorations of the subconscious, the polarity of man's psyche has been the object of philosophical reflection. Joseph Soloveitchik outlines these traditions of thought as follows: "All human thought has grappled with this strange dualism that is so pronounced in man and has sought to overcome it. From Plato and Aristotle, who distinguished between the nutritive soul, the sensitive soul, and the rational soul, to the psychoanalytic school of Freud and his followers, who sought to probe the depths of man's subconscious, this problem of dualism keeps reappearing and demanding its resolution." Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 109. The question of course remains as to what this dualism signifies? What is the meaning in our text of the "dust of the ground" and of the "breath of life"? What do these two dimensions signify? How are they to be articulated? And how do they speak to man's masculine destiny?

5 Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary Translated into English and Annotated*, vol. 1, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine and Co., 1945), Gen. 2:5, [9].
6 Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 80.
7 Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 166.
8 This dual view of man's nature as signifying towards a divine injunction or command is also observed by LaCocque: "The composition of the human is one of the tautest paradoxes possible . . . It is precisely because of this inherent capability that there is a divine commandment . . . with the purpose to channel human energies." André LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock, 2006), 62.
9 Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 165–166.
10 Ibid., 166.
11 LaCocque comments, "It is not that the human couple before eating of the forbidden fruit were ignorant, without wisdom, morons manipulated at will be the creator God. . . . The commandment initiates human ethics." LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 74.
12 Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 108–109.
13 Ibid., 37–38.
14 Philo, *De Opificio Mundi*. Cited in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, ed. Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 42.
15 See Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), Book I, XX [101], Book II, I [129–133].
16 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, vol. 1, The ArtScroll Series (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), Gen. 3:16, [129].
17 Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread," in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, ed. Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 435.
18 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 149.
19 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 126.
20 My reading thus sees in the curse not a mere punishment but the beginning of redemption. This was already hinted at by the ancient rabbis, as is observed by LaCocque, "[t]he end is not tragic for, according to an insight of the ancient rabbis and backed up by all the biblical tradition, the last divine word they heard in Eden . . . *tashuv* ('*you shall return*!'), is still ringing in the ears of Adam and Eve." LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 31. Thus, according to this rabbinic source, even though situated in the curse of man, "to dust you will return," the clause "you will return" resonates with the hope of retrieving a paradise lost. The curse thus seems to contain elements of hope and of redemption, as I shall argue in the remaining part of this chapter.
21 Rashi, *Pentateuch*, Gen. 2:7, [10].
22 Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 109.
23 Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 170.
24 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 149.
25 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 55.
26 LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 85.
27 Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation—Volume 1 Parashiyyot One through Thirty-Three on Genesis 1:1 to 8:14*, Brown Judaic Studies 104 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Parashah Twenty-One, Gen. 3:22–24, XXI:VII, 3a, [235].
28 LaCocque observes in this elevation above materiality the essential characteristic of the Israelite religion, "[i]n a unique way, the Israelites broke their shackles with the natural cycles and felt free to celebrate life. *For the first time in human history, fertility was replaced by*

love; agrarian expectations by historical hope; and superstitious terror by quiet faith." LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 210–211.

29 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Random House, 2006), 15.
30 Cited by Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 16.
31 This is also LaCocque's observation, "[t]his process of transfiguring the cursed earth is . . . *a process of redemption*." LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 230.
32 Ibid., 111.
33 Ibid., 90.
34 LaCocque sees in this last section of the curse the proof that the fall of man constitutes anything but a progression as has been inferred by certain commentators (see Chapter 1): "The earth that is the human domain after the transgression resembles the initial chaos, before its cosmologization by the Creator . . .There is no way to read Genesis 3 as the story of an Oedipal progress; it is a regression." Ibid., 120.
35 Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 35.
36 Ibid., 35–36.
37 Ibid., 36.

3 Cain

The exile east of Eden

Introduction

The story of Cain is an intriguing one, riddled with enigmatic allusions, twists, and turns. From the beginning, he is given a central position in the world, called "a man" by his mother upon her giving birth to him, and ascribed an almost divine character.[1] Moreover, as his name and profession as a tiller of the soil indicate, he is also profoundly grounded in the world, at home in it, and in full possession of it. As such, Cain epitomizes the Western characterization of subjectivity as "master and possessor of the world," as Descartes defined it.[2] Our text, and, as we shall see, its commentators, seem, however, uncomfortable with this positioning on the part of Cain; and the events that ensue the narrative of his birth seem recurrently to aim at a destabilization of Cain's stance in the world, at his de-centralization and exile from the world which he possesses.

There is, first, the strange occurrence of the sacrifice offered by Cain to God, which, with no explanation whatsoever, is refused by God. Commentators have elaborated at length as to why Cain's sacrifice was rejected,[3] but, as we shall see, our text remains profoundly enigmatic as to the reasons of this rejection. Indeed, there is no indication prior to Cain's actions as to what constitutes an "acceptable" sacrifice. We therefore have no means by which to judge Cain's sacrifice. One can elaborate at leisure as to the possible wicked intentions of Cain. The truth is, however, that our text shows no indication that Cain was a wicked person. There are no elements in the text that show Cain to have been any less "pious" than his brother who follows him in his actions. Why then this injustice on the part of God? Why this act of arbitrary favoritism?

More enigmatic are the ensuing words God speaks to Cain, remonstrating him preemptively, it seems, for a sin he has not even committed, nor perhaps even intended to commit. Not only does God refuse Cain's sacrifice, but he also scolds him about a deed he has not yet done. Everything seems to be pushing Cain beyond his own limits,[4] thereby perhaps even leading to the ensuing events with his brother "in the field." Strangely enough, this event in the field constitutes the first time that Cain addresses his brother. One wonders why. Indeed, this conversation, which, as we shall see, remains wordless, constitutes

the central passage of our text thereby containing the key to its interpretation. Yet, whatever verbal (or non-verbal) exchange occurred, Cain finds himself pushed to murder Abel.

One cannot but feel for Cain and somehow understand his actions. They are the actions of a man who finds himself caught in the absurdity of an existence without meaning, without orientation, an existence where the gods reign arbitrarily, and where no indication is given as to how to please them. Like Camus' "Stranger," Cain's actions seem to flow from this sense of absurdity. He kills, arbitrarily, without an explanation, without a cause, the murder having been already contained in the preceding accusation of God and in the failed dialogue with Abel. More enigmatic, however, is God's manner of punishment of exile. Why exile? And why exile not only from the earth but from God's face? God seems to be abandoning Cain here to his fate and alienating him from all further contact with him. Yet, one might wonder whether this exile does not have a deeper significance, one directly related to the nature of Cain's sin.

This chapter will attempt to explain these strange occurrences in the story of Cain. To do so, however, we will first have to understand the problem with Cain's centrality. What is, indeed, the problem with Cain being the "man," with his masterful stance in the world. Were the humans not called to "subdue" the world? Why then would Cain's stance come to be a problem? Understanding Cain's problem might then help us better understand the motive behind God's seemingly arbitrary preference for Abel. Are God's actions really arbitrary, or is there a pedagogical intention behind his actions? And if so, what is God trying to teach Cain? Finally, why exile? Why does God choose to exile Cain? Does this exile signify the end of Cain, or rather, as we will show, a last attempt by God to teach him something of utmost importance, something he had been trying to show him all along?

The self at center stage

Adam made love to his wife Eve,
And she became pregnant
And gave birth to Cain.
She said,
"With the help of the Lord
I have brought forth a man"
Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.
Now Abel kept flocks,
And Cain worked the soil.
Genesis 4:1–2 (NIV)

Our text has a number of strange allusions, the first of which is Eve's exclamation upon giving birth to Cain: "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man" (Gen. 4:1). Not only is Cain described as the "man," that is to say, given a central position with regards to his brother Cain whom she bears almost

as an afterthought, but he is identified as from the Lord.[5] Cain is not only central, but also has an almost divine identity. Cain finds himself, from the very circumstances of his birth, ascribed a central position previously reserved for God: he is, like God, central, unique, the only one worth mentioning. Old Testament scholar André LaCocque comments on this as follows: "Cain occupies the center-stage all along. [Whereas] Abel is narratively . . . eclipsed by his brother, or so it seems."[6] Thus, Cain, from the very beginning of the narrative finds himself propelled at center stage and ascribed, contrarily to his brother Abel, a strong stance in the world.

This central position of Cain is further emphasized by his name, which comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to acquire." This semantic connection is indeed noticed by Medieval Jewish commentator Nachmanides, who noted that the name Cain "is derived from Eve's statement . . . 'I have acquired a man.'"[7] Thus, the central and masterful stance exercised by Cain later on is already inscribed in his very name. He is born under the sign of mastery, of acquisition. Cain's destiny will be marked by the desire and ability to possess, to acquire, thereby ensuring the centrality and strength of his stance in the world. Next to Cain, Abel seems almost unsubstantial. His name means "vapor" or vanity, announcing a personality not intent on possessivity or mastery. Cain is the only substantial character of the story. Abel, as his name, and, as his destiny will indicate, has no substance, no hold on the earth, and no chance is given to him to make a mark on the latter.

Finally, Cain's central stance is emphasized by his profession: he is a "worke[r] of the soil" (Gen. 4:2). Whereas his brother Abel is a mere vagabond, without anything to his name, Cain owns the land, the land is his. Cain thus epitomizes the masterful stance incarnated by Western subjectivity. He is central and masterful in a world that he possesses and that revolves around him. The world at large, the exterior reality, thus finds itself relative to Cain and to his stance as master and possessor. We are here at the heart of Western subjectivity as described by Descartes for whom the external reality is ever and irremediably relative to a given subjectivity. While the Cainesque personality does transcend itself in the world, it does so ultimately with an intention to eventually acquire and possess it. Cain, in his centrality and possessiveness, thus constitutes the very type of the Western conception of the subject.

Such a central stance has become, however, the object of a number of criticisms on the part of commentators. The Midrash sheds a pejorative light on Cain's profession assimilating it to men of "no good": "three . . . lusted after the soil, and no good ever came of them: Cain, Noah, and Uzziah. . . . 'Cain a tiller of the ground' (Gen. 4:2) . . . 'Noah the husbandman' (Gen. 9:20) . . . Uzziah: 'for he loved husbandry' (2 Chron. 26:10)."[8] Cain the murderer, Noah the drunkard, and Uzziah the usurper: all three sins being assimilated by the Midrash to their love of the land. This is interesting and merits our attention. Indeed, one might wonder as to the problem with agriculture. After all, Adam was the first agriculturist and no bad seems to have been found in his tending

the soil, apart of course from the cursedness of the soil itself. Why then this distrust on the part of the Midrash for agriculture? Why does the biblical narrative show such a distrust of the soil?

Perhaps this distrust comes from the ever-present temptation to allow oneself to be reduced to the soil one is tilling, that is to say, to find in this tilling and in the fruits thereof one's sole destiny, one's sole purpose in life. Such an attachment to the soil poses a problem inasmuch as it comes with an obliviousness to the fact that man is not a mere earthling, but also a spiritual being whose purpose is to rise above the earth from which it was made. Such was indeed, as we saw, Adam's temptation: to allow his earthliness to get the better of his spiritual being, to not rise above his earthly condition to his spiritual destiny. And indeed, Cain's centrality and at-home-ness in the world might indicate a forgetfulness of the spiritual destiny of humankind as incarnated by his brother Abel, the wanderer, the dispossessed, and as such, the more sensitive one to a dimension other and beyond the realm of nature.

But what of this spiritual dimension? What does this mean? Indeed, our text seems to contradict the above analysis inasmuch as it is Cain who initiates the sacrifice, and Abel follows suit. What is to say, in our text, that Cain is not a spiritual being, in other words, that he is not a religious man, attuned to the divine? Perhaps, however, there is an important prerequisite to being a genuinely religious man: that of having a concept of transcendence. It seems, however, that in his central stance in the world, Cain has anything but a concept of something beyond himself, of a dimension remaining absolute with regards to his masterful stance, of a dimension of *otherness*. Indeed, in a world where everything finds itself submitted to Cain's will to power, even, as we shall see, his brother's life, there is no room for an other, and as such, for transcendence. What religion can possibly emerge from such a lack of consciousness of otherness?

Although heavily involved in the world, the Cainesque subjectivity is, then, never genuinely in touch with the world as *other*, that is to say, as absolute, as existing beyond its grasp. It is stuck in the mode of enjoyment without any genuine sense of transcendence, "[e]goist without reference to the Other . . . entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate—without ears, like a hungry stomach."[9] Such is then, perhaps, the problem with Cain: his central and possessive stance in the world makes him oblivious to the dimension of the other, and as such, to ethics. Cain might be a *Homo religiosos*, but he is not yet a *Homo ethicos*, and as such, his religiousness comes into question. We are now in a position to understand God's refusal of Cain's sacrifice.

The exile of pain

In the course of time
Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil
As an offering to the Lord.
And Abel also brought an offering—

Fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.
The Lord looked with favor on Abel
And his offering,
But on Cain and his offering
He did not look with favor.
So Cain was very angry,
And his face was downcast.

Genesis 4:3–5 (NIV)

This is one of the most enigmatic passages in the Bible. Indeed, one is at a loss to understand God's behavior! From a first reading, it seems that both Cain and Abel brought respectable sacrifices, each from his own domain of work. Moreover, it is Cain who here initiates the sacrifice. Abel just follows. Yet, God chooses to accept Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. The question of course arises as to why? Why does God choose to favor Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's? The question is all the more relevant as there seem to have been no prior guidelines as to what and how God wants humankind to sacrifice. How then would Cain know what constitutes a legitimate sacrifice? Indeed, the whole story seems most arbitrary! One cannot help but sympathize with Cain who seems to find himself the object of blind and arbitrary forces.

The Midrash ventures a number of reasons as to God's motives for respecting Abel's offering and not Cain's. For example, the Midrash perceives that Cain did not, as did Abel, offer the first fruits of his crop,

> "Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground" . . . It was from the refuse. . . . The matter may be compared to the case of a wicked sharecropper who ate [his share] by taking it from the first fruits of the figs and to the king handed over the late figs.[10]

In other words, Cain did not bring the first fruits of his crop, that is to say, the best of his crop to God, thereby not offering Him with his best. Abel, on the other hand, brought the "firstborn of his flock," therewith honoring God with the best of his work. Unlike Abel, his brother, Cain is not able to distinguish between God's part and his own part, between the sacred and the profane realms. He is too caught up in his urge to possess the earth, to genuinely care about another reality beyond that enterprise.

As such, Cain reveals himself as having no genuine concept of transcendence. LaCocque observes:

> Abel's sacrifice is discriminatory: he brings up the fat parts of the firstlings of his flock. . . . Abel could never be said to be the slave . . . of the herd like Cain is the slave of the soil. Here occurs the indispensable standing back from the object. Cain and his sacrifice were locked in a circle; Abel breaks the circle and he alone of the two becomes a priest, a mediator, in the intermediary space between God and creation.[11]

In other words, while Abel is able to rise above his own work and perceive within his work a trace of the divine, Cain remains hopelessly bound to his work and to its product. He is not able to discriminate between that which, in his work, is the result of natural cycles, and that which comes from the hand of God. His work and existence remain, as such, untouched by the spiritual realm. Cain remains, as LaCocque describes him, "a man of nature."[12]

The problem remains, however, as to the fairness of God's judgment. Indeed, it is easy for Abel, whose name and line of work speak to a natural attunement to the spiritual realm, to perform the right religious rite. But what of Cain? Grounded in nature, as his name and profession indicate, how is he to acquire such a sensitivity to a transcendent realm if no provision is made to teach him about this realm? Cain performs the rite according to what he knows. He is a man of nature and his piety reflects this. In the absence of any teaching or orientation on the part of the divine as to how to rise to the spiritual realm, how is he to know? Is then piety the prerogative of a few gifted ones, such as Abel? How is the common, earthly, man to rise to that level without any prior indications? Can one be blamed for what one does not know?

Yet, God chooses to ignore Cain, and this, without any clear reason as to why. And it is this act of disrespect on the part of God which profoundly alters Cain's stance in the world. Indeed, the text says that Cain's face fell. This is significant when one realizes that the face constitutes more than a mere part of the body, but rather, symbolizes the self's dignity and personhood. Levinas describes the face as that which, in a given person, signifies their freedom, their expression, and resistance to the powers of another.[13] When the text describes the falling of Cain's face or countenance, it is describing an event that goes much deeper than mere emotional disruption of anger or frustration: it is Cain's dignity, personhood, humanity that is stripped away from him. God's actions have the result of destroying in Cain what constituted his dignity, his manhood, and humanity. The pain inflicted by God thus brings about a profound transformation of Cain's previously manly, central stance in the world! But why such a drastic measure against Cain? What does God want with him?

One wonders, however, if there is not perhaps meaning to be drawn from God's actions towards Cain. Perhaps there is a pedagogical intention behind this pain inflicted by God upon Cain. But we must go back to what constitutes Cain's problem. Indeed, the sacrifice of Cain does not contain the key to Cain's sin. It is the passages prior to the event of the sacrifice which give an indication of Cain's problem. Cain's problem is not so much in his intentions, or in his actions, as in his general stance in the world: a central stance, which, as such, remains essentially oblivious to an other. Cain's problem lies not so much in his performing the wrong rite, or in not being attuned to the spiritual realm, as in a lack of concept of otherness. Cain's problem is not a spiritual one, but an ethical one. But inasmuch as he has no concept of ethics, he likewise has a poor concept of transcendence and of the spiritual realm.

This is where God's way with Cain becomes interesting. Indeed, what better way to open Cain up to the dimension of the other than through the experience

of suffering or pain? Levinas describes the experience of pain as a "vulnerability" which "tears me from myself,"[14] and from a "life that is complacent in itself, that lives of its life."[15] In other words, the character of pain is precisely to dislodge the self, to jolt it to the point where it loses its comfortable and central stance in the world. The experience of pain is relevant here inasmuch as it interrupts a self heretofore complacent in itself. Pain interrupts the stance of enjoyment, which, as we saw, signifies a self for whom everything is relative, there *for* the self. Pain thus causes a falling of the face, a down-casting of the self.

But the pain here is not meaningless or absurd. There is a meaning behind this painful experience. The pedagogy of pain is a pedagogy of otherness. For it is the personhood of his brother Abel that is signified behind Cain's pain, which arises from Cain's painful experience of rejection. In respecting Abel and *not* Cain, God allows for Abel to rise up, for the first time, as a person in the realm of Cain. For the first time, Cain takes notice of his brother; for the first time, he sees him and notices his presence in the world. For the first time, Cain realizes that he is not alone in the world, that he is not the center of the world. For a person like Cain, whose very identity was derived from his central and solitary stance in the world, the emergence of Abel by the act of God is a profoundly disturbing one, one that stabs him to the heart, the very core of his self! Cain is not merely angry, or depressed: he is un-done. His whole identity is unraveled by God's actions. For the first time, Cain finds himself expulsed from his comfortable stance in the world, de-centered, exiled in the very world that he was previously the sole possessor of.

This unraveling of Cain's central and masterful stance, this expulsion on the part of God, is, however, not performed in order to destroy him. This is not a case of arbitrary favoritism. Behind God's preference of Abel, it is Cain that is sought out. In the turning of his face towards Abel, God is seeking Cain. The whole event aims at saving Cain from an existence from which all otherness is blotted out. Indeed, the pain inflicted upon Cain constitutes his first experience of otherness, and, as such, an opportunity for him to arise to true selfhood and to true individuation as a consciousness no longer self-enclosed but genuinely transcending itself towards an other. The pain is there not to destroy Cain but to give him his first experience, his first lesson of otherness. In other words, far from disintegrating the self, the painful experience of the other frees the self, releases it from its "enchainment to itself," from its suffocation.

God is not so much trying to annihilate Cain as to release him from the prison of his ego. God is not so much trying to destroy Cain's world, as to broaden it to include the dimension of the other, to make it into a shared world. It is not the destruction of Cain that is aimed at by God's pedagogy of pain, but his elevation to true selfhood. What makes for the self's true dignity is not mastery of the world, as the Western concept of subjectivity would have it, but its sensibility to otherness. The elevated self is not the *masterful* self but the *relational* self. What makes for the elevation of the self is not its capacity to "master and possess" nature, but to relate to otherness. It is thus not the will to power that makes for the highly individuated self, but, far to the contrary, the sensitivity to ethics.

True selfhood is thus not that of a central self, at home in the world, but that of the expulsed, exiled self, vulnerable to pain, exposed to injustice, and, as such, open to an other. The pain that Cain is experiencing as the end of him is, in fact, the opening up of the possibility of otherness. Such, then, is the pedagogy of pain: to open up the self to a dimension other than itself, beyond itself, otherwise than being, and, as such, to allow for the genuine self-transcendence necessary to true worship. For only a self that has a concept of the other can genuinely address God, can genuinely access transcendence. It is ethics, which, in the case of Cain, must usher in metaphysics. Without a sense of ethics, no metaphysics, no spirituality, no religion is possible. It is because of Cain's obliviousness to the other that he could not attain true worship, true self-transcendence towards God as transcendent and other, and that his sacrifice was not respected. Only upon seeing the face of his brother, Abel, would Cain rise above nature and attain the spiritual dimension of his very being that he previously was oblivious to. Only upon learning to share the world with his brother would that world be genuinely sanctified by the action of humankind, and not remain at the level of mere matter. But this is not the path that Cain will choose to take, as is evident in the ensuing events unraveling in our passage.

The murder of the other

> *Now Cain said to his brother Abel,*
> *"Let's go out to the field."*
> *While they were in the field,*
> *Cain attacked his brother Abel*
> *And killed him.*
>
> Genesis 4:8 (NIV)

Indeed, the next scene shows an utter failure of God's pedagogical attempts. The pain reveals itself to be too much for Cain. The exile inflicted by God proves too difficult a trial for Cain who fails to see—or refuses to see—the ethical potentialities such a trial reveals. Cain chooses, rather, to recover his original stance. Un-done before God, having lost his very essence as a central and masterful being, Cain does not withstand the test and resorts to a last attempt at recovering his stance: murder. There are two moments of the act of murder, however, and it is to these that we now turn.

Interestingly, our passage does not begin with murder but with a failed attempt at dialogue. Our text mentions explicitly that Cain spoke to his brother Abel, but fails to fill in the blanks as to what was said during this conversation. LaCocque makes observation of this and situates the moment of this failed dialogue at the very center of the whole narrative,[16] thus giving our passage a special significance, "[t]he silence of murderous Cain is stressed by the verb 'he said.' Without it, we would not even know about the silence itself. But now it 'shouts' for our attention."[17] The writer of our narrative thus highlights this failed dialogue in two ways: first he situates it at the very center of the story, thus underlying its

significance. Second, he highlights it by introducing it with the clause, "he said," without ever filling in the blanks as to the nature of the exchange between the two brothers. This failed discourse thus holds the key to the problem at hand. But what does this mean? What is so significant about this failed dialogue?

To understand this we must understand what constitutes the ultimate meaning of dialogue or discourse. According to Levinas, discourse, or language constitutes the original moment of an encounter with an other inasmuch as "[l]anguage presupposes interlocutors, a plurality."[18] In other words, discourse is a way of encountering an exteriority that does not take it as an object of enjoyment. Language is thus a mode of encounter of otherness which does not fall into the mode of possession. Indeed, according to Levinas, language implies the notion of a shared world, *of* which we speak *to* another. In the moment of language, the interlocutor is thus constituted as over and beyond the world of possessable objects, and as coexisting in a shared world with the self. It is in this sense that, for Levinas, language is "ethical."[19] That is to say, it is ethical inasmuch as it recognizes the presence of a being in the world which the self cannot *possess* but, rather, which it must *address*, and this, as a coexistent being in a shared world.

And this is precisely what Cain cannot do! And this is why the dialogue is aborted, for to speak to his brother would be to implicitly recognize his presence in Cain's world, it would be to acknowledge his existence, to constitute him as another self, another human being, with an equal claim on the world. In line with Levinas's definition of language, LaCocque comments, "Cain is first unable to speak with his brother in the field because addressing him with whatever (even small) talk would acknowledge his otherness, that is, says Levinas, his intrinsic demand not to be harmed."[20] The moment of language would thus inaugurate the original ethical encounter between the two brothers, who, heretofore, have never exchanged a word, that is to say, never acknowledged each other's presence or existence in the world. Thus to speak is already to acknowledge an other, to welcome him or her into the realm of the self, and as such, to defer to that other as having an equal claim on the world. Language is thus impossible where the self reigns alone.

We now can understand the chilling quality of Cain's silence towards his brother. Such a silence is not a mere lack of words, but, more essentially, a negation of the other. It is a refusal to recognize the other as worthy of discourse, as worthy of coexisting in my world, as worthy of being *addressed* as an equal. It is a refusal of welcoming an other in his world inasmuch as language implies the recognition of the transcendence of the other, of his being more than a mere object of enjoyment or of mastery. It is the recognition of the other as an *interlocutor*, as having an equal claim on the world, as constituting a free being, absolute from the grasp and control of the self. The refusal of language—silence—thus constitutes a negation of the elevated status of the other as interlocutor, as coexisting with the self in a shared world. And, as such, it figures as the preface to murder.

And so Cain kills Abel. The exile of pain inflicted by God does not lead to his opening up onto the dimension of the other, but rather to the violent extermination of that other in what seems to Cain a desperate act of self-preservation.

The Cainesque self thus corresponds to the Hobbesian definition of human nature, "man is a wolf for man," naturally bent on self-preservation and, as such, condemned to eternal conflict and war. While Cain's reaction is natural, it does not, however, constitute, as Hobbes would imply, its only mode of being. There could have been a wholly different ending to Cain's struggle with his own self-interests, a wholly different denouement, a wholly different Cain at the end of it all. The pain inflicted by God might have opened him up to a wholly different destiny, an ethical destiny, and the opening up of a shared world, of a spiritualized nature.

But Cain's pain is too deep, too personal, too intimate for him to be able to withstand it. His exile too painful, and his expulsion from his previously central stance too much for him to bear. The Midrash makes this very observation, "'Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him' . . . Said R. Yohanan, 'Abel was stronger than Cain. . . . For when Scripture says, "He rose up;" it teaches only that Cain had been located beneath him.'"[21] Although it is impossible to ascertain whether Abel was indeed physically stronger than Cain, the pain experienced by Cain is such that it threw him off balance, expulsed him from his previously central position of mastery and this, for the profit of Abel. At this point of the narrative, Cain is indeed "beneath" Abel; he is the marginalized one, the expulsed one, and Abel is the chosen, central figure now in God's eyes. And this, Cain cannot accept. He must remain the only one; he must remain the central character of the story. This impulse is also intuited by Nachmanides who sees desperation in Cain's actions and fear that "the primary development of the world should be from his brother, for, after all, his offering was the one which was accepted."[22]

And so Cain refuses the lesson God is trying to teach him, and chooses to maintain his central stance in the world, and this at the price of his brother's life. But, as such, Cain refuses by the same token all ethical orientation to his destiny, any limitation placed on his being and on his existence. In LaCocque's terms, "Abel was the law to Cain."[23] That is to say, the rise of Abel to personhood constituted a limit to Cain's spontaneity and freedom. Inasmuch as Abel was to be acknowledged as holding an equal claim on the world, Cain could no longer be its sole possessor. But, as such, Cain could no longer be Cain (from the Hebrew word *qanah*, meaning to acquire or possess). Cain by essence must refuse any limit to his freedom. Cain's very name signifies towards a destiny from which ethics is absent, with no ethical orientation. Oblivious to God's attempts to orient him towards such a destiny, Cain recoils on himself and prefers to reign alone, without any limitations put upon his being.

But as such, Cain falls again into the age-old temptation of "being like God." In his biblical portraits, Elie Wiesel comments on Cain's murder as follows:

> Why did he do it? Perhaps he wanted to remain alone: an only child and, after his parents' death, the only man. Alone like God and perhaps alone in place of God. Like God, he thought to offer himself a human sacrifice in holocaust. . . . Cain killed to become God. To kill God. . . . Any man who takes himself for God ends up assassinating men.[24]

Cain's refusal of ethics thus inevitably leads to the refusal of God. His lack of sense of human otherness inevitably leads to the obliteration of any transcendent dimension, other than himself, that is of any spiritual realm. It is no wonder then that his act of worship finds itself rejected by God. What kind of encounter with God is possible from the part of a self, who, in his quest for centrality, has obliterated all possibility for otherness and transcendence? And yet, it is precisely an encounter that God will attempt to initiate with Cain, as is evident in the ensuing dialogue.

The atonement of exile

> *Then the Lord said to Cain,*
> *"Where is your brother Abel?"*
> *"I don't know," he replied.*
> *"Am I my brother's keeper?"*
> *The Lord said,*
> *"What have you done?*
> *Listen! Your brother's blood*
> *Cries out to me from the ground.*
> *Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground,*
> *Which opened its mouth*
> *To receive your brother's blood from your hand.*
> *When you work the ground,*
> *It will no longer yield its crops for you.*
> *You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."*
>
> Genesis 4:9–12 (NIV)

We have here a last attempt by God to reach Cain. A last attempt at dialogue whereby Cain finds himself addressed by God. God's question aims to awaken Cain to the dimension of otherness that he has just obliterated. And Cain again fails lamentably: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Levinas comments on this seemingly callous answer as follows:

> Why does the other concern me? What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper? These questions have meaning only if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned only with itself, is only a concern for itself. In this hypothesis it indeed remains incomprehensible that the absolute outside-of-me, the other, would concern me.[25]

In this question, Cain shows how utterly he has misunderstood what God had been trying to teach him. In this question he shows that he has no concept of the other whatsoever. Indeed, rather than hearing this question in a rebellious tone, one might hear it as an innocent question stemming from an ego, which has, as yet, no concept of the other whatsoever.

And so God punishes him and exiles him from the earth. This is an unusual punishment and merits our attention. Indeed, God might have punished him with death, an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. God chooses rather to exile Cain. The question is why? Nachmanides sees in exile the ideal punishment for murderers, "he should be in exile forever, for the punishment for murderers is exile."[26] But why is it so? Why is exile so well adapted to the crime of murder? And, more specifically, how is exile here adapted to Cain's particular sin? Indeed, exile seems ideal in that it isolates the murderer from others. But in our text, the exile is much more drastic: it constitutes an exile from the face of God himself. In exiling Cain, God seems to be casting him off forever from his face, from any spiritual destiny, from any ethical orientation. LaCocque seems to imply so: "Cain *wanders* from the *face* of God, and he *settles* in the *land* of Nod. It is hard to avoid thinking that Cain actually leaves the spiritual for the sake of the material."[27]

And indeed, in the land of exile, Cain finds himself, according to LaCocque, "without a dialogical partner, and this is the essence of his wandering. . . . A man without God, without 'other,' without ground, he would be floating aimlessly without end, were it not for a gracious divine remission."[28] In exile, Cain gets what he wanted: complete solitude, without any man or god to limit his spontaneity. Forsaken forever, he finds himself condemned to lifelong wretchedness without a human face or a divine remission. This is where, however, I would beg to differ with LaCocque and see in this exile not an act of forsakenness by God, but rather a last attempt at redemption. This idea of a possible remission and redemption of Cain is alluded to in the Midrash which senses Cain's "going forth" as holding redemptive potentialities:

> And Cain went away . . . Where did he go out . . . ? . . . R. Hinena bar Isaac said, "he went away rejoicing, in line with this verse: 'he goes forth to meet you and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart' (Ex. 4:14). . . . Adam met him and said to him, 'What happened at your trial?' . . . 'He said to him, I repented and am reconciled.' . . . 'Then Adam began to beat on his face: 'So great is the power of repentance, and I never knew it!'"[29]

But we have yet to understand what redemptive potentialities exist in the condition of exile. What the Midrash hints at needs to be further explicated. What, then, are the redemptive virtues of exile? Levinas hints at a redemptive potentiality of exile in a very brief passage, "I posit myself deposed of my sovereignty. Paradoxically it is qua *alienus*—foreigner and other—that man is not alienated."[30] This phrase is full of contradictions. Indeed, how does the self *posit* himself while being *deposed*? How is it that qua *alienus*, man is not *alienated*? Perhaps because it is in de-position, in exile, it finds itself ruptured, in the pain and contraction of marginalization of exile, and, as such, regains its lost possibilities of openness. The marginalization of exile, the de-position it effectuates of the previously central self teaches it the movement of contraction necessary for it to make room for an other. Exile, thus, becomes a pedagogy of

otherness. It is an experience which, in breaking the self into pieces, rupturing it, extirpating it, contracting it to the margins of the world, kneads it, molds it, carves it into a space open for another.

As such, the experience of exile is what allows the elevation of the previously self-enclosed ego to true selfhood, that is to say, to a self open and hospitable to otherness. LaCocque comments, "[t]hen he would treat his brother, *who epitomizes the world out there*, as a *Thou*, that is, as his unique chance to be himself an 'I.'"[31] The only way Cain can truly individuate as a human self, become an "I" and recover his forgotten spiritual dimension or breath, is to acknowledge the presence of his brother as a "Thou." The self intent upon itself is not a genuine self yet. To be a true self is to be capable of self-transcendence, that is to say, to ever remain in touch, in relation with an other beyond itself. The true self is not the masterful Cainesque ego, but the *relational* self, capable of acknowledging an other besides itself.

Yet, the text leaves us hanging as to whether Cain eventually learned the lesson of otherness. The end is ambiguous. On the one hand, Cain is described as the founder of civilization, of technology, of the arts, and of the first cities. One might see, with LaCocque, Cain as the initiator of the social contract, "from Cain as vagabond to Cain as creator of social agglomerate."[32] As such, Cain seems to have learned the lesson of otherness that God was trying to teach him and risen up to become the originator of human society. On the other hand, the city is generally considered in the biblical narrative with mistrust, as the upcoming story of Babel will show. And indeed, is Cain's attempt at sedentarization and enrootment in the city not a blatant disobedience to God's curse (or blessing?) of exile? Is not something of the benefits of that exile to be lost in Cain's building of the first cities? We will have to wait for the narrative of Babel, built by the sons of Shem, in order to really understand the significance of Cain's actions.

Conclusion

The figure of Cain constitutes the very figure of the Western concept of the subject whose nobility resides in his "mastery and possession of nature," to borrow the Cartesian expression. Wholly other is the Hebrew concept of the subject. Wary of the central stance given to Cain upon his birth, the biblical narrative and its commentators sense the danger of an ego whose destiny and existence unravel without a concept of the other, in the total absence of ethics. The twofold exile inflicted upon Cain thus constitutes an attempt to destabilize this masterful stance, and, as such, open Cain up to the potentialities of otherness: the exile of pain serving to undo Cain's previously closed self and open it up onto the presence of his brother Abel, and the curse of exile serving to teach the contraction of the self necessary for the creation of a space for otherness. There is thus a pedagogy of exile here at play, aiming at an awakening of the self to the dimension of otherness, thereby kindling within it a sense of ethics. The central and masterful self conceived by Western thought does not, then,

constitute the highest mode of being for the self. Rather, it is the de-centered, exiled, expulsed, and vulnerable self which constitutes the highest calling of the subjective, inasmuch as such a self contains all the ethical and relational possibilities still dormant within its Western counterpart. The true self being not the masterful and possessive Cainesque self, but the self awakened to an other and capable of relationship.

Notes

1 The Hebrew seems to imply this, as there exists an ambiguity as to what the expression "*et adonai*" means. It can mean "with the Lord," but also "that is to say, the Lord." If the latter is the case, our verse would read: "I have brought forth a man, that is, the Lord" (Gen. 4:1).
2 See Chapter 2.
3 See Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation—Volume 1 Parashiyyot One through Thirty-Three on Genesis 1:1 to 8:14*, Brown Judaic Studies 104 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Parashah Twenty-Two, Gen. 4:1–16, XXII:V, [242–244].
4 Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 58.
5 See note 1 above.
6 André LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock, 2008), 41.
7 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, vol. 1., The ArtScroll Series (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), Gen. 4:1, [41].
8 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Twenty-Two, Gen. 4:1–16, XXII:III, 2b–e, [241].
9 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 134.
10 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Twenty-Two, Gen. 4:1–16, XXII:V, 1a–c, [242].
11 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 23.
12 Ibid., 24.
13 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197.
14 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 55.
15 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 56.
16 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 4.
17 Ibid., 54.
18 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.
19 Ibid.
20 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 40.
21 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Twenty-Two, Gen. 4:1–16, XXII:VIII, 1a–c, [248].
22 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary*, Gen. 4:8, [139].
23 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 94.
24 Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, 58.
25 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 117.
26 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary*, Gen. 4:11, [141].
27 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 120.
28 Ibid., 31.
29 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Twenty-Two, Gen. 4:1–16, XXII:XIII, 1, [253–254].
30 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 59.
31 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 117.
32 Ibid., 122.

4 Shem

The temptation of sedentarization

Introduction

The tower of Babel is another story in the book of Genesis that features the punishment of exile. Only this time, there does not seem to be a legitimate sin justifying this punishment. Indeed, we understood well how Adam and Eve needed to be expulsed for the sin of disobedience. Cain's exile was also a legitimate punishment for the crime of murder. Here, however, we have neither disobedience nor murder. On the contrary, we have a peaceful people united in a lofty enterprise: that of building a city that can reach God. The great Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi himself praises the generation of Babel as a people conducting themselves "in love and friendship, as it is said, 'They were one people and had one language.'"[1]

The nobility of their task is all the more emphasized by the fact that it is led out by the sons of Shem, that is to say, the line that Noah blessed as bearing the name of God: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem" (Gen. 9:26). The tower of Babel is thus not the work of miscreants, but rather of the chosen line of the ones bearing the name of God, and from which Abraham would later be plucked to perpetuate the blessing of God. The tower of Babel, then, is the work of godly men. Indeed, the Midrash itself intuits this when it places Abraham among the builders and dwellers of Babel.[2] It is the work of the sons of Shem, of the precursors of Abraham, and of the chosen people. And indeed, the text itself emphasizes the religious character of their work when it speaks of a tower leading to the heavens, a technical term signifying the realm of God. The purpose of the work of Babel is thus irrevocably a metaphysical one and not a mere material one.

It is, then, disconcerting to see God's discontent with the work of Babel as well as his interruption of the work, and his scattering away of the Babelians. One wonders why God is unhappy with this enterprise, which, as Rashi pointed out, is a peaceful one, and where, for once, humanity unites in a common goal. And a lofty goal at that: to reach the heavens, to reach God. Upon reading the text, the reader finds himself or herself again wondering as to the arbitrary character of God's judgment. Just as with his refusal of Cain's sacrifice, God's actions with the city of Babel seem unjustified and arbitrary.

Why interrupt such a noble task? Again, our text submits no explanation as to why God decides to interrupt the work of Babel. Just as we were not told why Cain's sacrifice was not accepted, we are not told here why God does not accept the work of the Babelians.

The punishment inflicted upon the sons of Shem seems also strange. Why exile? Why does God want them to scatter over the earth? Why is he so opposed not only to unity, but also to the *dwelling* in unity? The text seems to imply, twice, that God prefers exile to sedentarization. First when the Babelians unite for their task, "otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4), the passive form indicative here of an action on the part of God. Second, when God indeed scatters "them from there over all the earth" (Gen. 11:8). One wonders as to why? Why are the sons of Shem condemned to a life of exile? Why can they not dwell in harmony? What is wrong with wanting to put down roots in a given place and build themselves a name there?

The purpose of this chapter will be to understand the reason behind this exile. Indeed, there exist a number of clues in our text as to the problematic character of the task of the sons of Shem. I shall analyze two moments of this task: the united character of their task, taking place against the backdrop of their having "one language and a common speech" (Gen. 11:1), and the nature of their dwelling in the plain of Shinar, which will enable the ensuing actions of "mak[ing]" and "build[ing]" (Gen. 11:3, 4). My purpose will be to decipher in the text clues to the problematic character of the project of sons of Shem, for only then will it be possible to understand the significance of God's actions of confounding their language and of scattering them over the earth (Gen. 11:7, 8). Let us now now turn to the problematic character of the task of the sons of Shem. For indeed, only upon understanding the sin of the Babelians, will it be possible to understand the logic behind the punishment of exile.

The danger of unity

Now the whole world
Had one language
And a common speech.
As people moved eastward,
They found a plain in Shinar
And settled there.
They said to each other,
"Come let's make bricks
And bake them thoroughly."
They used brick instead of stone,
And tar for mortar.
Then they said,
"Come let us build ourselves a city,
With a tower that reaches to the heavens,

So that we may make a name for ourselves;
Otherwise we will be scattered over the face
Of the whole earth."

Genesis 11:1–4 (NIV)

Our text begins with the declaration that "the whole world had one language and a common speech" (Gen. 11:1). The word for "one" [*echad*] is repeated four times in our text, thereby setting the tone for the entirety of the narrative. The backdrop of our story, then, is this unity of language which will eventually become unity of action. Incidentally, the word translated by "language" [*devarim*], can also mean event. Thus, the ensuing unity of action is already inscribed in the unity of language mentioned in the first verse of our text. The enterprise of the sons of Shem will be characterized by unity in thought and deed. What nobler task than this? Rashi himself recognizes the "goodness" that qualifies the harmony between the sons of Shem.[3]

The Midrash, however, does not share Rashi's enthusiasm and makes an interesting observation. Quoting our text, the Midrash comments, "'That phrase means that they addressed words against the two who are singular . . . against the one of whom it is said, "Abraham was one" (Ez. 33:24), and against, "The Lord, our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4).'"[4] This is an interesting observation as it plays on the semantic connection between unity and unicity. In other words, the unity of the sons of Shem somehow endangers the unicity, or uniqueness, of Abraham and of God. Indeed, the unity of language and of deed in our text is one to which all are invited to conform. The text makes note twice of the injunction by the sons of Shem, "[c]ome, let [us]" (v. 3, v. 4), thereby underlining the unifying force behind those words. The call is not for the sons of Shem to find their own destiny, or forge their own individual way, but to rally to a collective call for action.

As such, however, the call for unity of the sons of Shem endangers their own unicity. Unicity which our Midrash epitomizes in the figures of Abraham—called out of the collective towards his own individual destiny—"*lech lecha*," or "go towards *yourself*" (Gen. 12)—and of God who is the Unique one, with none like Him. In the context of Babel, the *lech lecha* of Abraham cannot take place; there is no room there for individual destiny. But likewise, and perhaps even as a consequence, God's unicity is forsaken for the human collectivity's own metaphysical constructions. It is as though the unicity of God depended on the safeguard of the unicity of humanity. For if there is no human unicity available to respond and testify to God, there can be no genuine unicity of God, no uniqueness, and as such, no genuine transcendence.

The unity of the sons of Shem, then, is profoundly problematic. It is not the unity intuited by Rashi of peace and fraternity, but rather resembles more closely the unity of the totalitarian economy which, in its constitution, finds itself going against the unicity, individuality, and otherness of its constituents. Jacques Derrida makes a similar observation in his commentary on Genesis 11, "[i]n seeking to . . . found . . . a universal tongue and a unique genealogy,

the Semites want to bring the world to reason, and this reason can signify . . . a colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom)".[5] Thus, Derrida perceives an inherent violence within the call to unity of the sons of Shem, a "colonial violence" whereby the unicity of its adherents would have to be forfeited in the name of a single, unique objective.

It is interesting to note, moreover, that this totalitarian unity is catalyzed by language. This is surprising inasmuch as language can only arise, as Levinas has shown, on the backdrop of the presence of an other. In a world where there is no other, there is no need for language as the latter presupposes the presence of an interlocutor, an other self, to *whom* we address ourselves about the world. Levinas observes that "[l]anguage presupposes interlocutors, a plurality."[6] In our text, however, language serves precisely as the negation of this "radical separation" and "strangeness" of the other for a unity of thought and deed. We must then witness in our text a perversion of language. André Neher observes this in his commentary on the story of Babel. What seems at first, according to Neher, to be the first genuine human attempt at speaking *to* another (there being no dialogue between humans until then), turns out to be the means whereby that other finds herself neutralized in a common ideal and deed:

> Out of the infinite opportunities for contact, for opening out, for communication which the world created by God had offered until now, they retained only the contents (voice, manner, movement) but blocked up the containers, like a living spring which was caught at the very mouth of the rock from which it issued so that its waters could be secreted away into a false cistern.[7]

In other words, instead of becoming a factor of relationship with an other, instead of opening up the ethical realm, language closes in upon itself. The function of language, therefore, amounts to suppressing the other. Thus, human dialogue fails in its very emergence, in its very first attempt. The "come, let us" does not open up onto an other, upon an interlocutor, but rather crystallizes upon a totalitarian project whereby the unicity of any possible interlocutor finds itself neutralized. The era of fraternity inaugurated by the sons of Shem is, then, a false peace, which does not arise between the same and an other, but which is achieved by the neutralization of that other under the project of the same. We now turn to the dwelling that ensues from this unity of language and deed.

The act of dwelling comes after a sequence of problematic actions. The sons of Shem migrate eastward, that is to say, as the Midrash intuits, they distance themselves further from the "Ancient of the world [*kadmon*]. They declared, 'We want neither him nor his divinity.'"[8] It is, indeed, interesting to note that the journey eastward has previously, in our text, been associated with rebellion and sin: Adam and Eve are expulsed east of Eden upon their sinning, and Cain is exiled further east upon murdering his brother. Moving east, therefore, always implies rebellion or disobedience. Against this backdrop, the migration

of the sons of Shem eastward hints at a less than pure intention: rebellion is in the air and disobedience is imminent.

Moreover, they settle in the plain of Shinar. The plain constitutes the antithesis of the mountain, the classic locus of divine revelation and epiphany. As such, the choice of the plain hints at a rejection of the divine presence and authority for mere human objectives. LaCocque makes a similar observation, "[i]n ancient Israel, valleys are seen with a certain suspicion . . . God's locales of predilection for his epiphanies are mountains . . . Nothing good is expected to happen in a valley."[9] The negative connotation of the plain is further emphasized by its name, Shinar, which is none other than the future localization of Babylon, the epitome of human hubris and arrogance in the face of God. André Neher comments, "[w]as not the 'Kingdom of Babel' to be a negative reduplication of the world, and was it not to replace the Kingdom of God with the proud kingdom of man? Was not Babel to supplant the 'heaven and the earth.'"[10]

The decision to dwell, then, comes after two rebellious movements on the part of the sons of Shem: the migration to the east and the choice of the plain of Shinar. The act of dwelling must be understood in this context as far from innocent. Indeed, the act of dwelling might just constitute the finishing touch on a rebellion in three parts: the direction east, the choice of the plain, and the act of dwelling. The Midrash intuits this problematic character of dwelling in its commentary of our text. Quoting our text it observes: "'[t]hey settled there' (Gen. 11:2): . . . Said R. Isaac, 'In every passage in which you find a reference to "settling," Satan leaps at the opportunity.'"[11] The question, of course, is why dwelling is so problematic. While it is possible to understand the problematic character of the eastward migration and of the choice of the plain of Shinar, the problematic character of the act of dwelling is less obvious. The next verse of our passage offers further clarification.

Our text follows upon the act of dwelling with three action verbs: "let [us] make bricks" (Gen. 11:3), "let us build . . . a city" (Gen. 11:4), and "so that we may make a name" (Gen. 11:4). This is interesting and associates the acts of building and making with the act of dwelling. In other words, dwelling is far from innocent; it implies an act of "making" and of "building" on the part of the subject. The subjectivity that settles down and dwells is an active subjectivity intent on taking possession of its environment. The subjectivity that dwells is thus a subjectivity intent on making its mark upon that place, of appropriating that very place for itself and building upon it. It is a subjectivity that thus defines itself essentially as the master of space, as grounded in a given territory. It is a subjectivity that has a stance in the world, that holds a position of centrality in that world.

It is difficult not to see here a connection between the sons of Shem and the figure of Cain, himself the founder of the first city, and, as a tiller of the ground, a master and possessor of space. Like Cain, the sons of Shem opt for dwelling, rather than, like Abel, migration. In fact, they seem to harbor a holy fear of the nomadism of Abel in their refusal to "be scattered." Like Cain, the sons of Shem are intent on "making" and "building" in order to make a

mark and to take possession of their land, thereby resonating with the destiny inscribed in Cain's name: to acquire. Finally, they, like the sons of Cain, are building a city, thereby recreating for themselves the lost paradise of Eden.

Yet, it is still difficult to see the problematic character of a subjectivity intent on dwelling and making its mark on the world. What is wrong with this dwelling and building? It is perhaps Levinas who comes closest to articulating a critique of dwelling. In his analysis of "dwelling" in *Totality and Infinity*,[12] Levinas underlines the following gesture inherent to the act of dwelling:

> Possession proceeding from the dwelling is to be distinguished from the content possessed and the enjoyment of that content. . . . Possession is accomplished in taking-possession or labor, the destiny of the hand. The hand is the organ of grasping and taking, the first and blind grasping in the teeming mass: it relates to me, to my egoist ends.[13]

In other words, according to Levinas, the act of dwelling is primordially a self-centered act, focused on the interests of the self, and on the establishment of a central stance of the self in the world. Such an act thus structures itself as entirely self-centered and has no interest or need for an other. We are not far here from the figure of Cain, who, likewise, exhibited such a central stance to the detriment of an other.

Moreover, inasmuch as the act of dwelling is intent on ensuring a central stance for the self in the world, it necessarily perceives the other as a threat to this intention. If the other is considered as a legitimate other, that is to say, as a self which itself has a claim on the world, it necessarily must come between the self and its act of dwelling. This is echoed in Pascal's words, "'[t]hat is my place in the sun.' There is the origin and image of universal usurpation."[14] In other words, the act of dwelling, whereby the self consolidates for itself a central stance in the world, is by the same token an act of usurpation whereby the other's claims on the same world are neutralized and delegitimized. Although the act of dwelling, and all of the building and making it entails, ensures the self's survival and stance in the world, it does so to the detriment of the dimension of the other and, as such, poses an ethical problem. Again, Cain's murder looms in the background as a silent ever-present possibility in the city of Babel.

The endeavor of the sons of Shem is thus problematic inasmuch as it constitutes an attempt to consolidate the self's central stance in the world to the detriment of an other. The actions of making and building of the sons of Shem, inasmuch as they hold the sole focus of establishing the self in the world, have come to replace their capacity to relate and welcome another in their midst. The Midrash intuits this problem in a story told in the *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* commented by André Neher:

> One can understand the striking Midrash which tells that when a man fell from the scaffolding of the Tower of Babel nobody paid attention, but the breaking of a brick provoked mourning and tears. The Midrash not only

> puts its finger on the dehumanization characteristic of the concentrational system and on the totalitarian economy's overvaluation of the product in relation to the human producer. I feel that the sentimental halo with which the Midrash has surrounded this classic episode also enables us to recognize the tragedy of man's abdication before the artifact.[15]

This neutralization of the dimension of the other intrinsic to the process of individuation of the sons of Shem is further emphasized in their wanting to "make a name for [them]selves" (Gen. 11:4). When one is familiar with the biblical context of name-giving, this desire of the sons of Shem to "make a name for themselves" strikes one as incredibly odd. Indeed, in the Bible, the name is always given by another, and in many cases, by God himself. This has to do, of course, with the biblical conception of the subject as for-the-other, that is to say, as constituted in relation with an other and never on its own. In other words, the biblical conception of the self is a relational self. The self individuates as such, becomes conscious of itself in connection with an other which solicits it and calls it into being. The self is elevated to the status of self only upon being opened onto the dimension of the other; the biblical self is thus always the ethical self.

The sons of Shem, however, have no use for such a definition of the self. Contrary to the biblical worldview, they want to define *themselves*, thereby revoking their creaturiality and the ethical sense that this condition gave them. Indeed, the whole project of Babel can be summarized in this desire to make a name for *themselves*: as a desire to affirm the self while doing without or away with the dimension of the other. Such is the problem behind the unity of language and deed, and behind the act of dwelling. The Babelian enterprise is problematic in its oblivion to the dimension of the other and to the dimension of ethics. As LaCocque observes, "for, at the dawn of time, humanity wants to constitute a 'we' without a 'they.' The absence of 'they' means the absence of otherness . . . and also the absence of the Other."[16] We are now in a position to understand God's reticence with the project of the sons of Shem, as well as his ensuing actions.

The restoration of pluralism

But the Lord came down
To see the city
And the tower
The people were building.
The Lord said,
"If as one people
Speaking the same language
They have begun to do this,
Then nothing they plan to do
Will be impossible for them.

> *Come, let us go down*
> *And confuse their language*
> *So they will not understand each other."*
> *So the Lord scattered them from there*
> *Over all the earth.*
> Genesis 11:5–8 (NIV)

"But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower" (Gen. 11:5). At this point, our text shifts from the "come, let us" to the "Lord." In fact, the whole second half of our text will focus on God as the subject of a number of actions: he comes down (Gen. 11:5), he confounds their language (Gen. 11:7), and he scatters them (Gen. 11:8). The "coming down" of the Lord betrays a profound irony with regards to the project of building a tower reaching the heavens with God nevertheless having to "come down" to see it. This ironic clue lets us know that what is about to ensue will constitute the very reversal of the project of the sons of Shem. In contrast to their rising up, God comes down; in contrast to their having one language, God confounds their language; in contrast to their dwelling, God scatters them.

Of course, we have yet to understand the reasons of these counteractions on the part of God. Is God jealous of the power of the sons of Shem? Does he resent the unity and the consequential strength of their endeavor? Darell Fasching puts it this way:

> In our pluralistic world we long for the common morality of a sacred society and lament our fragmented ethical diversity and the confusion it seems to bring. . . . From such a perspective the actions of a God who would deliberately make a sacred community into a society of strangers seems at best a perverse judgment on human effort.[17]

In other words, from the perspective of an *ethos* which sees value in a homogenous society whose sole purpose lies in united and collective effort towards a concerted goal, the actions of God do not make sense. Indeed, does not social homogeneity coincide with peace and progress as Hobbes would have it in his *Leviathan*? In light of this, the actions of God seem not only arbitrary but also detrimental to human peace and progress.

And yet, we saw in the first half of this chapter that the striving of the sons of Shem for unity and collective action was performed to the detriment of an essential dimension: that of the other. This is precisely the diagnostic of our text: "nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (Gen. 11:6). One does not see clearly, however, the connection between the limitlessness of human power and the negation of otherness. This limitlessness constitutes, incidentally, the very definition of Western subjectivity as articulated by Descartes. Upon defining the self as intrinsically rational—this rationality being inherent to any human being, no matter his ethnic, gender, or social background—he comments on the fact that, upon developing the rational faculty, the human

self will find no limitations of its powers within nature and become, "maste[r] and possesso[r] of nature."[18]

However, such a definition of the self would come under heavy attack at the twilight of the Enlightenment, when the true face of the Cartesian self would be disclosed in the aftermath of two world wars for mastery and possession of nature to the detriment of human life. In its conquests of space, the limitless self, therefore, lacks an important quality: that of humanity. To define the essence of the self as mastery and possession is thus to omit an important human feature of the self: that of relationality, that of an awareness of the human other. It is this omission on the part of Descartes which gave rise to the dynamics of Western politics of conquest and war. Such a self is entirely absorbed in its mastery and has no sense of ethics or of the human other which it might have been called to protect. But how are we then to recover the human self? How are we to recover for the self a sense of the other, of ethics?

According to Levinas, only a self that has known limitation can recover a sense of the other, only "[a] calling into question of the same—which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question . . . ethics."[19] In other words, only upon having been called into question, limited in its spontaneity and in the scope of its power, does the subject regain a sense of the other, of ethics. The problem of Babel is thus that, in its quest for limitless power as symbolized by the tower reaching the heavens, it negates the dimension of the other and of ethics. The problem of Babel, then, is not that they are building a city, but that, in their quest for limitlessness, they are doing so in complete oblivion to the dimension of ethics.

God's observation that "nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" is far from being a statement of jealousy or of fear on the part of God, as implied by Derrida: "[c]an we not, then, speak of God's jealousy? Out of resentment against the unique name and lip of men, he imposes his name . . . and with this violent imposition he opens the deconstruction of the tower, as of the universal language."[20] Rather, it is a diagnostic on the unethical character of the project of the sons of Shem. Their quest for limitless power betrays a complete obliviousness to the dimension of ethics. The diagnostic of God thus unveils, beneath the so-called harmony and unity of the sons of Shem, a will to power which is oblivious to the human other not fitting within their collective endeavor. Beneath the "godly" intentions of building a bridge to the heavens, lies a callousness to the human other, to ethics.

We have yet to understand, however, how the confounding of languages and the scattering of the sons of Shem will contribute to an awakening to the dimension of ethics. Indeed, the judgment of God is still difficult to follow. And yet, I agree with LaCocque that "God's care is never absent from the imposed punishment."[21] In other words, as in the stories of Adam, Eve, and Cain, there exists, arguably, a direct correlation between the sin and the chastisement. We will see that God's actions constitute a rebuke on two levels: first, God will pass judgment on the oneness of language by confusing the languages;

second, God will pass judgment on the attempt to dwell by the sons of Shem and, instead, scatter them abroad. But the ethical significance of these two judgments remains to be seen.

"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other" (Gen. 11:7). The "come, let us" of God here echoes the "come, let us" of the sons of Shem again hinting at the act of reversal that God is about to perform. The question that arises, however, concerns the ethical significance of the confounding of languages. Indeed, if ethics is what is sought after by God, why confound the languages? Does not ethics rest on the peaceful cohabitation between persons, and will not the confounding of languages give rise, rather, to misunderstandings and strife? It seems strange that God would make a move against language, which, as we saw above, constitutes the very bridge between the same and the other! Why does God take action against the very means of an encounter between the self and the other?

But is the act of the confounding of languages necessarily an act *against* language? Is it not, rather, an act whereby the very foundations of language and communication are recovered, that is to say, an act whereby the otherness of the other is retrieved? In her book, *Sharing the World*, Luce Irigaray makes an interesting observation as to the foundation of any authentic dialogue or communication. She situates this foundation in silence, that is to say, in the absence of communication and understanding whereby the other appears as one who precisely does not speak my language and does not share my worldview:

> Thus, the first word we have to speak to one another is our capacity and acceptance of being silent. It would be the first wave of recognition addressed to the other as such. In this silence, the other may come towards me, as I may move towards him, or her.[22]

Indeed, only upon acknowledging that there exists an other which, qua other, may not be reduced to what I might say or understand, does the genuine duality prerequisite to communication emerge.

We can now better understand God's confounding of the languages in light of these analyses. In confounding the languages, God is in fact recovering the basis of true discourse, of true communication: the incomprehensible and ungraspable face of the *other*. The confounding of languages thus allows for the face of the other to emerge from within the totalitarian economy of the central and limitless self. It allows for the blossoming forth of the other. The sudden incapacity for the Babelians to understand each other constitutes, in fact, their first awakening to the dimension of otherness and, as such, to ethics. Derrida speaks of a "forbidden transparency, impossible univocity"[23] which in fact "limits . . . universality."[24] That is to say, according to Derrida, the confounding of language goes against the artificial transparency and univocity forged by the Babelians, thereby recovering the mystery and plurivocity characteristic of the dimension of the other.

But our text does not end there. God goes on to expulse and exile the Babelians, "[s]o the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth" (Gen. 11:8).

Again one wonders as to the ethical significance of this exile. How can this exile, whereby the Babelians precisely are to lose touch with each other, possibly bring about an ethical encounter? Does not, rather, the exile whereby the sons of Shem find themselves dispersed from the collectivity they had created, go against any ensuing ethical enterprise? One must, however, understand this expulsion from within the attempt at dwelling by the sons of Shem, inasmuch as this act of dwelling constituted, we saw, an act of affirmation of the centrality of the self and of its limitlessness. The act of dwelling, as performed by the sons of Shem, remains profoundly problematic in its obliviousness to the other and, as such, to ethics.

The exile of the sons of Shem may become intelligible only against the backdrop of the unethical dwelling of the Babelians. But how might exile remedy the unethical stance of dwelling of the Babelians? Precisely in its act of de-centering of that central and established self. The ethical significance of exile lies precisely in this: that it brings about a de-centering of the self and allows for the possibility of a space for an other. LaCocque follows this line of interpretation and observes that "humanity is scattered and thus debilitated in its will to power, but this is the very condition for the rise of a new humanity with a diversified culture."[25] In other words, while exile does limit the will to power of the sons of Shem, it allows, by the same token, the emergence of other powers, other ways of doing things, other endeavors. LaCocque adds, "[t]his is why, with regard to the generation of the dispersion, the chastisement is in term of *limitations*,"[26] or to put it differently, it is "an act of decentering."[27] In addition, writes LaCoque, "psychoanalysis substantiates the notions of the subject's decentering and provides a better understanding of the role of otherness in the formation of the ego."[28]

Thus, according to LaCocque, the act of de-centering is essential to the formation of a self which has matured to the state of awareness of an other beyond its own scope and powers. The punishment of exile thus amounts to a crisis enabling the coming of age of the sons of Shem and their awakening to the dimension of ethics. To the previously entirely self-absorbed and egotistic subjective structure of the sons of Shem, the exile inflicted by God has a pedagogical purpose: to awaken them to a dimension beyond themselves and, by the same token, to a calling other than that of the establishment of the self; to an ethical calling. Such a calling can only be heard in the context of exile, however, as Levinas observes, "[w]hen man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history."[29] In other words, exile, uprootment from the destiny concocted by the self for itself, from history, is necessary for the self to become aware of an other calling, an ethical calling which beckons him on a journey towards otherness, towards genuine transcendence, rather than on an endeavor intent on affirming and establishing itself. Such will be, in fact, the exilic calling of Abraham.

Conclusion

"And they stopped building the city" (Gen. 11:8). The city of Babel thus became the unfinished city, the city still in the making, never finished, never

completed, but thereby disclosing the "'unfinished world' of diversity, a world that offers us the opportunity to welcome the stranger."[30] It is thus precisely its unfinished character that will allow for the city of Babel to move from an enterprise intent on establishing the self to the detriment of the other to a place welcoming of that other. Such an unfinished city will, however, not be the one that the Babelians left behind, with its dilapidated tower and broken walls, but a city towards which one is ever on the move, towards which one must journey, a city reached only upon the completion of a long and difficult exile. It is to this city, to this ideal human community, where otherness finds itself welcomed and cherished rather than neutralized, that the sons of Shem are invited by God to journey upon their being expulsed from the self-enclosed walls of Babel. Such will be the orientation of the exile of the second half of this work. An exile back to the city of God, back to Eden. Exile which will no longer constitute a movement eastward, as had to be performed by Adam, Eve, and Cain, but rather a movement of return with a westward orientation as we shall see Abraham, Rebekah, Jacob, and the sons of Levi perform.

Notes

1 Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary Translated into English and Annotated*, vol. 1, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine and Co., 1945), Gen. 11:9, [46].
2 Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation—Volume 2 Parashiyyot Thirty-Four through Sixty-Seven on Genesis 8:15 to 28:9*, Brown Judaic Studies 105 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Parashah Thirty-Eight, Gen. 11:1–30, XXXVIII:VI, 2a–b, [48].
3 Rashi, *Pentateuch*, Gen. 11:9, [46].
4 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Thirty-Eight, Gen. 11:1–30, XXXVIII:VI, 1a–b, [48].
5 Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," in *Difference in Translation*, trans. and ed. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 174.
6 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 73.
7 André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), 103.
8 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Thirty-Eight, Gen. 11:1–30, XXXVIII:VII, 1c, [50].
9 André LaCocque, *The Captivity of Innocence: Babel and the Yahwist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock, 2010), 28.
10 Neher, *The Exile of the Word*, 103.
11 Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Parashah Thirty-Eight, Gen. 11:1–30, XXXVIII:VII, 3a–b, [50].
12 See in particular, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152–174.
13 Ibid., 158–159.
14 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 18, [295].
15 Neher, *The Exile of the Word*, 105.
16 LaCocque, *The Captivity of Innocence*, 101.
17 Darell Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 213.
18 René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 35.
19 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.
20 Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," 170.

21 LaCocque, *The Captivity of Innocence*, 90.
22 Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London: Continuum, 2008), 17–18.
23 Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," 174.
24 Ibid.
25 LaCocque, *The Captivity of Innocence*, 90.
26 Ibid., 109.
27 Ibid., 111.
28 Ibid.
29 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 52.
30 Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, 2.

5 Abraham

The return to Eden

Introduction

The figure of Abraham is the classic figure of exile. Called by God to a life of exile in the very first chapters describing his life, one cannot help but see exile as a central feature of Abraham's life-journey westwards towards Eden. But this exile is not, as has often been described, that of a wandering Aramean. This exile is further described in our text as a calling towards a destiny centered around God. It would seem, then, that there exists a correlation between exile and Abraham's journey of faith with a God that he does not yet know at the moment of his calling. The question that arises, however, is why exile? Why must one leave behind one's land, one's people, and one's family in order to encounter God? Why can't this God be encountered from within one's relationships with other people? The test seems almost inhuman. For God to ask one to sever his closest ties with the human family as is asked of Abraham seems cruel and arbitrary.

The plot thickens when one realizes that the exile that is asked of Abraham repeats itself, arguably, three times. The first and most obvious exile is the one described above where God calls Abraham to leave behind his country, his people, and his father's household to go to the land that God will show him. There are, however, two more exiles. I would argue that the second one takes place at the moment of God's covenant with Abraham through the rite of circumcision. One might wonder, however, how circumcision constitutes an exile. That is, until one realizes that this rite entails a wound inflicted at the very heart of man's strength and will to power. Is it then not possible to see in the rite of circumcision a symbolic gesture aiming at de-centering man and exiling him from his heretofore established stance in the world? But why such an attempt? What is to be learned through this wound at the very heart of man's strength?

Finally, I would situate the last exile at the moment of the sacrifice of Isaac, or the Akedah, where Abraham sees himself cut off, expulsed by God from any hope of establishing himself in the future through his son Isaac. This exile is, of course, the most problematic one. Whereas we might have understood the need to sever oneself from one's past, from one's former land and people

in order to journey towards transcendence, it is impossible to understand how God's command to Abraham to murder his son could possibly open up new avenues of transcendence. It seems here that God has gone too far! Already the command to Abraham to sever his family ties seemed callous; this command to sever his tie to his son through the act of murder is almost impossible to bear. Why then this final exilic trial? What was Abraham to learn through this event?

The purpose of this chapter will be to attempt to understand the signification of these three exiles commanded by God to Abraham. Our work will focus on the following two questions: Why exile? And what is God trying to teach Abraham through each of these three exiles? I will show that beneath the seemingly callous command to sever his ties to his past, present, and future, there lies the possibility of a broadening of Abraham's horizons not only to the transcendent dimension of the divine, but also to a deeper, more ethical rapport with the others in his life. I will then again show the ethical and redemptive implications of exile, and this from an analysis of Abraham's three exiles. We now turn to the first one of these exiles.

The journey of the promise

The Lord had said to Abram,
"Go from your country,
Your people
And your father's household
To the land I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation,
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And whoever curses you I will curse;
And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
Genesis 12:1–3 (NIV)

The *lech lecha* is one of the most commented expressions in the Bible. The command to leave [*lech*] is not, however, a command given the wandering Jew lacking direction and orientation. The command is to go [*lech*] towards yourself [*lecha*]. This is an interesting formulation as it seems to imply that the command to leave is given so that the subject can better individuate himself.[1] It would, then, seem that the command given Abraham to leave behind his country, his people, and his father's household has to do with him somehow stepping out of what previously defined him, in order to better access his true self, that which endures when all ties with land, people, and family are severed. The command would, then, signify, in Kierkegaard's terms, an exit of the particular out of the universal.

In his commentary on Abraham, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard describes the movement of faith enacted by Abraham as a journey whereby he might discover himself as an individual rather than solely reduced to a universal which, until now, defined and also limited him: "faith is just this paradox, that the single individual is higher than the universal . . . the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular above the universal."[2] In other words, the only way Abraham might discover himself as a particular, that is to say, as an individual subject, is if he is made to depart from the universal which has heretofore defined him. The *lech lecha*, go towards yourself, thus makes perfect sense in a Kierkegaardian context: it is a movement of expulsion out of the universal in order to recover the particular up to now reduced to the totality which encompassed it.

Thus the *lech lecha* contains an invitation for the subject to discover a destiny other than that paved out by the universal which encompasses it, by its people, its homeland, and its family. Its destiny is unique and, as such, opens the way for its individuation as itself unique. This destiny, however, is not to be understood as a return to the self. Paradoxically, far from orienting the subject back to itself and its private preoccupations, the *lech lecha* expulses the subject from itself towards an unknown which transcends it: "Go . . . to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12). The journey of the *lech lecha* does not, then, consist in the self recovering ownership of itself over and against the wishes and conventions of a given community. It is not to be understood as a way for the self to recoil upon itself and recover its own desires and interests as distinct from that of the community. This is not a calling for the self to individuate itself in isolation, for, indeed, the self is called towards an other. The horizon of the *lech lecha* is not the self, but God, and by extension, all the nations of the earth.

Our text supports this direction by the multiplication of the possessive pronouns from which the self is to sever itself: "Go from *your* country, *your* people, and *your* father's household" (Gen. 12:1).[3] In other words, far from signifying a return to the self and an establishment of the self's stance in the world, the *lech lecha* signifies a profound detachment of the self from anything which it possesses, from anything which establishes it in a central and masterful stance. The *lech lecha* thus constitutes an invitation for the self to leave behind the realm of possession, or centrality, of mastery, and of at-home-ness in the world for that which it does not possess, "to the land I will show you," to the land that you do not yet have. Such a land does not belong to the realm of possession. It does not figure among Abraham's possessions. It lies out of Abraham's reach, both cognitively and effectually. He does not know where this land lies, nor how to go about conquering it.

Far from signifying the establishment of the self, the *lech lecha* constitutes then a movement of de-centering, of exile of the self from everything that constituted its ground. The question that arises, however, is how an individuation of the self might be possible in such a violent context of exile and groundlessness. How might the self journey towards its individuation, having

been stripped of its stance in the world? In the Western concept of the subject as substance, that is, as grounded in a particular stance, such an individuation is unheard of. There is no subject if there is not a given ground wherein it can take its stance and have an impact. Yet, the Hebrew concept of the self begs to differ and points us to a wholly other way to define the self's coming to maturity. Such a concept of the self is a relational one. Indeed, inasmuch as the Abrahamic self loses its possessive stance in the world, it simultaneously finds itself opened up to a dimension of transcendence, that of God and that of the other.[4]

One might wonder how, on a first level, the exile of Abraham might bring him closer to God. Nachmanides intuits the connection between the two as follows: "Therefore, for Abraham to overcome all these difficulties, it was necessary to tell him that he should leave everything for the love of the Holy One."[5] He then adds that "the reason why [Abraham] was to leave his land was to experience, by his traveling to another land, closeness to God."[6] For Nachmanides, the journey whereby the self leaves behind the land of its origins to journey elsewhere constitutes an act of proximity to God. One does not, however, yet understand the connection between the two. How does the departure from the land lead to proximity with God? Might God not be encountered from within one's home, within one's land and people? How does breaking with one's origin constitute an act of "nearness of God"?

Levinas makes the same connection as Nachmanides in defining the approach to God as a subjective encounter rather than as an objective/universal knowledge. According to Levinas, transcendence "concerns so particularly subjectivity."[7] That is to say, God manifests himself on the subjective level, and not on the objective level. Indeed, God is not manifest outside of the realm of subjectivity; in other words, he is not manifest as a mere object of cognition. This is so because, according to Levinas, "subjectivity is enigma's partner, partner of the transcendence that disturbs being."[8] In other words, the manifestation of transcendence cannot occur within the disclosure of being, or objective reality, as knowledge or as universal truth. Indeed, genuine transcendence does not lend itself to the comprehension or elucidation reserved for objects. God is not a mere object that the intellect can conceptualize. As such, transcendence as enigma can only occur outside of the light of objective reality, in a dimension other than mere objectivity. Such a dimension can only be found within the secret interiority of the individual subject.

What does this mean? This means that it is only inasmuch as the self has journeyed out of the dimension of being, that is to say, out of its previously secure stance in the world, its comfort zone, and its certainties, that the self is susceptible of encountering, first of all, *itself*—as distinct from being, and as psyche or interiority—and, second of all, a dimension of transcendence, or infinity. A separation with being is needed for the self to become attuned to that which is otherwise than being, to a dimension which transcends that of being and of the preoccupations thereof. Thus, the break with the barriers of its certainties and habits is necessary for the self to apprehend a

dimension of transcendence. Levinas, then, is right to say that "atheism" is the prerequisite of proximity with the transcendent God. For only upon an act of iconoclasm[9] whereby all the false gods, securities, and comfort zones find themselves shattered, might the self encounter the true God, which, as such, transcends all human certainties and categories.[10]

But the transcendent movement of the self is not limited to an encounter with God. Our passage speaks of a broadening of the self to "all peoples on earth" (Gen. 12:3). Here the need for the self to undergo exile from its land and people in order to encounter an other seems clearer. Levinas observes, "the breakup of essence is ethics."[11] In other words, only the self which has known exile, or a de-centering from its central stance in the world, who is itself on the margins of the world, a stranger in the earth, can genuinely encounter an other. A central self, encamped in its own traditions, beliefs, and people, can never genuinely open up to an other. Only the de-centered self may, at the very heart of its exile, become a place of hospitality for an other. The idea that only the exiled self is capable of hospitality seems, however, paradoxical. Does not the self need to have a stance, a place in the world, in order to offer hospitality?[12] Indeed, but this stance must be one that is open upon another and not closed up upon itself. Exile is a stance which, while residing in the world, does so on the mode of a profound de-centeredness thereby allowing for a degree of openness to the other in a way that would be impossible for an enrooted and central self.

Indeed, as long as the self is living in a mode of possessiveness and of centrality, there is no room for genuine otherness. In a world where "everything belongs to me," even the other finds herself reduced to one of my possessions and finds herself revolving around the self. The self needs to experience a de-centering, it needs to lose its grasp on the world in order to, paradoxically, be capable of encountering an other. Only a self which does not live in the mode of possession, having been dispossessed of itself, can welcome an other. This is why Levinas says that "when man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history."[13] Only the uprooted self, expulsed from a mode of being as possessiveness and masterfulness, can genuinely encounter the other qua other as that which will not let itself be mastered and possessed.

Thus, we may now understand better the significance of the *lech lecha*. Far from signifying as Kierkegaard implied, the mere emergence of the self and its individuation apart from the totality which birthed it, the *lech lecha* signifies the coming of age of a self until now defined as occupying a central and masterful stance in the world to a definition of selfhood as relational and transcendence towards a genuine other. Only inasmuch as the self has awakened to the other—be it that of God or of the other—is it capable of achieving genuine self-transcendence and arriving at true selfhood. Thus we can now understand the exilic calling of Abraham as a calling to genuine selfhood—*lech lecha*—that is to say, as a calling to self-transcendence towards a destiny beyond itself to an other. We now turn to the second exile of Abraham: that of circumcision.

The de-centering of the self

"*As for me, this is my covenant with you:*
You will be the father of many nations.
No longer will you be called Abram;
Your name will be Abraham,
For I have made you a father of many nations,
I will make you very fruitful;
I will make nations of you,
And kings will come from you. . . .
As for you, you must keep my covenant,
You and your descendants after you
For the generations to come.
This is my covenant with you . . .
The covenant you are to keep:
Every male among you shall be circumcised."
Genesis 17:4–6, 10 (NIV)

And, indeed, what a strange ritual! One wonders right away why such a violent gesture is needed to serve as a sign for God's covenant. Why circumcision? What is the meaning of such a rite? Finally one wonders as to the connection between this rite and the blessing that ensues, that of the possession of the land and of Abraham's fatherhood of nations. How is it that a rite that wounds man precisely in the source of his reproductive strength would come as a prerequisite to his fruitfulness and fathering capabilities? The rite seems, on the contrary to reduce man's strength, to somehow temper it. Moreover, one wonders as to how this rite came to become a sign for God's covenant with Abraham. What does the rite of circumcision have to do with Abraham's entering into a covenant with God and, more interestingly, what does this covenant entail?

In his analysis of the ethical subjectivity, Levinas gives the following description which might well be applied to the ritual of circumcision. Describing the moment of ethical awakening of the subject, Levinas describes the latter as "torn up from oneself in the core of one's unity."[14] He then clarifies this original wound or tear as signifying in "the form of-one-penetrated-by-the-other."[15] In other words, according to Levinas, this wound inflicted upon the self's core of unity has an ethical significance. One might wonder, however, as to how this wound is inflicted, what ethical significance such a wound has, and how it might be applied to circumcision. According to Levinas the wound in question is the one inflicted by the entry of an other into the world of the self. Such a wound has the effect of de-centering the self heretofore occupying a central stance in the world, which, more often than not, is lived by the self as a painful experience. This wound, however, signifies beyond the pain of the self to the opening up of the self's world to the other. Such is, according to Levinas, the structure of the ethical awakening of the self to the dimension of the other.

I would venture to argue that the rite of circumcision enacts precisely this ethical awakening in its wounding of the self at the very heart of its powers. Thus the rite of circumcision hits at the very "core" of the self, it wounds it or "tears" it, and, as such, signifies towards the presence of an other within the very heart of the self. The circumcised self thus carries in its very flesh the mark of the other and is always reminded thereby of its responsibilities and calling towards that other. Circumcision thus marks the coming of age of the self, its elevation to maturity as an ethical self fully awakened to the dimension of the other. As such, the biblical conception of the self again subverts the Western conception of the self as central and masterful, defining it rather as essentially wounded, and, as such, branded by its ethical calling and responsibility for the other. The mature self is thus not the central self of Western philosophy, but the exiled, de-centered self, wounded in its very powers and signifying, as such, an ethical calling.

Our passage seems to situate the rite of circumcision in line of such an ethical calling through a twofold mention of otherness. First, the otherness of God is emphasized through the multiplication of God's actions: "I have" (1 ×), "I will" (6 ×).[16] In other words, it seems as though the act of circumcision, whereby man's powers find themselves limited, paves the way for God's future actions. The act of de-centering and exile operated by the rite of circumcision allows for an opening up of man's possibilities and future to God's blessing and providence. Thus, the rite of circumcision symbolizes the fact that it is God who is the source of Abraham's success and strength, and not Abraham himself. It is then only through the experience of exile—enacted by the rite of circumcision—that God's blessing is able to be poured out, only through the limitation of man's strength and powers that God's strength and power are allowed to work in a limitless way.

Moreover, the de-centering of Abraham through the rite, in turn, opens up his destiny to include others: "[I] will greatly increase your numbers . . . I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:2, 5). In other words, it would seem that only through the contraction of the self—symbolized by the rite of circumcision—is expansion of the self towards an ethical destiny possible. Far from limiting the self and destroying its powers, the rite of circumcision allows for an even more potent self. But his self is no longer turned upon the establishment of its own powers, but becomes, rather, gifted with the powers of welcome and hospitality of the other. Thus, the self is no longer defined, as in Western philosophy, as *conatus*, or as perseverance in itself, but as goodness, as a break with self which allows for ethics, for the dimension of the other to emerge. Circumcision enacts this elevation of the self beyond its own being and powers, to the dimension of the good, that is to say, the dimension of ethics whereby the self finds itself involved in a destiny that goes beyond its own interests and preoccupations.

But there is more. The rite of circumcision also brings a change of name. What is the meaning of this change? And what does the new name signify? It is interesting that this is one of the major contrasts between the story of Abraham

and the story of Babel. In the story of Babel, the sons of Shem decree that they will make a name for themselves. Here it is God who gives Abraham his name. One must wonder at the intention behind this parallelism on the part of the author of the book of Genesis. We saw that for the sons of Shem, the intention behind making their name great was to affirm their identity without any external reference, it was to derive their destiny solely from themselves, that is to say, to live solely for themselves. One must understand the giving of a new name to Abraham in light of this story which serves as the very antithesis of the Abrahamic story and journey. What would it mean, in contrast to the sons of Shem attempting to *make* a name for themselves, for Abraham to *receive* a new name?

In Hebrew thought, the name is not a mere phoneme serving to identify a given person. It spells out the very essence and destiny of that person. To receive a name is thus not an unintentional event—it signifies a profound transformation of a given person's identity and calling. What is interesting is that this new essence and destiny finds itself *bestowed* upon the subject. Here the self does not make itself, nor does it draw its identity and destiny from itself or from its works, but rather from another. This concept of the subject is radically new in the face of the Western concept of the subject where the self emerges from an inner principle inhabiting it, or comes to self-consciousness through its own works. Here the self emerges upon being summoned, or called forth by an *other*.

Thus, according to Levinas, "subjectivity is structured as the other in the same,"[17] that is to say, as ever assigned and subjected by an other, intrinsically exiled, and, as such, unable to escape its ethical calling. This "other in the same" is symbolized in our text by the Hebrew letter *hey* which traditionally alludes to the name of God. As such, the Abrahamic identity and destiny finds itself branded in its very core by the divine name, by the divine will and orientation. God is now the guiding principle of Abraham's essence and destiny. Abraham's destiny and calling is no longer in his hands but in God's hands. Unlike the sons of Shem who make themselves, Abraham finds himself made by God: it is God who will make him who he is; he will not make himself. We are now ready to turn to the third exile: the Akedah.

The negation of the promise

Some time later God tested Abraham.
He said to him, "Abraham!"
"Here I am," he replied.
Then God said,
"Take your son,
Your only son,
Whom you love—Isaac—
And go to the region of Moriah.
Sacrifice him there as burnt offering
On a mountain I will show you."
Genesis 22:1–2 (NIV)

So much has been written on this profoundly enigmatic and terrifying passage to borrow Kierkegaard's expression.[18] Indeed, one must read *Fear and Trembling* to be reminded of the profoundly problematic character of God's command, of this "monstrous paradox"[19] to use Kierkegaard's words. How is it possible for a God who prohibits murder to turn around and ask his faithful one to commit murder? More importantly, how can it be that the God who, after so long, grants Abraham a son, now asks him to sacrifice him, thereby destroying the very possibility of the divine promise? And if it is indeed a test, what a cruel one indeed! And does this test not finish badly, with the death of Sarah and a lasting separation between Abraham and Isaac? Can God play such games with his faithful ones?

Kierkegaard is one of the rare writers to take the Akedah drama seriously and sees there a replay of the *lech lecha* in chapter 12. And indeed, there are a number of parallelisms between chapter 12 and our chapter, signifying an underlying connection between the two passages. In his reading of the Akedah, Kierkegaard comments that one must here observe a similar movement to that of Genesis 12 whereby the single individual is asked to journey out of the universal, that is to say, out of the dominant *ethos* of his time towards a destiny which totally overwhelms and transcends him. The Akedah would then constitute, according to Kierkegaard, a consolidation of this primacy of the individual over and against the universal, that is to say, a "teleological suspension of the ethical"[20] whereby the faith of the individual in God constitutes a higher principle than that of the dominant *ethos*. Indeed, faith, according to Kierkegaard "is just this paradox, that the single individual is higher than the universal."[21] The story of the Akedah would then reaffirm the single individual in his terrible commitment to a God which elevates him above ethics, above his responsibility to the communal *ethos* to which he had been previously subjected.

This interpretation seems plausible in light of the parallelisms with Genesis 12. However, our analyses have shown that far from detaching the individual from ethics, the *lech lecha* inaugurates ethics, that is, the connection between the self and a genuine other. The self engaged in the *lech lecha* is in no way to be understood, as Kierkegaard does, as the solitary self journeying alone towards his God, but as a self which has awakened to the dimension not only of God but also of the genuine other which transcends kin and family. In light of this it would then seem implausible to interpret the Akedah as a departure from ethics. On the contrary, we have seen that in every trial, in every test that Abraham has had to endure up until this moment, it was ethics that was signified, it was an awakening to the dimension of otherness and transcendence that was experienced. We, then, must approach the story of the Akedah with a similar presupposition: that there too a lesson of ethics finds itself hidden. Far from signifying the overcoming of ethics, I would argue that the Akedah hides an ethical orientation.

This is precisely Claire Katz's intuition as well. In line with Levinas's thought,[22] Katz finds in the Akedah a story of high ethical significance. Far

from seeing the climax of the story in the sacrifice of Isaac, thereby signifying a departure from ethics, Katz situates the climax in the intervention of the angel forbidding Abraham to slay Isaac. Such a climax gives a wholly new ethical orientation to the story, making the ethical injunction not to murder Isaac the very crux of the matter. Thus, the ethical moment is uncovered, according to Katz, not at the moment of the sacrifice, but at the moment that the sacrifice is averted, "when Abraham sees in the face of his son the true meaning of the religious . . . to love the ethical more than God."[23] This entails, of course, that ethics be redefined from the Kierkegaardian sense of ethics as the *ethos* binding a given community or people, to that of the respect of the other. It is then, according to Katz, "in Abraham's seeing of Isaac's face and his turn from an absolute responsibility to God to his responsibility to his son that we see virility tempered."[24]

Although this interpretation does do justice to the text by uncovering its ethical significance, it seems to me that the ethical moment is not to be found in the aversion of the sacrifice but, rather, as the text itself seems to indicate, at the very moment of the sacrifice. The centerpiece of the text remains structurally as well as thematically the sacrifice of Isaac. Any ethical interpretation must remain true to the text's intention. I would therefore argue that the locus of ethics is to be found in the very sacrifice and not in its interruption. Far from occurring at the moment of the aversion of the sacrifice, the tempering of virility is, rather, to be connected to the command to sacrifice. But this hypothesis remains to be proved. Indeed, it seems difficult to reconcile ethics with human sacrifice. What does ethics have to do with sacrifice?

Interestingly, it must be noted that the command by God to sacrifice Isaac comes at a very opportune time, at a time where, at last, the promise has been kept and Abraham is able to establish himself in the land as the visible heir to the promise of God. André Neher observes:

> For Abraham, the promise had been metamorphosed into *now* . . . What, then, could the future be if not such a steady, continuous stretch of time, sustained from its own resources and reaching out toward maturity as the fruit grows out of the flower?[25]

In other words, the story of the Akedah arrives at a point where Abraham, for the first time, is about to forfeit his condition as an exile and stranger in Canaan for a future that stretches with certainty and clarity before him. His descendance is, for the first time, assured, established, natural with no further need for divine intervention. And it is at this moment, where Abraham at last might have had some respite from his wanderings that the terrible command is uttered. Why?

Levinas offers a possible perspective as to why this interruption of Abraham's enrootedness might have been needed in a reflection on birth and death, "[t]he discontinuity of generations, that is, death and fecundity, releases Desire from the prison of its own subjectivity and puts an end to the monotony of its

identity."[26] In other words, according to Levinas, the self always runs the danger of contracting back unto itself and its own interests—such is the nature of the self. There exist, however, two experiences which allow for a rupture of the self unto otherness: the birth of a child or the perspective of death. Thus when a child is born, the self finds itself transcended by the child; or, when death is near, the self gains the intuition of an experience beyond its own being, thereby ushering a possible awakening to transcendence.

But, one might object, the birth of Isaac should have served well enough to prevent Abraham's contracting upon his own self. Why is the death of the child then needed? The decree of death upon the child is needed inasmuch as, it can be argued, the child was never truly born, never achieved its own individuation beyond being the mere fulfillment of the promise made to the *father*. Thus, Isaac is never more than the accomplishment of the promise made to *Abraham*, the means by which the latter finds himself established in the land and inherits at last the title of father of many nations. He is never more than the child of the promise. Indeed, who is Isaac? Apart from his name, there are no details about his childhood or about his own struggles in his journey to manhood. Before the Akedah, Isaac has no story of his own. He is not yet Isaac and has not yet achieved full individuation as a man. In fact, it is only after the Akedah that he finally marries and finds a place of his own.

Thus the son Isaac does not really ever interrupt the legacy of Abraham—he is the mere and silent continuation of his father's dreams and aspirations. His own dreams and aspirations are not mentioned. Isaac is nothing more, at this point, than the extension of his own father Abraham. We might now better understand the need for God's trial of Abraham. In light of what we have just observed, it might be argued that it was never Isaac himself that was targeted by the sacrifice, but Abraham's possessive grasp on his son. The command to sacrifice would thus come to signify the offering up of precisely what Abraham could not offer up, because it was unthinkable that he should be able to let go of his son inasmuch as the latter had become all but identified with himself. As such, however, the son no longer signifies, as Levinas ventured, the interruption of the self's contraction upon itself but its radicalization. And as Abraham was losing the openness that had characterized his identity so far, the need for a last trial was necessary.

And so a last exile is imposed upon Abraham. So far we have witnessed the exile from the past, then, with the rite of circumcision, the exile from Abraham's present stance in the world. Now we must witness the exile from Abraham's future dreams of establishing himself in the world through his son Isaac. The Akedah thus contains a double ethical signification: the first consists in expulsing Abraham from the temptation of again closing in upon himself, upon his own possessions, tribe and people, and forgetting his universal calling. The second consists in freeing Isaac from the possessive grasp of Abraham and thereby allowing him to emerge as his own person with a destiny of his own beyond that of establishing Abraham in the land.[27] This second signification is, actually, alluded to in our text with the multiplication of the

possessives in God's command, "[t]ake *your* son, *your* only son, whom *you* love—Isaac" (Gen. 22:2). Here Isaac is defined entirely in terms of his belonging to Abraham. As such, the Akedah marks the end of Abraham's grasp on Isaac's destiny and his opening back up onto his own universal calling beyond his own tribe and peoples.[28]

Conclusion

The three exiles of Abraham can now be better understood by the reader as an initiation to ethics in the form of a journey out of the same towards the other. The first exile signifies Abraham's expulsion from the past, from the closed circle of his kin, customs, and comfort zone, towards a destiny that transcends him as well as opens him up onto a universal calling. The second exile, which marks his very flesh, serves to remind him of an original wound at the very core of his virility, of his powers and as such, of his essential de-centeredness. Such a wounding, in turn, serves to remind Abraham that his life and destiny are not his own but inspired by a calling which again holds universal implications. Finally, the third exile endured by Abraham strikes at the heart of his future and of his aspirations for sedentarization, thereby preventing his closing back upon himself and his own and forgetting his unbreakable tie with the other towards whom he was called.

Notes

1 This is the observation also made by André Wénin for whom Abraham's name, inasmuch as it signifies, "elevated father," seems to reduce Abraham's destiny to that of making his father great. Thus, Abraham would have no destiny of his own outside of that of elevating his father. See André Wénin, *D'Adam à Abraham* ou *les errances de l'humain: Lecture de Genèse 1,1–12,4* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 232.
2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 84.
3 This is precisely Wénin's observation, according to whom this multiplication of possessives signifies a fusional universe wherein the family members have meaning only in connection to the father. See Wénin, *D'Adam à Abraham*, 235.
4 Wénin observes that the relational character of Abraham's exilic journey is signified in the text by the appearance of a threefold coupling of the pronouns of the first and second person singular (I–you) in the first part of verse one; this is then followed by a coupling of the pronouns of the first person singular with the third person plural (I–them). Wénin concludes that Abraham's journey will allow for the possibility of a relationship with God (I–you) and with others (I–you–them). When Abraham leaves behind the enclosed world of his father, it is for an ever-broadening relational world. See Wénin, *D'Adam à Abraham*, 238.
5 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, vol. 1., The ArtScroll Series (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), Gen. 12:1, [289].
6 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary*, Gen. 12:2, [291].
7 Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 74.
8 Ibid.
9 We are here reminded of an ancient Jewish legend wherein Abraham is described as destroying his father's idols as a young boy. See Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The*

Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation—Volume 2 Parashiyyot Thirty-Four through Sixty-Seven on Genesis 8:15 to 28:9, Brown Judaic Studies 105 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Parashah Thirty-Eight, Gen. 11:1–30, XXXVIII:XIII, [55–57].

10 This is also, incidentally, Maimonides' view who cites the clinging to the habitual and familiar as obstacles to the truth: "In our own times there is a fourth cause . . . namely, habit and education. Men have an ingrained love for the things to which they are accustomed and are so fond of them . . . The same happens to a man with regard to the opinions to which he is accustomed and in which he has been brought up: he is fond of them and defends them zealously and abhors other opinions. For this reason, too, man is blind to the truth and prefers the views with which he is familiar." Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, abridged, trans. Chaim Rabin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishers, 1995), 57.

11 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 14.

12 This is Michel Haar's central objection to Levinas's ethics of exile: "We know that before the Greek *ethos* was applied to any practical rule or behavior, it originally meant a shared place (*topos*, *lieu*), a place where people dwell together, meet, and communicate. This leads us to put a last introductory question about the meaning of Levinas's ethics: Can there be an ethics without such a place? Or would such an ethics exit, as Levinas claims, in exile, given the absence of topos." Michel Haar, "The Obsession of the Other: Ethics as Traumatization," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23, no. 6 (1997): 96.

13 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 52.

14 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 49.

15 Ibid.

16 See Gen. 17:5–8.

17 Ibid., 25.

18 Kierkegaard summarizes his horror upon reading the story of the sacrifice of Isaac as follows: "This thought scares me, it stirs up something else in me so that I don't want to think of it." Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 60.

19 Ibid., 62.

20 Ibid., 85.

21 Ibid., 84.

22 Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 74.

23 Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 124.

24 Ibid.

25 André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), 174.

26 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 304.

27 According to Wénin, the essential moment of the Holocaust does not occur between Abraham and God but at the very heart of the father–son relationship. Thus, the lesson God wanted to teach Abraham was not only to love his son, but also to love him in a just way, so as to preserve his son's identity and specificity. See Wénin, *D'Adam à Abraham*, 58, 88.

28 André Neher notices this broadening of Abraham's destiny towards others after the Akedah as follows: "And has it yet been noticed that these last episodes in Abraham's life, however varied and praiseworthy they may be, take place, without exception on the horizontal plane? There Abraham came into contact with a multitude of new human beings, or, at least, with various human societies, among which he had lived until now, but as if he had been unaware of them or forgotten them." Neher, *The Exile of the Word*, 177.

6 Rebekah

The journey of womanhood

Introduction

Rebekah is one of the rare women in the Bible to have been explicitly called to a life of exile. In fact, her calling closely resembles the calling of Abraham as commentators like Catherine Chalier have noted.[1] Like Abraham, Rebekah is to leave behind her land and family to go towards an unknown. Like Abraham, Rebekah is called by God, albeit indirectly. And yet, there are a number of important differences between them. Whereas Abraham's destiny calls him towards a land that God is to give him, Rebekah's destiny is towards a man that she is to marry. Although Abraham's destiny only eventually opens up onto the nations, Rebekah's destiny is specifically and intrinsically relational.[2] It is difficult not to notice, moreover, parallels with the respective destinies of Adam and Eve, the former being linked to the earth, and the latter to her husband. One wonders, however, as to the differences between the two exiles. How is Abraham's exile to the land different from Adam's expulsion from the land; how is Rebekah's exile to her husband different from Eve's accursed exile of desire.

Rebekah's exile endures, moreover, into the land of her destination as she struggles with her identity as a childless woman, on the margins of a society where the status of women rested in childbearing. She is then not only exiled to the land of Canaan, but also condemned to remain exiled within that very land, and this for twenty years, ever remaining on the margins of society. Incidentally, she is not the only matriarch to struggle with this. Sarah, and later Rachel, would have the same problem. One must wonder, then, about the significance of such a state of being and why it seems to afflict, almost without exception, all the matriarchs. What is the meaning of such an exile? What ethical and/or redemptive possibilities are opened by such an ordeal?

Having struggled with exile and alienation all her life, the last scenes of Rebekah's life show her at last relinquishing this exile in her struggle to ensure her favorite son inherits the land and the promise. Commentators are split here as to whether she did the right thing.[3] Is her duplicity and treachery towards her husband not justified by the end result? Is there not a time when one must act and take the initiative? Again, there exist haunting similarities between this

last scenario and the story of the fall, both of which revolve around food. In light of these similarities, it might be argued that Rebekah is here falling into the same pitfall as Eve: relinquishing her essential exile and ethical calling for a re-positioning of herself as center of the world in a controlling and masterful stance detrimental to her husband's personhood and otherness. The biblical text itself sustains this interpretation and prolongs the consequences into the very life of Jacob, whom we will examine in the next chapter.

Rebekah's generosity

Before he had finished praying,
Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. . . .
The woman was very beautiful,
A virgin; no man had ever slept with her.
She went down to the spring,
Filled her jar
And came up again.
The servant hurried to meet her and said,
"Please give me a little water from your jar."
"Drink, my Lord," she said,
And quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.
Genesis 24:15–18 (NIV)

It is interesting that, unlike most of the figures of exile we have seen, Rebekah seems to already have an acute sense of ethics. Indeed, the Midrash describes her as the very symbol of *hesed* (kindness), and as the one who would come and bring back such kindness into the family of Abraham still reeling from the violence and the trauma of the Akedah. Moreover, the biblical text associates her twice with *hesed* in the prayer of Eliezer asking for guidance regarding the choice of a wife for Isaac: "show kindness [*hesed*] to my master Abraham" (Gen. 24:12, 14).

Moreover, kindness is the very virtue that Eliezer is seeking in Rebekah. One wonders as to why this would constitute such an important attribute for Eliezer. Why specifically this attribute? Why not rather piety, or intelligence, or purity? While it is true that Eliezer is coming from a context where kindness and hospitality to the stranger were the pillars of Abraham's household, and therefore would be justified in seeking a woman who would fit within this paradigm, one feels the need to expound further as to the reasons for his making *hesed*, that is, hospitality to the stranger, not only a condition for marriage but a condition for election. Why must Rebekah first show the capacity to love the stranger before she can be deemed worthy of loving Isaac?

Such a question is approached by Søren Kierkegaard in his analysis of the command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" in *Works of Love*. For Kierkegaard, the neighbor cannot merely constitute the next of kin, because love of kin remains ever tainted with self-interest. We love our close ones because,

unconsciously, we know that we depend on them and that we have everything to gain from loving them. The neighbor cannot, then, be reduced to the next of kin since, at that level, the self has no sense yet of what it is to love. Kierkegaard explains, "consequently, your neighbor is he who dwells nearer than anyone else, yet not in the sense of partiality, for to love him who through favouritism is nearer to you than all others is self-love."[4] For one to genuinely speak of love, then, one must understand the neighbor as the one who is not the next of kin, but rather the stranger, the distant one. For only such a one can be loved with a love completely devoid of self-interest and therefore loved purely and selflessly. Kierkegaard concludes then that the "[*n*]*eighbour* is what philosophers would call the *other*, that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested."[5]

Thus, for Kierkegaard, it is only when one has learned to love the stranger, the distant one, that one can learn to love selflessly, that is to say, to love genuinely. As such, it is only when one has first learned to love the far, that one may love the near with pure selfless love. The love of the stranger thus constitutes a pedagogy of genuine love, of true, pure, and selfless love, and, as such, constitutes a necessary stage in the purification of one's love for the ones close to us. Thus only the self who has learned to love the stranger, the marginalized one, the exile, is capable of genuinely loving the next of kin. Kierkegaard concludes then, later in *Works of Love*, with the one capable of neighborly love, who "[t]he more he loves the unseen, the more he will love the men he sees."[6] The more the self is capable of loving the stranger, the one it does not understand, and who has nothing to bring it, the more that very self will be capable of loving its close ones, the men and women it sees.

One understands better now why Eliezer was looking for *hesed* in Isaac's prospective wife. Only inasmuch as she could show sensitivity to the distant one, to the stranger, would she show herself capable of genuine love for his master's son. Only inasmuch as she could show that she had overcome her selfish inclinations, would she be deemed worthy of becoming Isaac's bride. And yet, there is more to Eliezer's agenda. The quality of *hesed* is needed inasmuch as it constitutes a condition not only for marriage but also for election into the fold of God's people. Why is that? Rebekah's capacity for kindness is important to Eliezer inasmuch as it testifies to a sensitivity to a dimension beyond herself, to a dimension of otherness. As such, Rebekah shows that she has the potential for a spirituality that extends beyond that of idolatry—which remains ever encamped within the realm of the immanence of the idol. Even though her family is idolatrous, Rebekah's actions show her to be already awakened to the dimension of the Most-High, to the dimension beyond that of idolatrous worship, which, at its essence, can be reduced to the bending of the gods to the will and desires of the self. By showing disinterestedness, Rebekah shows the potential for true worship, which at its core, is disinterested.

In other words, only a self that has shown the capacity to open up to a human other beyond its own interests and needs, will be capable of opening up to the ultimate Other, God, beyond a simple idolatrous economy centered

on the self. Thus only a generous self is found capable of true worship and of encountering the true God, for only such a self has a correct notion of transcendence as that realm which lies ever beyond the self's scope of interests. Thus Levinas observes, "hospitality . . . in it the idea of infinity is consummated."[7] Generous hospitality towards the stranger constitutes the very encounter with God, with the Infinite. To welcome the other beyond the interests of the self is, in itself, for Levinas, an act of true worship as it testifies to an awakening of the self to transcendence. And it is precisely this interest in the other on the part of Rebekah that would kindle and fuel her sense of adventure, leading into her amazing journey towards this other that would constitute her husband, and, eventually, towards this Other that is God. It is then to this exile that we now turn.

The exile of love

But he said to them,
"Do not detain me, now that the Lord
Has granted success to my journey.
Send me on my way so I may be to my master."
Then they said,
"Let's call the young woman and ask her about it."
So they called Rebekah and asked her,
"Will you go with this man?"
"I will go," she said.

Genesis 24:56–58 (NIV)

It is interesting that we have here a very similar movement to that of Abraham. Just as Abraham was called to leave behind his family, people, and land, Rebekah now receives the same calling. Yet, Rebekah's journey is different from Abraham's inasmuch as it is not towards a land that she is called but towards a person. Moreover, while Abraham's calling to the land that God will show him is structured as a movement of self-individuation—*lech lecha*, go towards yourself—Rebekah's calling constitutes a calling away from herself towards an other. What is the significance of such a contrast? Can we see here a specifically feminine version of the election? Finally, one cannot help but notice strong similarities between Abraham's rapport to the land and Rebekah's rapport to her husband, and the story of the fall. What then is the significance of these similarities?

One must note, however, that although Abraham's rapport with the land echoes Adam's accursed binding to the earth, there exist a number of differences between the two, in light of which it will be possible to notice also important differences between Rebekah's calling towards her husband and Eve's accursed desire for hers. Indeed, whereas Adam sees himself condemned to toil and struggle with the land, Abraham finds himself offered the land by God, "[t]he whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner,

I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:8). Moreover, while Adam finds himself expulsed towards the east, Abraham is invited to journey westward as though to journey back to Eden. Everything points to the fact that Abraham's journey and calling to the land institutes a reversal of the Adamic curse, a moment of grace whereby the land is no longer toiled for through sweat, tears, and blood but, rather, offered.

One might read Rebekah's journey in a similar light. No longer condemned to desire her husband in spite of herself as Eve was, Rebekah is given a choice. Does she choose to orient her life-journey and her destiny towards this man, or not. Unlike Eve who found herself marked within her very flesh with a destiny for-the-other in spite of herself, Rebekah is given full liberty to choose whether she will take on such a destiny or not. Here, too, we have a reversal of the story of the fall, whereby the woman's rapport with the man is no longer imposed but freely chosen. The moment of grace lies here in Rebekah's emancipation from the burden of the curse to freely decide what her destiny as a woman will be, and to consent or not to a life for-the-other. In such a context, the for-the-other heretofore understood as the woman's accursed burden—she is condemned to submit to and desire her man—becomes a calling freely chosen from a position of independence and autonomy. The noble generosity of the for-the-other is here recovered. The difference between Eve and Rebekah is that of a generosity undergone to a generosity freely bestowed. With Rebekah, the for-the-other is recovered in all of its nobility and height as a possible and dignified mode of being of a free and emancipated self.

And so with Rebekah we enter into a whole new conception of the subject. This is not a subject defined, as in Western thought, or even as far as Abraham was concerned, as centered and master of the world but, rather, a subject which finds itself intrinsically de-centered and expulsed from its own autonomous stance towards an other. We are very far here from the Cartesian self, or even the Abrahamic self previously defined as center of the world and possessor of a given territory. Contrarily to Abraham whose calling constitutes above all a calling to possess a given territory, Rebekah's calling is intrinsically and essentially relational. Thus it would seem that Rebekah's specific feminine calling reveals femininity as for-the-other in its very essence, albeit inasmuch as it is freely chosen. The feminine calling finds itself to be ethical at its very core.[8]

This description of the feminine destiny as intrinsically ethical, in turn, sheds a whole new light on the journey of love. Understood from Plato to Levinas as an act essentially centered on the self, the story of Rebekah reframes the erotic desire as a movement of self-transcendence essentially centered on the other. Beyond and against Levinas who observes that "the metaphysical event of transcendence—the welcome of the Other . . . —is not accomplished as love,"[9] the story of Rebekah speaks, far to the contrary, to an ethical signification of Eros reminiscent of Levinas's concept of metaphysical desire: "the other metaphysically desired is not 'other' like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell . . . the metaphysical desire tends towards something else entirely, towards an absolutely other."[10] Therein lies the difference between

Abraham's journey to the land and Rebekah's journey towards her husband. While Abraham transcends himself towards that which will eventually, in turn, be possessed by him, Rebekah transcends herself towards a dimension that cannot be possessed, as the "bread I eat, the land in which I dwell," but rather towards an "absolutely other" which is not relative to the self's interests and needs.

Thus, unlike Abraham's journey, Rebekah's love journey has an essential ethical orientation whereby the dimension of an absolute other is opened. Love "aims at an Other,"[11] thereby constituting the original gesture of ethics. This is also Irigaray's take on Eros. Contrary to the Sartrean and Merleau-Pontian view of Eros as hopelessly dominating, narcissistic, and self-absorbed, Irigaray speaks of a cultivation of the sensible, of a work of love, whereby the erotic intention recovers its inter-subjective, self-transcendent intention towards a genuine other:

> Rather than violating or penetrating the mystery of the other, rather than reducing his or her consciousness or freedom to passivity, objectuality, animality or infancy, the caress makes a gesture which gives the other to himself, to herself, thanks to an attentive witness, thanks to a guardian of incarnate subjectivity.[12]

In other words, far from reducing the other to an object of desire, the Erotic intention can, if properly cultivated, aim at a genuine other. Referring to the Buberian "you," Irigaray concludes, "[t]he caress leads each person back to the *I* and to the *you*."[13] The possibility thus exists, for Irigaray, for the Erotic relationship to be structured as an I–you relationship and not merely as an I–it relationship.

Therein lies, arguably, the whole significance of Rebekah's journey. Contrarily to Abraham's journey, Rebekah's journey finds itself structured intrinsically as ethics. As such, her journey opens up also new possibilities for the feminine subject to consciously recover its ethical calling as for-the-other, thereby recovering the original dignity and height of the for-the-other previously experienced as a curse after the fall. But Rebekah's ethical orientation towards an other will in no way jeopardize her own status as a subject, as is signified by the veiling of the self upon encountering Isaac. And it is to this that we now turn.

The veiling of the self

> *Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac.*
> *She got down from her camel and asked the servant,*
> *"Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"*
> *"He is my master," the servant answered.*
> *So she took her veil and covered herself.*
>
> Genesis 24:64–65 (NIV)

The encounter between Isaac and Rebekah is one that includes a seemingly anodyne detail: the veiling of Rebekah. One wonders as to the need for our text to mention this almost trivial detail. What is the significance of such an act? What does it mean? Indeed, one is surprised at what might be perceived as a sudden shyness on the part of a woman who had up to now been quite forward, as was evident in her dealings with Eliezer. Yet, upon encountering Isaac, she chooses to withdraw, to recede in her interiority through the act of veiling. It is as though Rebekah's gesture of veiling herself was a way of presenting herself to Isaac as not entirely in his space, as not entirely there, as an absence within her very presence, that is to say, as fundamentally exiled from Isaac's world. The question is, of course, why this reserve? And, more importantly, how does such a reserve constitute here the very structure of her encounter with Isaac?

Levinas calls this reserve "discretion" and sees there a typically feminine attribute: "the other whose presence is discreetly an absence . . . is the woman."[14] Thus the woman, for Levinas, is characterized intrinsically by this spatial exile from the world of man, by this discretion whereby her essence is revealed as "simultaneously with this presence, in its withdrawal and in its absence."[15] The woman, in her encounter with man, presents herself, in the gesture of discretion, as a presence which is simultaneously an absence, as being there and not there at the same time; that is to say, as fundamentally exiled from the scope of man's world. The question is, of course, why this interpretation of discretion is relevant and meaningful. What is the significance of such a gesture?

One might understand the act of discretion, as exemplified by the veiling whereby the woman does not reveal everything about herself, whether physically or psychologically, upon her first encounter with man, as enabling, paradoxically, her true essence to be perceived upon that encounter. In other words, to reveal everything at that moment would consist in precisely occulting her true self, that which constitutes her very essence—her deep mystery and otherness. Levinas comments on this as follows: "The beloved, at once graspable but intact in her nudity, beyond object and face and thus beyond the existent, abides in virginity."[16] What constitutes the essence of the woman, then, is her way of abiding in virginity, that is to say, of eluding any form of possession or of violation, and as such, abiding as a future in the present, "not yet" says Levinas earlier.[17]

Thus, a woman's discretion testifies to a transcendence within the world of man. Such a transcendence differs from the transcendence of the ultimate Other, or God, yet might be understood as one of the modes of this transcendence. Just as God remains ever hidden from the cognition and grasp of man, likewise woman, as a mode of divine transcendence, image of God's hiddenness, enacts, in the gesture of discretion, a hiddenness and mystery that constitutes her very essence as other. As such, woman might then be encountered as the very experience of the sacred in the world of man, thereby constituting a prelude to the penultimate experience of the sacredness and holiness of God.

Woman's discretion then appears in the world of man as the very guardian of the sacred so often forgotten and forfeited in man's urge to conquer and master the world around him.

Thus, woman, in the act of discretion, emerges in the world of possessions of man as that very entity that he cannot possess. As such, woman initiates the first ethical moment in the journey of man in the world inasmuch as her presence as absence opens up a realm for man of that which he cannot possess or master, thereby placing a limit on the scope of his powers. The act of discretion thus opens up within the dimension of man's possessions the dimension of an object unlike other objects readily available for man, of an object which is not an object. The woman's discretion can then be understood as a gesture inaugural of ethics in the realm of man, thereby allowing for all ensuing encounters with woman to take place on the level of ethics rather than of possession and mastery. The woman's act of discretion thus ensures that she will be subsequently encountered by man as a person rather than a mere object of pleasure or of possession.[18]

This act of discretion, whereby the woman places herself in a realm that is sacred, or separate from that of man has been also interpreted by Irigaray as the very basis for an ethical encounter with woman. Her observations are strikingly in tune with our biblical text:

> I find myself wondering if the work of love that the book transmits has conveyed the fact that to love each other between us, woman and man, women and men, requires the protection of a space, a place of silence . . . not so much because it rests at the level of nature, of the drive, of instinct but because if maintains a difference, a difference that cannot be expressed, but must be protected, cultivated, generated, also historically, so as it becomes more refined and shared . . . thus silence is two, a two which cannot be reduced to the one or to the other, a two irreducible to one.[19]

Thus, according to Irigaray, for there to be a genuine relationship between a man and a woman a separation is necessary, a space of silence must be protected for the duality to arise which is prerequisite to the encounter. It is this very space of silence, this place between the lovers that the act of discretion opens up, thereby allowing for the woman to emerge as a person and a face hence ensuring that the duality is preserved. Levinas comments along similar lines, "[t]he same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and absolve themselves from this relation, remain absolutely separated. The idea of Infinity requires this separation."[20] That is to say, for there to be a relationship which preserves the dimension of infinity, in other words, of the mystery and hiddenness of the partners involved, there needs to be a prior separation, a space of separateness, of sacredness must be "protected, cultivated, generated,"[21] to refer to Irigaray's terminology. Thus the exile in space signified by Rebekah's gesture of veiling herself enables her true essence as mystery, other, and face to emerge, thereby inaugurating an ethical encounter with the

man.[22] But there is yet another exile to be experienced by the matriarch: the exile in time. And it is to this exile that we now must turn.

The art of waiting

> *Isaac prayed to the Lord*
> *On behalf of his wife,*
> *Because she was childless.*
> Genesis 25:21 (NIV)

A little noticed fact in our text is that Rebekah, like Sarah, and later, like Rachel, was barren for twenty years. The time span between Isaac's prayer for his wife and her actually begetting her two sons is that long; for, as the text mentions, Isaac is sixty years old (twenty years after his wedding) when his sons are born. The question, of course, arises as to why it is that the matriarchs all seem to undergo the same affliction. Why indeed, are all the matriarchs barren? Why such a long period of waiting imposed on them? And is there a spiritual component to this waiting, what's more, a specifically feminine component? Indeed, what are the feminine virtues that are developed through this waiting? Finally, what kind of exile are we talking about here?

What is interesting about barrenness is that it strikes at the heart of the woman's powers—that of giving life. Although a woman has other powers connected to the mastery of the world at large, the ability to give birth is an essential power ascribed to her *as* a woman, as a gendered being. Why then would the text strike at the very core of the woman's powers? We are reminded here of the trauma of circumcision whereby the man finds *himself* struck at the very heart of his powers as a man. The barrenness seems to take a similar aim at the center of the woman's powers. But why is such a trial inflicted upon the matriarchs? Why this deep trauma inflicted upon the very heart of their power as women? Why this experience of complete and utter powerlessness over their destinies as women? Moreover, why this exclusion, perhaps even expulsion from their God-given destinies as women and mothers? Why this exile from what makes them essentially women? From their very essence, their very being?

Perhaps one might interpret the barrenness of Rebekah as an experience whereby she finds herself displaced towards a center of gravity outside of herself. That is to say, there exists the possibility of this barrenness re-orienting Rebekah outside of herself. And this through the experience of "patience." But how is this possible? Is this experience not, on the contrary, the sign that there is no future and no hope for Rebekah? That there will be no self-transcendence in children, that she is riveted to this irremissible present, to this inescapable situation. Is barrenness not the experience *par excellence* of no exit? And how is this patience to be birthed?

Our text gives us a clue as to what the experience of barrenness might lead to. Indeed, right after the text mentions Rebekah's barrenness, Isaac's prayer is mentioned. The barrenness has, in a way, propelled the self towards a new possibility,

beyond the self's powers, towards a dimension beyond the self which is looked upon with hope. In other words, the experience of barrenness, of loss of the self's powers implies the despair of an inescapable situation only if the self continues to look to its own powers for salvation. It is only upon the acknowledgment of complete powerlessness, as enacted by Isaac's prayer, that a dimension beyond the self, a dimension of hope, might be opened up. And, moreover, that a dimension beyond the irremissible present might come to light: that of the future.

Indeed, the present constitutes the realm of the self's mastery. It is the realm of the "now," of the coincidence between the self's desire or will and the accomplishment of that will, that is to say, the realm of the self's powers and initiative. In the present, the self reigns as supreme master. The experience of barrenness signifies, however, the complete loss of these powers, the non-coincidence between the self's desire and the accomplishment of that desire. And yet, far from signifying the demise of the self, this non-coincidence might open up a whole new dimension for the self, the dimension of the future and of hope, thereby inaugurating temporality as well as the work of patience. And indeed, patience constitutes a whole new way of experiencing the powerlessness over the present. Far from signifying the stoic resignation of the self to its present condition—which would constitute a form of despair and an incapacity to open up to temporality—patience constitutes, in its very passivity, a gesture whereby the self transcends its previously inescapable situation towards an other susceptible of redeeming it. Far from signifying, as in Greek thought, death and decay, time and the acquiescence of time through patience signifies in the Hebrew mindset the infinite and the promise of redemption.

Thus, one might understand the work of patience as the ultimate gesture of passivity, whereby the self acknowledges its powerlessness, and as such experiences the possibility of an awakening to infinite hope. The work of patience, the acknowledgment that action is impossible, thus serves to open up the dimension of the promise of God's redemptive action. Thus, waiting, inasmuch as it enacts a de-centering and contraction of the self's powers, makes room for God's power and initiative. As such, patience constitutes an almost liturgical act whereby one anticipates God's actions, whereby one dwells in the realm of the promise. The gesture of patience comes to signify the imminence of a gift from God. The experience of waiting testifies to a life entirely oriented towards God's providence. Waiting can then come to constitute the sure sign that a gift from God is about to be bestowed. Levinas would say that "glory is but the other face of the passivity of the subject."[23] The glory of God, the splendor of his providences, constitutes the other face of the self engaged in the humble and sometimes profoundly painful act of waiting.

Simone Weil put it beautifully:

> The attitude which brings about salvation is not like any form of activity. The Greek word which expresses is *hypomene*, and *patientia* is rather an inadequate translation of it. It is the waiting or attentive and faithful immobility that lasts indefinitely and cannot be shaken.[24]

In other words, patient waiting is the attitude whereby one opens up to the possibility of salvation, that is to say, to the possibility of transcending the inescapable present. It is, moreover, only when the self's powers are struck with powerlessness that the dimension of infinity or of redemption can be manifest. In other words, the condition for the apprehension of the infinite and of its glory is possible only for the self having undergone the experience of powerlessness. Perhaps this was the lesson to be learned by the matriarchs and by Rebekah through the experience of barrenness. Perhaps it was this vision of the infinite that was intended behind the pain and trauma of barrenness and temporal exile. And yet it is precisely this vision that Rebekah will forfeit towards the end of her life, and this by forfeiting the very condition of exile which had characterized every aspect of her life.

Rebekah's downfall

Now Rebekah was listening
As Isaac spoke to his son Esau.
When Esau left for the open country . . .
Rebekah said to her son Jacob, . . .
"Now, my son, listen carefully
And do what I tell you:
Go out to the flock
And bring me two choice young goats,
So I can prepare some tasty food for your father,
Just the way he likes it.
Then take it to your father to eat,
So that he may give you his blessing before he dies."
Genesis 27:5–6, 8–10 (NIV)

We now come to the end of our story. An end which shows a very different Rebekah from the one we first encountered at the beginning of chapter 24. Indeed, up until now, Rebekah's life was marked with exile, whether in the form of hospitality to the exiled, accepting an exilic destiny for-the-other, or finally the long and painful exile in time as she waited patiently for God's providence. We saw, moreover, that each one of her exilic trials opened up onto the dimension of the infinite and constituted a way of being-in-the-world characterized by receptivity to divine providence rather than by conquest or mastery by one's own efforts. Here, however, Rebekah falters. Here she relinquishes her previously exilic and open-handed stance for the temptation of acquisition and grasping of something which she profoundly desires. When faced with the possibility of Esau acquiring the blessing, she loses her reliance on the Infinite and gets to work. Jacob, her favorite son, must acquire the blessing and Rebekah will see to it that he does.

Now commentators are split as to whether this change in Rebekah's character is a good thing or not. Alice Ogden Bellis, in her book, *Helpmates, Harlots,*

and Heroes, points out that scholar Christine Allen "argues that Rebekah more than Isaac is the spiritual link between Abraham and Jacob."[25] Bellis goes on to cite Allen, "[h]ad not Abraham been asked to sacrifice Isaac? Could she not be asked to sacrifice her marriage trust? Had not Isaac been given back? Could not the marriage be reunited? Would not God 'suspend the ethical for teleological reasons?'"[26] That is to say, perhaps the dishonest means used by Rebekah are justified in the light of the end: Jacob's rightfully acquiring his God-appointed blessing. Perhaps Isaac was here headed in the wrong direction, and Rebekah's initiative was needed to set him straight and to recover the divine orientation for their family. There is a whole literature on women in the Bible setting their men straight through their courageous and often unorthodox actions.[27]

I would, however, beg to differ with Allen on her diagnostic of Rebekah's actions. Indeed, Allen's interpretation does not seem attuned to the text's own interpretation of Rebekah's initiative. The consequences described by the text of Rebekah's dupery stretch far beyond her own destiny into Jacob's life, who would see himself taken advantage of and duped in much the same way by Laban on his wedding night. The echoes and common motives between the two passages are striking and point to an intention on the part of the author of the text to emphasize the gravity of Jacob's dupery as well as open up the possibility of an expiation for this fault through the painful experience of being himself duped. This is also Diane Sharon's view: "What if . . . Rebekah is not acting in harmony with the will of God? In that case we should expect dire consequences. Indeed the consequences ensue."[28]

I would further argue that there exist disturbing parallels between this story and the story of the fall which cast a dark shadow on Rebekah's actions. Daniel Langer, in his essay "A Tikkun: Rebekah and Eve,"[29] points out a number of common motives between the two stories that do not serve Rebekah's cause. Commenting on the common motive of food between the two passages, Langer observes:

> Eve had given her husband, Adam, from the fruit of the tree which the Lord God had commanded not to eat, "*and he did eat ('akl)*" (Gen. 3:6). Rebekah ensured that *her* husband, Isaac, would eat from the savory food of Jacob, a source that was in accord with the will of God, "*and he did eat ('akl)*."[30]

Although Langer goes on to say that Rebekah's actions somehow serve the redemptive purpose of reversing Eve's sin, I would argue, on the contrary, that they tragically repeat Eve's doomed gesture and consequently spell out a repetition of the story of the fall. And indeed, in both cases, we see the woman's initiative taking place to the detriment of man's actions and place in the world. In both places the woman is active and coercive, and the man passive and silent. In both cases we have the ethical obliteration of man's place in the world, of his initiative, and of his expression, and the woman taking center stage. And finally, in both cases we have the temptation of food offered by woman to man.

And thus, we find here Rebekah relinquishing her previously exilic and open-handed stance in the world—whether in generosity or in patience—for a stance that seeks to control and master her own destiny and this, to the detriment of the infinite present in the human face. This usurpation of the man by the woman is further emphasized by the total absence of discourse between the man and his wife. Unlike Abraham and Sarah, and later Jacob and Rachel/Leah, there is no record of any conversation between Isaac and Rebekah. This absence of discourse is particularly flagrant at the moment of the prediction concerning the two sons, of one serving the other. Rebekah inquires of the Lord, but never breathes a word to her husband about it. One might wonder why? Likewise, there is no attempt on the part of Rebekah to speak to Isaac about her reticence to see Esau acquire the blessing. One might already perceive, as in Cain's story, an ethical problem in this inability to address the other in discourse.

The absence of discourse thus paves the way in Rebekah's case, as in Cain's, to an absence of ethics, and to an eventual obliteration of the other, of his face, to the profit of the self established as central. Thus, in her relinquishing of her exile, Rebekah forfeits at the same time her sense of ethics and of transcendence. Moreover, it is not only Isaac's initiative that finds itself obliterated by Rebekah's actions, but also God himself. Inasmuch as we saw that waiting constituted a gesture whereby a space was opened for the possibility of God's actions, Rebekah's frantic actions and trickery now lead to a closing up of the realm of the Infinite. She does not, as Diane Sharon wisely puts it, "let divine intention blossom in its own time,"[31] but rather interrupts the redemptive gesture, cuts the fruit before it is ripe, tasting its bitterness henceforth in the despairing consequences that ensue. And, indeed, where subjectivity reigns there can be no other. Where subjectivity takes control there can be no divine intervention. And inasmuch as waiting constituted a condition for the possibility of God's providences, Rebekah's actions now have the effect of contracting her universe—once so open—onto the limits of her own actions and the scope of her own intentions which is, as we saw, the realm of despair.

Conclusion

And so Rebekah's exilic journey comes full circle. It begins with a drink offered to a man in an act of hospitality and ends with a plate of food smuggled to another in an act of deception. What could have been a destiny entirely lived in an open stance before the infinite and marked by an effacement of subjectivity before the other, whether in the gesture of generosity, of the risk of a journey taken for-an-other, the act of veiling herself before that other, or finally, the difficult and patient act of waiting, falters in the end in this desperate attempt to reach its destination before its time. In the end, Rebekah relinquishes her exilic stance, perhaps too painful, too difficult, too dependent on the Infinite, and opts for the grasping and possessive stance of a subjectivity's desperate attempts for control. But the temptation of mastery backfires inasmuch as her heart's

desires are not fulfilled. The divine providences reserved for her and for her son Jacob cannot be offered to a hand and a life that has closed itself upon itself, that has obliterated all trace of the infinite and of the other. In her betrayal of Isaac, Rebekah shows herself a very different person from the Rebekah we first encountered. That Rebekah was open-handed and generous, she was not afraid of taking risks and surrendering to a destiny entirely oriented towards the Infinite. The Rebekah of old age is the opposite. She is cautious and calculating, and her generosity towards man has turned into trickery. And yet, the path opened up by her journey does not close up. Jacob's journey will begin where Rebekah left off and the trajectory to the infinite will continue to be traced. And so it is to Jacob's exile that we now turn.

Notes

1 In her book *Les Matriarches*, Chalier compares Rebekah's departure from her people, land, and religion with Abraham's exile. Moreover, according to Chalier, it is this courage that will constitute the sign of her election. See Catherine Chalier, *Les Matriarches: Sarah, Rébecca, Rachel et Léa* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 83.
2 See Chalier, *Les Matriarches*, 99.
3 See Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, URJ Press, 2007), 150. See also Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2007), 69.
4 Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 37.
5 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 37.
6 Ibid., 158.
7 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 27.
8 See Chalier, *Les Matriarches*, 99.
9 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 254.
10 Ibid., 33.
11 Ibid., 256.
12 Luce Irigaray, *To be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (New York: Routledge, 2001), 27.
13 Ibid.
14 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 155.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 258.
17 Ibid.
18 See Chalier, *Les Matriarches*, 99.
19 Irigaray, *To be Two*, 62.
20 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 102.
21 Irigaray, *To be Two*, 62.
22 See Chalier, *Les Matriarches*, 99.
23 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 144.
24 Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 1951), 128.
25 Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, 69.
26 Ibid.

27 See André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005).
28 Eskenazi and Weiss, *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary*, 150.
29 Daniel Langer, "A Tikkun: Rebekah and Eve," *Tradition* 27, no. 1 (1992): 3–19.
30 Langer, "A Tikkun," 3.
31 Eskenazi and Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, 150.

7 Jacob

The exclusion from the birthright

Introduction

The story of Jacob is marked by painful episodes of exile. These episodes are all the more painful in light of Jacob's painstaking efforts to establish himself in the land and find a place in the world. From his childhood on through adulthood, Jacob is seen as desperately striving for a secure stance in the world. His ontological exile is manifest already at birth when he is described as grasping his brother's heel as though having already a sense of ontological void or nothingness and seeking some kind of stability and support. Later, he is seen as swindling his brother twice, first of his birthright, and the second time of his blessing. All this with the purpose, again, of establishing himself in the land, of finding a place there.

The reader cringes for Jacob upon witnessing the ensuing exile, when all that he had worked for comes to naught. This exile from his brother's wrath upon having cheated him of his blessing leads him to a place of complete destitution. He has lost everything he has striven so hard to acquire: his birthright and his blessing. And yet, can one not perceive in this exile a number of positive elements? In this chapter, I will argue that this exile, far from signifying a punishment and a dire consequence for Jacob's sin, constitutes, on the contrary, a redemptive moment with ethical implications marked by two encounters: with God at Bethel and with the woman Rachel at the well. Our text seems to connect the two encounters and one wonders from the onset as to why? Why must the encounter with God precede that with the woman? What is it that Jacob has learned from his encounter with God that allows him to relate to the woman?

This redemptive encounter remains, however, merely a one-time event in the life of Jacob. Soon enough, he sinks back into his old self, ever striving to establish himself, this time in the favor of his uncle Laban. There he works a total of fourteen years in an effort to acquire more or less cunningly that which he has always craved: a place in the world, a secure stance in the land. Yet Jacob's efforts again backfire. His wealth takes such proportions that Laban's sons begin to envy him and express their discontent to their father. Upon hearing this, Jacob, fearing for his life, finds himself again having to move on and finds himself again in exile.

And so, again, Jacob finds himself placeless. One might assume once more that this exile is well deserved inasmuch as he has again swindled his way to his wealth. Yet, again it will be argued that this exile holds redemptive possibilities which open up to an experience of ethics. Again, this exile will be marked by two encounters: with the angel at Peniel and with his brother Esau at the border of the land of Canaan. The two exiles are furthermore related in our text by the expression "face" which applies first to God and then to his brother. What then does this correlation mean? How does seeing God face to face have anything to do with the ensuing welcoming of the face of his brother?

Jacob's ontological exile

> *When the time came for her to give birth,*
> *There were twin boys in her womb.*
> *The first to come out was red,*
> *And his whole body was like a hairy garment; . . .*
> *After this, his brother came out,*
> *With his hand grasping Esau's heel;*
> *So he was named Jacob.*
>
> Genesis 25:24–26 (NIV)

Jacob's ontological exile is evident from the very first descriptions of his birth. Born second, and as such, condemned to reside on the margins of history, Jacob will fight all his life against this fate. It is difficult not to see here a number of parallels between the story of Jacob and Esau, and that of Cain and Abel.[1] Just like Abel, Jacob is described as the second born, and almost as an afterthought. Like Abel, Jacob is condemned to a life in the shadow of his brother, the firstborn. And like Abel, Jacob's life seems destined to unravel under the constant threat of exile. Abel is a shepherd and, as such, ever on the move. He does not own the land; Cain does. Jacob, likewise, will own nothing but finds himself, from his birth, destined to live within his brother's estate as an exile. Thus, from the first, Jacob's existence seems struck with the curse of exile, and this, even before any form of expulsion from the land.

And it is this exilic fate which Jacob will consistently resist and try to overturn. His life from the very moment of his birth will be marked by the will to rebel against his fate. Interestingly this rebellion will take on Cainesque overtones inasmuch as Jacob's striving to find a place in the world will take place as a struggle against his brother and as a desire to usurp his own central stance in the world. This struggle, moreover, is a struggle for life and death. In Jacob's mind, it is either him or his brother. There is no possible coexistence of the two in the land. To establish himself, Jacob will have to negate Esau in a gesture reminiscent of Cain's desire to kill Abel upon finding himself expulsed to a secondary status by God's favoring Abel over him. Our passage gives its readers a sense of this Cainesque subjectivity in its sparse yet laden description of Jacob's birth wherein Jacob is described as grasping the heel of his brother.

But the significance of this gesture remains to be explored. What is it in the gesture of grasping the heel that echoes Cain's stance with regards Abel?

The grasping of the heel has been understood by commentators like Rashi as an attempt to usurp power, "Esau's Heel—a sign that this one (Esau) will hardly have time to complete his *period of* domination before the other would rise and take it (his power) from him."[2] In other words, according to Rashi, the grasping of the heel is an image laden with meaning: that of the usurpation of power. From the beginning, Jacob's endeavors would all focus on the usurpation or annihilation of Esau in order to take his place. This interpretation is followed up by Old Testament commentator H.S. Smith, who traces the struggle for supremacy to the womb, "[t]his thirst for power . . . actually originates as a pre-natal phenomenon. While yet in Rebekah's womb the twins 'struggle together' . . . for supremacy."[3] Commenting further on Jacob's grasping of the heel, Smith observes:

> The double meaning of the verb *ahaz* provides a clue as to the thrust of the narrative, for behind the common meaning, "to grip," "to take hold of," lies another one: "to have possession," "to inherit" . . . Perhaps implicit in Jacob's physical act of gripping Esau's heel is the intention to take possession of the latter's position of power and dominance.[4]

Smith then makes a very interesting observation, which, we shall see, will be of particular relevance upon commenting on Jacob's second exile at Peniel. He interprets the biblical description of Jacob's grasping of the heel as a veiled and discrete way of saying that Jacob was grasping Esau at the genitals:

> I venture to suggest that the spirit of the narrative is more strictly adhered to if *yaqb* is taken in this instance as a euphemism for genitals. . . . the suggestion that in the story Jacob is gripping Esau not by the heel but by the genitals would aptly prefigure the narrative plot as a whole.[5]

The grasping of the genitals constitutes a much more powerful gesture than the mere grasping of the heel. While grasping the heel might still be interpreted as Jacob's trying to keep up with his brother, in a sort of competitive spirit, the grasping of the genitals signifies a desire to take possession of the very seat of Esau's life-force and power. The grasping of the genitals thus must be understood as a life and death situation. Jacob is here seeking to supplant, not only Esau's prerogatives, but also his very being, his very existence. The gesture is here reminiscent of Cain's desire to supplant his brother in the eyes of God and his ensuing murder. Although Jacob is described by birth in a way reminiscent of Abel, it is the spirit of Cain that animates him. It is Cain's strong, primitive drive for power and sedentarization, an obsession with the land and with the acquisition of a stance of power that inhabits Jacob. But such an obsession makes it impossible to engage with an other in a peaceful way, or to coexist with this other. In other words, Jacob's possessive stance shows that

he has not yet awakened to the possibility of ethics. And perhaps it is precisely this lesson of otherness that the ensuing exile was meant to teach.

The expulsion from the Promised Land

When he reached a certain place,
He stopped for the night because the sun had set.
Taking one of the stones there,
He put it under his head
And lay down to sleep.
He had a dream in which he saw a stairway
Resting on the earth,
With its top reaching to heaven,
And the angels of God
Were ascending and descending on it.
There above it stood the Lord . . .
When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought
"Surely the Lord is in this place . . .
This is none other than the house of God."
Genesis 28:11–13, 16–17 (NIV)

This first exile reads like a punishment. Jacob's primitive obsession with finding a place in the sun has led him to swindle his brother twice: first by the barter of his brother's birthright for a bowl of lentils, second by posing as his brother in order to receive the blessing of the firstborn. It is as though it is this consistent attitude of usurpation that has led to his downfall. And it is his last action, the grave sin against his father and brother, that leads to his being expulsed from the Promised Land by his mother. In a way, then, Jacob gets what he deserves and finds himself having lost everything he has striven for inasmuch as the Promised Land constituted precisely what was aimed at in all of his cunning and strivings. Here he is now, alone and destitute, expulsed from that very land which was to be his inheritance.

Yet, it is possible to offer another reading of this exile. More than a mere punishment serving to humble Jacob, this exile holds a number of redemptive moments. The first exile of Jacob is marked by two crucial encounters: the encounter with God at Bethel, and the ensuing encounter with the woman Rachel at the well. This intimate connection between exile and encounter seems to hint to a sense of Jacob's exile that is ethical. While his exile marks the end of his strivings to conquer the Promised Land, it opens up a whole new ontological dimension and horizon for Jacob: that of human encounters. In other words, Jacob's exile seems to open up a new destiny for Jacob. No longer intent on the conquest of space, Jacob is now susceptible to experiencing a welcoming of the other and an awakening to the dimension of ethics. And so it is to the first of these encounters that we now turn.

It is interesting to note that this encounter with God takes place at night; as though it was necessary for night to fall on the soul in order for it to be able to apprehend God. Mystics and philosophers of all sorts have attempted to describe this night of the soul and its revelatory possibilities. Simone Weil speaks of the dark night as a void which only grace can fill: "Void: the dark night. . . . Whoever endures a moment of the void either receives the supernatural bread or falls. It is a terrible risk, but one that must be run—even during the instant when hope fails."[6] Thus, according to Weil, in order to encounter a dimension beyond being, a void must be created within that ontological dimension. A "break out of essence"[7] is necessary to apprehend transcendence. Exile is required to open up to a dimension and destiny beyond the mere perseverance in being.

And thus, Jacob finds himself destitute and placeless, perhaps in order to better apprehend the "null-site"[8] where God resides. Jacob finds himself in the night of the soul to better apprehend the epiphany of God. He is exiled from the ontological realm he has sought to conquer all his life, in order to awaken to a dimension of transcendence. The revelation that ensues and that is enabled by Jacob's exile is, then, not surprising: a ladder leading up to heaven and a vision of God. The ladder would come to signify the elevation of Jacob beyond his ontological concerns and preoccupations to a new dimension—that of an "otherwise than being." And the vision of God would be the climax of such an elevation.

What surprises the reader in this vision, however, is the overwhelming repetition of the word *maqom*, signifying "place" (Gen. 28:11, 16, 17). This is an interesting repetition inasmuch as it is precisely this that Jacob has lost and that he finds himself without. He is in exile, without a place to lay his head; he is the placeless one. And so one wonders at this emphasis that our passage places on the world "place" [*maqom*]. What is the meaning of such an emphasis? Moreover, it is not any place that is alluded to here but *the* place [*bamaqom*]. The place is a very definite place and not just any random place. So what is this place? Our passage concludes beautifully as to the meaning of this place in Jacob's own words: "This is none other than the house of God." Thus, the place that Jacob finds upon losing his place in the world, is the house of God.

This is such a profound moment in the story and calls for interpretation! Why such an overwhelming repetition of the word "place"? And why call it the "house of God"? What is the meaning of the vision? And what did Jacob learn from this vision? One must remember how Jacob must have felt right before the visitation of the vision in order to grasp the profundity of the allusion to a place. Let us remember that Jacob arrived at Bethel completely destitute, having lost everything that he had previously sought after, having lost his family, his blessing and the Promised Land. Night has fallen, both effectually and symbolically, upon his soul and existence. He is alone and destitute. What more comforting an event, then, than this vision which envelops him with a sense of place, of a place in God's house, of a place *in* God. It is as though the vision were telling him that what he has been seeking, i.e. a place in the world,

he must first and foremost find in God. His true blessing and inheritance is to reside in the presence of God, to find his home in God's abode.

Perhaps this was what Jacob was to learn from the vision of Bethel: that what he was seeking—a place and a name—could only be found in God. Only upon realizing that God is the one he needs, that he only is his place, his inheritance, and his blessing, would he be able to receive those from God and go beyond his own fruitless attempts at claiming a place in the world. Only upon realizing that the highest destiny is that of dwelling "in the house of the Lord" (Ps. 23:6) as did his descendant David in his own exile, would he be found worthy of receiving a dwelling place in the Promised Land. Moreover, only upon experiencing the hospitality and grace of God, would he cease all his cunning and usurping strivings, and be ready to receive that which was to be his inheritance. Finally, only upon encountering the face of God, would he be able to open up to another human face, that of the woman.

The encounter with Rachel is one of the most beautiful moments in Jacob's life. The Jacob that interacts with Rachel is, moreover, profoundly different from the Jacob we are used to. The encounter with Rachel must have been a defining and transformative one. Indeed, we are used to a Jacob intent on grasping, possessing something. From birth, he is depicted as he who is grasping the heel of his brother. This grasping would characterize his life from then on, in his attempt to possess first his brother's birthright and, finally, his blessing.

Imagine the reader's surprise to see in this encounter with Rachel a wholly different Jacob. A Jacob capable of *generosity*. Such a quality is profoundly out of character for Jacob. Yet, this quality should not have been alien to him. One is reminded, in Jacob's behavior, of his mother's generous stance to the stranger upon encountering Eliezer. The generous act associated with water should, therefore, not be alien to Jacob since it recalls his own mother's traits. And yet, this generosity marks the very inversion of the Jacob we know. The possessive and striving Jacob is now moved to generosity. The encounter with Rachel marks a profound turning point in Jacob's constitution and psychology. But what is the significance of such a turning point and what is it that produced it?

The encounter with Rachel is significant inasmuch as it marks Jacob's first awakening to ethics. The act of generosity which marks this encounter is crucial here and testifies to a shift in Jacob's stance in the world. From a stance entirely centered on the self, Jacob's generosity marks the moment of the inversion of this stance to a concern which stretches beyond his own interests and is centered on an other. For the first time, Jacob is aware of a dimension beyond his own self and his own self-interest. This awareness is signified by the inversion of his heretofore self-interested stance into generosity. Commenting on the structure of the ethical awakening of the subject, Levinas observes that "[t]o recognize the Other is therefore to come to him across the world of possessed things, but at the same time to establish, by gift, community and universality."[9] The awakening to the dimension of the other, then, is not a mere intellectual consciousness which sees, in a field of vision, the other. It passes through the world of possessed things. How so?

According to Levinas, the self might be aware of there being people around it, yet profoundly unaware of their *otherness*, that is, of their belonging to a realm transcending the self. The self can live its whole life surrounded by people and never come to terms with their alterity inasmuch as these people are continually perceived as revolving solely around the self's interests. Only when the spell of self-interested behavior and perseverance in being is broken might the self perceive the other qua other, that is, as holding a significance that goes beyond the self's narrow self-interests. Thus, for Levinas, the awakening to an other, or ethics, necessarily rests upon an *interruption* of the self's perseverance in being. Such an interruption is testified to, precisely, in the act of generosity. It is the generous gift of the previously coveted world by the self to the other which marks, for Levinas, the inversion of Jacob's possessiveness into ethics.

We now can understand the significance of Jacob's generous gesture towards Rachel. Such a gesture is more than a mere act of courtesy or courtship, and testifies to a deep transformation in Jacob's psychology as well as to a profound awakening to ethics echoing Rebekah's own ethical stance as a young, yet unmarried, girl. Indeed, this moment of generosity might almost be seen to constitute a redemptive moment not only for Jacob but also for Rebekah. The allusions contained in Jacob's generosity to Rebekah's generosity serve to remind us of who *Rebekah* used to be before she succumbed to stratagem. The question remains, however, as to what provoked this transformation in Jacob? What is it in his encounter with Rachel that so profoundly marked him as to completely overturn the categories of greed and possessiveness that previously characterized him?

A clue as to the moment of transformation is given by our text in its allusion to Jacob's weeping. This weeping testifies to the fact that Jacob is somehow moved, that something has shifted within him. Commentators speculate as to what shift occurred. The Midrash says that Jacob weeps because he realizes that he has nothing to offer Rachel and that, unlike Eliezer, it is as a pauper that he will present himself to her family.[10] He weeps because he has nothing to show for himself, because he has lost everything. This interpretation rests, however, on the fact that Jacob is still the same inside—still intent on possessing the land and establishing himself. He is weeping because he has failed in this intent. But if Jacob is still the same inside, this means that nothing has shifted, that no transformation has taken place. How then to explain the change in his behavior? How then to explain how deeply moved—to tears—he is upon seeing Rachel?

Perhaps then his weeping testifies to something else. Perhaps the weeping is provoked by the fact that the woman has touched something in Jacob which heretofore had been kept hidden and repressed. Commentators make a parallel between Jacob's moving of the stone away from the well's mouth, to a psychological wall being moved within himself allowing for emotion to be expressed. What, then, is this wall within Jacob? What is this hardness that the sight of Rachel dispels? Perhaps one might trace this hardness in Jacob as that which arises out of his constant struggle against his own fate and against

the people who will him evil. As such it is the hardness that arises in a man who has no foothold in the world and must constantly struggle to stay afloat; the hardness of the accursed one, condemned to a life of perpetual exile in the world and surrounded by foes. And it is precisely this hardness that the sight of Rachel dispels.

But what is it in Rachel that breaks the wall of hardness that surrounds Jacob's heart? Commentators have speculated that what moves Jacob to tears is the promise contained in the sight of Rachel; of a home and of progeny. What moves Jacob to tears is the sight of everything he had been striving for being offered to him in an extraordinary excess of grace. Catherine Chalier comments on this moment of grace in her commentary on the encounter between Jacob and Rachel and describes it as exceeding everything that Jacob could have hoped for.[11] Having lost everything because of his greed and possessiveness, Jacob finds it all potentially restored to him in one glimpse of Rachel. And this is why he breaks down and weeps. At the excess of grace bestowed upon him at that moment.

Thus, one might interpret the encounter with Rachel as yet another moment of hospitality. What Jacob sees in Rachel—and which moves him to tears—is precisely, and this at the moment of the most dire exile, the promise of a welcome, of a home, and of hospitality. Interestingly, Levinas describes the feminine as the opening up of a "dwelling,"[12] that is to say, an opening up of a home, of a dwelling within the previously brutal realm of conquest to which the self belonged. In other words, the feminine is that which opens up, within the realm of the self until now entirely structured as conquest and possession, a dimension of hospitality and of welcome for which it has not striven. Levinas comments further on this hospitality on the part of the feminine calling it "a delightful lapse in being, and the source of gentleness in itself."[13] The appearance of the feminine self thus marks an interruption or a "lapse" in the categories of being, that is to say, in the laws of possessiveness and acquisition. When faced with the woman, the self finds himself before a being who, instead of presenting itself as a foe or a threat to its existence as the Hobbesian scenario would prescribe, offers it a home and a welcome, thereby momentarily interrupting its painful strivings and efforts. The dimension of the feminine thus opens up a dimension which functions according to completely different laws from those of being: a dimension of grace, of hospitality, of welcome, and of love.

As such, then, one might see in this "lapse in being" the originary moment of ethics, that is, of the opening up of a dimension beyond being, following other laws than the laws of the perseverance in being. The encounter with the woman thus constitutes an originary moment of transcendence, of a dimension beyond the economy of the self. Furthermore, the woman's welcome constitutes the original lesson in hospitality and the original experience of an other as non-allergic and non-threatening to the self. For the first time, then, the self is faced with an other to which it can *relate*. Heretofore faced with threatening others against which it had to struggle to establish himself, Jacob now finds

himself facing an other which wills him good and which welcomes him rather than seeks, or implies, its destruction. Hence, for the first time, Jacob is faced with a *human* other, that is to say, an other with whom a relationship is possible as it does not pose a threat to the self, but rather welcomes it onto itself.

It is this first and genuine experience of humanity that might be the reason behind Jacob's weeping. It is this experience of an other which does not will it evil but rather good, which does not seek its destruction but rather offers it a haven, which triggers Jacob's tears and initiates the deep ethical transformation within him. The act of generosity must then be seen, not as a spontaneous act of charity—completely out of character for Jacob—but, rather, as a response to a human welcome which constitutes for him the dawn of ethics. Thus, the encounter with Rachel marks the possibility for Jacob to recover a human world of relationships rather than remain in his solitary struggle for control and possession. The ensuing part shows, however, a Jacob again engaged in a struggle for power, as his interactions with Laban will show. A second exile will then be necessary to seal Jacob's transformation and usher him into a new beginning.

The return to the Promised Land

So Jacob was left alone,
And a man wrestled with him till daybreak.
When the man saw
That he could not overpower him,
He touched the socket of Jacob's hip
So that his hip was wrenched
As he wrestled with the man.
Then the man said,
"Let me go for it is daybreak."
But Jacob replied,
"I will not let you go
Unless you bless me." . . .
Then the man said,
"Your name will no longer be Jacob,
But Israel" . . .
So Jacob called the place Peniel . . .
The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,
And he was limping because of his hip.
Genesis 32:24–26, 28, 30–31 (NIV)

This second exile holds a number of similarities with his first exile. Like the first exile, Jacob leaves because his greed has caused him enmity among the people he was dwelling with and he finds himself under the threat of death. Both exiles, then, are caused by a certain mode of being on the part of Jacob, that of his greed and of his striving to establish himself in the land, be it the

Promised Land, or that of his exile. In both cases, the exile puts an end to his strivings and he finds himself again destitute, having lost everything he has striven for. There seems then to be a correlation between Jacob's exile and a certain mode of being which is in need of correction. The question, of course, remains as to how this exile, here his second exile, will serve to correct Jacob's penchant for greed.

Moreover, both exiles feature an encounter, first with God, then with man. In the first exile, Jacob encounters God and a place is named—Bethel—in order to commemorate this encounter. In the second exile, likewise: Jacob wrestles with an angel which he identifies with God at the end of his encounter and again a place is named—Peniel—in order to commemorate the encounter. Both encounters with God are followed by an encounter with a human. In the first exile, Jacob meets Rachel and experiences a first awakening to the dimension of ethics. In the second exile, Jacob will meet Esau and, again, find himself adopting an ethical stance centered on generosity. There is, however, a significant difference between the two exiles, marked by a seemingly insignificant detail: the first exile is ushered in by the sun setting and under the covering of darkness whereas the second exile ends with the rising sun and the dawn of a new day, thereby signifying the end of an era for Jacob and the sure beginning of a new one. We will have to wait, however, to fully understand the significance of this difference. Let us turn to the encounter at Peniel.

The encounter with the angel at Peniel is marked by a most curious occurrence: the striking on Jacob's hip. I have often wondered as to the significance of such a gesture. Indeed, why the hip? What is significant about the hip? And why does the angel strike Jacob there? Medieval Jewish commentator Nachmanides hints as to the meaning of such a gesture as follows: "They [the rabbis] said in *Bereishis Rabbah*: . . . [The angel] struck not only Jacob but all the righteous people who were destined to descend from him; that is, to the generation of forced apostasy."[14] This passage hints at a possible interpretation of the hip as signifying the genitals. The hip would then be a veiled, discrete way to speak of the seat of man's powers, of his reproductive organs. This inference is also made by Old Testament commentator Brueggemann, who sees in the striking of the hip an assault on Jacob's "vital organs. Thus, the 'limp' refers to the mark left on his very manhood."[15] Smith follows suit and also identifies the hip with the genitals.[16] The question of courses remains as to why the angel chooses such a sensitive target? Why the genitals?

This aim taken at man's vital organs is reminiscent of the rite of circumcision—already analyzed in the chapter on Abraham—and seems to contain a similar signification. We remember that the rite of circumcision signified that God was to have jurisdiction over the seat of man's powers, that is to say, that God and not man was in control of a man's destiny. In light of this meaning, it is possible to interpret, likewise, the crippling gesture on the part of the angel as setting a limit on Jacob's powers. Such a limit is particularly apropos with regards to Jacob inasmuch as the portrait we have sketched of him shows a man intent on asserting his own power, as was evident in his grasping of his

brother's heel/genitals. It is interesting here to note the echoes between the description of his birth and the fight with the angel. Both have sexual overtones and have to do with the will to power. Here, however, the Jacob we knew, the one ever trying to assert his will to power finds himself wounded precisely in the seat of these powers. But why does the angel decide to cripple him there? Why such a cruel ordeal? What is Jacob to gain from this event?

Perhaps Jacob needs this crippling moment, this interruption of his powers because it is only at this price that he will come to awaken to a dimension beyond himself, to a dimension of transcendence. Perhaps the crippling wound inflicted on Jacob is necessary to put a term to a mode of being entirely centered around the self, and for the opening up of a new horizon for Jacob. Levinas interprets this wounding of the self as a "defecting or defeat of the ego's identity"[17] which opens up onto a dimension beyond the self. One might then perhaps understand the interruption of the self's powers as ushering the possibility of God's power. As is observed by Smith, "it is only by recognizing the carnal limitations of his own procreative power that Jacob, as heir apparent to the covenantal promise, is allowed to inherit the promise in reality."[18] In other words, only upon achieving an awareness of his limitations, of his powerlessness, would Jacob come to realize that his destiny does not lie in his hands, but rather can only be given him through an act of grace, through an act of power on the part of God. Only upon being crippled in his own strength, would Jacob come to realize what constitutes his true strength: God himself!

This idea of God's strength taking the place of Jacob's strength is further emphasized in the name change undergone by Jacob. The explanation for Jacob's receiving of a new name given by the text is that "he has struggled with God and with men" as though to indicate that his struggle has somehow earned him the name "Israel." A deeper investigation of the meaning of the name reveals, however, a surprising fact: Israel means "God fights" or "God will rule."[19] Thus, the name signifies not a continuation of Jacob's struggles but, more accurately, an *interruption* of Jacob's struggles, with God struggling and fighting for him. Thus, the name "Israel" seems to signify the end of Jacob's struggles rather than setting a seal of approval upon these struggles. Moreover, this interpretation rejoins the preceding event of the fight with the angel and the crippling of Jacob.

Thus the renaming of Jacob must be read against the backdrop of his crippling fight with the angel as a game changer: no longer will Jacob fight for his destiny and for his inheritance of the Promised Land but, rather, it will be God from now on who will fight for him. No longer will Jacob be the master of his destiny, but rather it is God who from now on will grant him his inheritance and his blessing in an act of grace. The renaming of Jacob, then, signifies the radical transformation of Jacob's previously greedy and possessive mode of being. No longer will Jacob seek to strive and possess, and live a life centered on himself, but rather it is God who will fight for Jacob and have control over his destiny, thereby ushering in a mode of being for Jacob entirely centered on transcendence, on God. No longer will Jacob's stance be one of the closed

grasp of possessiveness and self-reliance, but rather the hand which had, at birth, grasped his brother's heel, can now open to receive God's providences and blessing. The renaming thus constitutes the opening up of the dimension of transcendence in Jacob's entirely self-focused life. And it is precisely this opening up of the metaphysical realm for Jacob that will renew the ethical awakening already begun with his encounter with Rachel. This time, however, the other is none other than his worst enemy: Esau.

The encounter with Esau is Jacob's last recorded encounter and, interestingly, follows right after his encounter with God. Just as the encounter with God preceded the encounter with the woman, likewise here, the encounter with God precedes the encounter with the brother. It is as though the narrative wanted to make a correlation between encountering God and encountering an other. It is as though only a self having come to an awakening to divine transcendence can genuinely encounter the human transcendence. Kierkegaard puts it nicely in his *Works of Love* when he observes that the more a man "loves the unseen, the more he will love the men he sees."[20] That is to say, only upon having awakened to metaphysics, to a dimension beyond itself, is the self capable of ethics. The awakening to God, that is, to a dimension transcending the self constitutes thus a pedagogy of otherness serving to usher in an ethical mode of being. One must first encounter the face of God before becoming aware of the face of the other. But more on the motif of the face later.

The encounter with Esau will mirror the encounter with Rebekah with regards to the generous stance adopted by Jacob. Just like Rebekah's encounter with Eliezer, Jacob's encounter with Esau is marked by an act of generosity whereby Jacob sends a section of his flocks ahead to Esau as a gift (Gen. 32:17–21). Levinas describes this generous stance as constituting the very prerequisite of the encounter with the other as follows: "To recognize the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as 'You' in a dimension of height."[21] In other words, the recognition of an other passes through an act of generosity whereby the self acknowledges that the world is not solely its own possession and also belongs to another. Only with this interruption of the self's natural instinct to possess and to master does the other become manifest in its world. The act of generosity thus constitutes the very inversion of the act of possession, thereby opening up a space in the world of the self for an other.

There is, however, a marked difference between Jacob's encounter with Rachel and this encounter with Esau. While Rachel is perceived by Jacob as a moment of hospitality whereby the self finds a home and a safe haven, Esau is perceived as lord and master, that is to say, as one who has ownership of the self and of its possessions. The other is one who in his lordship brings about a full surrender of the self to its powers. This is emphasized in our text with the act whereby Jacob bows down seven times before Esau, thereby signifying his complete submission towards his brother. This is shocking inasmuch as the Jacob we know had been characterized by exactly the opposite behavior: one of usurpation and greed with regards to his brother's position in the world.

Here we witness, however, a completely different Jacob: one who instead of grasping his brother's heel, surrenders himself completely to his lordship and power. What is, however, the significance of such a gesture?

Levinas comments further on the awakening to otherness as entailing a sense of the self's previously arbitrarily central stance in the world, and shame at its own freely exercised powers with the following words: "The welcoming of the Other is ipso facto the consciousness of my own injustice—the shame that freedom feels for itself."[22] In other words, the awakening to the dimension of the other passes through the realization that the self's previously spontaneous and innocent central stance in the world had occurred to the detriment of an other. To set the self as central is to singlehandedly situate everything else, including other subjectivities, at its periphery. To do so amounts, however, to reducing other subjects to the status of objects in the world of the self; it is to reify them, to transform them, in the Buberian terminology[23] from "thous" to "its." The self's spontaneous perseverance in being is thus intrinsically unethical and violent to other consciousnesses and, as such, needs to be rectified. Such a rectification can only occur, however, if the self acknowledges its centrality as problematic and unethical.

This is precisely the meaning of Jacob's humble and quasi ritualistic gesture of bowing before his brother: the surrendering of his arbitrary and unethical central stance in the world and the re-instating of his brother, no longer as an "it" revolving around or obstructing the self's *conatus*, but as a "thou," himself a subject and master of a world. The significance of Jacob bowing before Esau thus comes powerfully to light as a ritual which restores to his brother the prerogatives of a human "thou," and gives to Esau a human face. Esau is no longer, in the eyes of Jacob, a mere obstacle to his powers, and as such a mere "it" in Jacob's world. He is now a "thou," a human subject, with his own powers and with his own place in the world. As human subject or face, Esau remains a powerful limit to Jacob's self, but no longer as a threat, rather as containing all the possibilities of transcendence.

This renewed perspective on Esau, as a figure of transcendence rather than as a foe is highlighted in Jacob's words upon encountering Esau: "For I have seen your face which is like seeing the face of God" (Gen. 33:10). This is one of the most beautiful affirmations in the book of Genesis. Levinas comments on the face as the very locus of transcendence as follows: "The dimension of height opens forth in the human face . . . The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed."[24] In other words, the face of the other, inasmuch as it puts a limit on the self's powers, awakens it to a dimension beyond itself—to a dimension of transcendence. As such, the other constitutes the moment of awakening for the self to the realm of the Infinite. While the other does pose a threat to the self, inasmuch as it puts a limit to its heretofore arbitrary powers, its limitation does not do violence to the self but, rather, opens up before it a dimension of transcendence. The other does not then destroy the self, but rather initiates it to its more essential

destiny as a bridge towards transcendence, as intrinsically relational and connected to the Infinite.

And it is precisely this renewed understanding of the role of the other that is manifest in Jacob's words to Esau. No longer will Esau be seen as an obstacle to Jacob's apprehension or encounter with the divine but, rather, Jacob's intuition of God in the face of his brother constitutes a recognition of the central role played by the human other in the self's awakening to transcendence. No longer will Esau be a mere brute man of the fields, but by Jacob's affirmation finds himself also a man of God, a locus of transcendence. The divine image and calling is bestowed anew upon Esau, almost like a blessing on the part of Jacob. And it is this final encounter with Esau that seals Jacob's profound transformation from the usurper to the man of God who blesses rather than swindles, who welcomes the other rather than seeking to annihilate him or her.

Conclusion

We can see again, in our narrative, the transformative moment of exile. To a subjectivity entirely centered on itself and on the establishing of its powers to the detriment of the other, Jacob's first exile marks the end of the reign of his powers and a painful expulsion from the land he was to inherit. Therein lies, however, precisely the redemptive power of that first exile. For only upon experiencing the pain of de-centering and the limitation placed upon his powers, would Jacob be receptive to the realization that it is God who is his place, his inheritance, and his strength as he did in Bethel. And only upon losing everything would he be sensitive to the welcome and offering of a home on the part of the woman. The lesson of the first exile needed, however, to be strengthened by the second exile which more markedly operates a limitation of Jacob's powers, hitting now at the center of his life-force and virile strength. Only at the price of such a wounding, would Jacob genuinely reap the lessons of exile, leave behind his self-reliance and obsession with acquiring a central stance in the world, for reliance on God and the ensuing ability to welcome a human other in his world. Only then would Jacob undergo the profound transformation from the usurper to man of God, no longer intent on possessing the land but, rather, open to the grace of an inheritance of a totally different nature: an inheritance of a human world and of a divine calling to bless rather than to usurp.

Notes

1 Indeed, there is an ongoing *leitmotif* in the book of Genesis regarding the struggling fates of brothers, from Cain and Abel, to Ishmael and Isaac, to finally Joseph and his brothers. Inasmuch, however, as it is the story of Cain and Abel which sets the stage for all the ensuing sibling rivalries, it will be illuminating to read our story of sibling rivalry against this backdrop.

2 Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary Translated into English and Annotated*, vol. 1, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine and Co., 1945), Gen. 25:26, [115].

3 S.H. Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh': The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives," *Vestus Testamentum* 40, no. 4 (1990): 464.
4 Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh,'" 464–465.
5 Ibid.
6 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 11.
7 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 8.
8 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 8.
9 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 76.
10 Jacob Neusner, trans., *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation—Volume 3 Parashiyyot Sixty-Eight through One Hundred on Genesis 28:10 to 50:26*, Brown Judaic Studies 106 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Parashah Seventy, Gen. 28:20–29:30, LXX:XII, 3–5, [36].
11 "The consolation promised by the arrival of Rachel does nothing at all to fill a lack in Jacob, who, thanks to her, would finally find peace and satisfaction. She exceeds his expectations and it is precisely this excess which makes him cry." ["La consolation promise par l'arrivée de Rachel ne vient aucunement en effet combler un manque en Jacob qui, grâce à elle, trouverait enfin apaisement et satisfaction. Elle excède son attente et c'est précisément cet excès qui le fait pleurer."] Catherine Chalier, *Traité des Larmes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), 162, my translation.
12 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 156.
13 Ibid., 155.
14 Ramban, *The Torah: with Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, vol. 2., The ArtScroll Series (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), Gen. 32:26, [198].
15 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 270.
16 Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh,'" 466.
17 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 15.
18 Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh,'" 472.
19 See Allen P. Ross, "Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (October 1980): 347, 346.
20 Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 158.
21 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 75.
22 Ibid., 86.
23 See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, Simon and Schuster, 2000).
24 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78–79.

8 Levi

The priestly calling of exile

Introduction

The story of Levi and of his descendants is also marked by exile. But the story of Levi's exile is little known and not as talked about as, for example, Abraham's or Jacob's exile. The reason for this lies perhaps in the fact that his exile is mentioned only at the end of Jacob's life as a brief curse for Levi's rash actions against the citizens of Shechem; or because Levi himself was never exiled. The curse was applied to his descendants, who were condemned never to inherit their share of the Promised Land because of their father Levi's violence. The story seems to end with the curse of Jacob for Levi's act of murder and nothing more seems to come out of it.

Until much later, that is. It is only in the book of Exodus that mention is made of Levi's exile, but this time in a much more favorable context. The mention is made right after the event of the golden calf wherein the tribe of Levi stands out as the only one willing to take a stance for God. It is right after this that mention is made of Levi's exile, but this time the curse is transformed into a blessing. The Levites are to remain exiled—in this the words of Jacob stand firm—but because of a very special calling: the priestly calling to represent God before the people of Israel. As such, the Levites are then no longer to inherit among the Israelites because God himself is to be their inheritance (Deut. 10:9).

Such a reversal raises, however, a number of interesting questions. First, one wonders as to the connection between the Levitical calling and a life of exile. What is it in the function of representing God that seems to necessitate an exilic condition? What is it in the priestly calling that might explain its close association with exile? It seems odd that the priests, supposed to represent God's kingly and princely features, are to dwell among their people without inheritance, that is to say, in poverty and dependence upon others for their fare. Moreover, one would expect the representatives of God to obtain an even bigger share of the Promised Land. Instead, the Levites are to inherit nothing. This is perplexing and merits further attention.

The purpose of this chapter will be to inquire into the connections between priesthood and exilic calling. But first, this chapter will turn to the deed of murder which provoked the original oracle of exile upon the sons of Levi.

At first glance, the murder of the Shechemites by Levi and Simeon seems entirely justified in light of Shechem's actions upon Dinah, as well as in the face of possible integration and therefore assimilation of the people of God with the surrounding Canaanite nations. Such an act might be understood almost as possessing the tenets of a holy war, fought for the divine name, and with the intention to protect its bearers from disappearance. In light of this, it is difficult to understand the severity of Jacob's judgment upon his two sons. Why then such a terrible curse?

Our investigation will then turn to the reversal of the curse into a blessing upon its being redefined by God as pertaining to the priestly calling. Here questions will arise as to the connection between exile and the priestly function. Why is a life of poverty and exile the necessary prerequisite to the priestly calling? Why does God choose to be represented by the figure of poverty and dependency? What is it in the divine essence that is revealed by such a condition? A marked contrast will be observed, furthermore, between the sons of Levi and the sons of Shem, likewise embarked on a spiritual quest: that of reaching the heavens. Indeed, the Shemites represent the very opposite endeavor to the Levites inasmuch as their religious approach is centered on the establishment of strong structures of power. The Levites, on the other hand, are poor and exiled—the very opposite. The Shemites and the Levites, then, seem to sketch out two possible approaches to the religious. It is their concept of the religious which will, furthermore, inform their definition of the social contract: the former being based on sedentarization and a strong, established sense of self, the other on exile and a weak, de-centered sense of self. In this chapter, I will evaluate both approaches and propose a Hebrew concept of society that is based on exile.

Levi or the Curse of Exile

> *"Simeon and Levi are brothers—*
> *Their swords are weapons of violence.*
> *Let me not enter their council,*
> *Let me not join their assembly,*
> *For they have killed men in their anger*
> *And hamstrung oxen as they pleased.*
> *Cursed be their anger, so fierce,*
> *And their fury, so cruel!*
> *I will scatter them in Jacob*
> *And disperse them in Israel."*
>
> Genesis 49:5–7 (NIV)

The story begins with Dinah, who decided to "visit the women of the land" (Gen. 34:1) in the neighboring town, and is raped, humiliated, and kidnapped by Shechem. Upon hearing of this, however, Jacob says nothing but waits for his sons to come home from work. However, upon being told of their

sister's predicament, Dinah's immediate brothers, Simeon and Levi lose no time. They come up with a cunning plan to save their sister requiring that all males be circumcised in return for Dinah's hand, to which the Shechemites—blinded by Jacob's wealth—agree. As they are still recovering from the wound of the circumcision knife, Simeon and Levi sharpen their own knives and fall upon the Shechemites in murderous anger killing all males and liberating their sister from her sequestration.

One cannot help but feel sympathy for the two brothers. Indeed, their murderous rampage can have two justifications. First, the fact that their sister was not only seduced, or raped, but that she was humiliated, implying that she experienced the whole endeavor as profoundly degrading. This is not, therefore, a mere case of statutory rape, whereby the woman finds herself seduced into having more or less consensual sex, but a case of brutality and humiliation. Moreover, Dinah finds herself sequestered. She has no say in the matter at all. There is a marked contrast here between her situation and Rebekah's situation. Whereas Rebekah is found by Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, Dinah is seen wandering off on her own in search of her own adventures. Whereas Eliezer offers Rebekah gifts, thereby honoring her, the Shechemites are after Jacob's wealth and it is greed which propels them to encourage marriage between Dinah and Shechem, thereby lowering Dinah to the level of loot. Finally, whereas Rebekah is asked for her consent, Dinah is never consulted and her silence throughout the whole story is eloquent.

It is these dehumanizing and degrading events of which Dinah is the victim which seem to justify Simeon and Levi's rage. The actions of the Shechemites have had the effect of lowering their sister to the level of an object, of stripping her of her personhood and humanity. And for this, they deserve to die. But there is more which speaks in favor of the two brothers. Indeed, behind their sister's potential marriage to Shechem, arises the temptation of assimilation and integration with the neighboring communities. Jacob himself seems to have somewhat fallen victim to this temptation when he chides the two brothers for "making him a stench" to the neighboring towns thereby destroying any chance of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Jacob is then forced to move on to another region in order to avoid retaliation. This temptation of sedentarization and integration, would, however, resurface later and haunt the children of Israel throughout their sojourn in the Promised Land, constituting their greatest stumbling block.

In retrospect one might see the actions of Simeon and Levi as an attempt to maintain the purity of the race, the separation of the chosen people from the contamination of surrounding nations and the faithfulness to the Abrahamic pact with God to not go back to the pagan land and customs he came from. Thus, the violence of Simeon and Levi might be understood as the first instance of "holy war," and, as such, constitutes the precursor to the ensuing wars between the sons of Israel and the surrounding Canaanite peoples during their re-conquest of the land in the book of Exodus. The murderous actions of Simeon and Levi might then be understood as an attempt to preserve the

divine plan in its integrity, but, even more deeply, to preserve the holiness of the divine name among the surrounding nations. Indeed, inasmuch as the divine name borne by Dinah, as a member of the chosen people, had been desacralized by her rape and humiliation, the restoration of the divine name could only be done at the price of murder.

In light of all this, it is difficult to understand Jacob's chiding of his two sons. It is only later, when the curse against Simeon and Levi is actually uttered, that one might get a hint as to the problem behind the brothers' actions. Indeed, the curse says nothing of the righteous intentions of the two brothers but speaks only of their murderous rage, as though motive did not matter anymore where murder is concerned, as though nothing—no matter how high and noble the cause—can justify murder. Nothing, and especially not the protection of the divine name as the following Levinasian analysis of murder will show. Indeed, according to Levinas, the act of murder is especially serious inasmuch as it does not only seek the annihilation of another human being, but, more specifically, the annihilation of the dimension of otherness. "The other is the sole being that I can wish to kill."[1] Thus, for Levinas, what is targeted by the killing of a human being is this dimension of otherness which he or she carries and which, as such, poses a threat to the self. The other is the sole being that I can wish to kill precisely because this other is the only being that poses a legitimate threat to the self's previously central and solitary stance in the world. The other, qua other, is thus intrinsically threatening to the self, and as such, the only being that I can wish to kill.

Thus, what is at stake behind any act of killing, whether justified or not, is the annihilation of the dimension of otherness posed by the victim. As such, then, the act of murder constitutes a profound threat to otherness and, by extension, to any form of transcendence limiting the self. Inasmuch as otherness constitutes one of the modes of transcendence, murder thus threatens not only the human other, but the dimension of transcendence itself. What was an ethical problem thus becomes a metaphysical one. Inasmuch as otherness constitutes the very mode of manifestation of transcendence, it is not only the human other which is annihilated by murder, but divine transcendence. Levinas puts this as follows: "This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face."[2] What is destroyed along with the human other is the very dimension of the Infinite, the very possibility of transcendence, more specifically, the only locus in the realm of the self of a possible opening of that dimension. It is, then, the very possibility of God which finds itself annihilated along with the human other in the act of murder.

To kill in order to protect the divine name constitutes, therefore, a nonsensical action inasmuch as killing constitutes precisely the obliteration of the dimension of the divine opened by the human face. In the biblical *ethos*, holy war is thus a contradiction in terms. The dimension of holiness is not preserved by violence and war, but eradicated. This might explain, incidentally, why David was not allowed to build the temple. A man of war can have naught to do with the divine dwelling. A man having dedicated his life to the obliteration

of the divine image and presence through the act of war can have no part in the construction of a dwelling for that divine presence. And this certainly explains Jacob's curse upon his sons. The chosen people are responsible for the preservation of the divine name and essence in the world. This, however, can be achieved only through the protection of the human face inasmuch as it is precisely this face which constitutes the original locus of transcendence. By resorting to murder, Simeon and Levi only perpetuated the degradation of the divine name inflicted upon their sister Dinah. They did nothing to redeem the situation but, rather, sank lower than their persecutors.

Only against the backdrop of this analysis is it possible to understand the curse of exile inflicted upon the brothers. The brothers are not to inherit the land and, as such, they are condemned to disappear and merge with their brothers. Just as they annihilated others, they themselves will be annihilated and assimilated within the other tribes. Because they have desecrated the divine name by their murderous actions, they shall have no part in the destiny of the chosen people or in their inheritance. Those who killed in the name of identity, now become stripped of their own identity in the land of Israel. The curse of exile thus must be heard as an act of annihilation serving to echo their own actions of annihilation. We will have to wait for the next chapter in the lives and destiny of the sons of Levi to see the reversal of the curse of exile into a blessing. And it is to this chapter that we now turn.

The sons of Levi or the reversal of the curse

> *At that time*
> *The Lord set apart the tribe of Levi*
> *To carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord,*
> *To stand before the Lord to minister*
> *And to pronounce blessings in his name,*
> *As they still do today.*
> *That is why the Levites have no share*
> *Or inheritance among their fellow Israelites;*
> *The Lord is their inheritance.*
>
> Deuteronomy 10:8–9 (NIV)

Indeed, the story of Levi does not end there. Several generations later the tribe of Levi comes to the fore again, but this time in a completely different light. We are now at the beginnings of the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, and shortly after the revelation of God on Sinai. Moses has gone up for further instructions but has taken longer than expected to come back down. The children of Israel become impatient and ask Moses' brother Aaron to make them a visible representation of God that they might be on their journey again. He complies and the worship and reveling begins, that is until Moses comes back down and catches them in the act. His anger is such that he breaks the tablets of the law he has just received and calls out to himself whoever is

still willing to take a stance for God against idolatry. The tribe of Levi is the only one to rise up and stand by Moses.

This rare and unexpected act of fidelity is thereupon praised by commentators of the book of Exodus as the reason behind God's calling the Levites to his service. Commenting on the priestly calling bestowed upon the Levites in Deuteronomy 10:8, Rashi explains:

> At that time accordingly means: In the first year of the Exodus from Egypt when ye sinned by *worshipping* the *golden* calf, but the sons of Levi did not *thus* sin,—*at that time* God separated them from you. . . . the sons of Levi did not sin, but stood steadfast in their faith.[3]

Interestingly, however, the oracle of exile is not revoked, rather transformed. The Levites are to remain, as Jacob predicted, exiles within the Promised Land, but in a way that would remain profoundly connected to their priestly calling. Their exile is no longer a curse, but the sign of their election. They are not to inherit the land because "[t]he Lord is their inheritance" (Deut. 10:9). There is, then, a strong connection between the priestly calling of the Levites and their exilic condition.

The question that arises, however, concerns this uncanny connection between the priestly calling and exile. Indeed, if the priest is to represent God on earth, one wonders how the condition of exile, and the ensuing poverty that arises from it, could possibly serve to represent God? Should not the priest be given a royal and kingly role, one that would best represent the King of the universe? Why this exile? Why this poverty? How might the exiled and impoverished Levite come to represent the Most High? Moreover, one would expect the Levites, as the priestly caste, to inherit a double portion of the Promised Land. Instead, they are to inherit nothing and to live in complete dependence among their brothers in a condition of perpetual destitution. It is a strange condition that is here ascribed to the priestly caste of the chosen people.

To better understand the connection between exile and the priesthood of ancient Israel, one would do well to first understand what was to be the role of the priest. As mentioned before, the priest was to function as a bridge between heaven and earth, as a representative of God's holiness, purity, and royalty. André Neher speaks of the Levites as the physical embodiment of the covenant between God and his people, as the perpetual intermediaries between the sacred and the profane.[4] The question remains to be elucidated however as to how the exilic condition could speak to the divine essence. How does the condition of exile and its consequential poverty properly represent God's nature to the children of Israel?

The analyses of Levinas are particularly illuminating. Speaking of the divine essence, or of the Infinite, Levinas describes it as an "inassimilable alterity, a difference and ab-solute past with respect to everything that is shown, signaled, symbolized, announced, remembered, and thereby 'contemporized' with him who understands."[5] In other words, what makes for the specificity of the divine

essence is the fact that it escapes our understanding, our conceptions, and the world that we are susceptible to constitute around us. Levinas speaks of the divine essence as necessarily transcending being, that is to say, that world that the understanding has constituted. The divine essence, thus, never appears as "phenomena," that is, as a visible and intelligible object among the objects of the world, but rather as "enigma:" "The enigma is the way of the Ab-solute, foreign to cognition."[6]

Thus, what makes for the divine essence is its character of ever transcending being, ever beyond and otherwise than being. The mode of manifestation of the divine is to show itself within being but as a perpetual absence from being, as ever distinct from being. Is this not, however, precisely the calling of the Levites? That of dwelling within the land of the Israel, but as perpetual sojourners, as perpetual strangers, that is, as never really a part of, never really present and enrooted in that land. And as such, is not the exilic calling of the Levites precisely the perpetual reminder of that otherwise than being which constitutes the legitimate dwelling of the Most High? Far from being a curse, the exilic condition, this ontic and ontological separation from being, becomes the very sign, the very testimony, of a beyond being, of an otherwise than being and as such, points to the dimension of the divine essence which itself is ever beyond being.

Levinas puts it beautifully as follows: "There must be someone who is no longer agglutinated in being, who, at his own risk, responds to the enigma and grasps the allusion. Such is the subjectivity, alone, unique, secret."[7] According to Levinas, only a being which is not riveted to being, not "agglutinated in being," that is to say, who is not tied to the adventure of being but has awakened to a dimension beyond being, can perceive the enigma, or the divine essence. As such, the Levites, inasmuch as their exile releases them from a preoccupation with being, with material concerns and perplexities, are much more attuned to the dimension of an otherwise than being, to the dimension of the enigma. Thus, the exilic condition, far from being a curse, is here explicated as a condition susceptible of developing a sense for transcendence, for an otherwise than being. As such, exile becomes the condition par excellence of the spiritual journey, the very prerequisite for an awakening or sensitivity to the dimension of transcendence.

André Neher comments further on this ontological exile of the Levite. The Levite's exilic stance is interesting, according to Neher, inasmuch as it testifies to a temporal reality beyond space.[8] The Levitical detachment and expulsion from the realm of space through the denial of property opens up, in turn, the dimension of time—that is to say, of a dimension that does not pertain to the spatial or the material. Through his refusal of the temptations pertaining to the domain of space, the Levite opens up the possibility of a spiritual dimension and calling beyond that of material possessions. The Levite testifies thereby that there is more to the human condition than the possession of space. The human destiny must also elevate itself to a mode of being, which has naught to do with conquest of space and the perseverance of being, thereby opening

the possibility of an otherwise than being. This temporal dimension opened up by the Levite would, in turn, constitute the very locus of the encounter with the divine as testified by the unique temporal forms of worship adopted by the Hebrews. The worship of the Hebrews would indeed come to sanctify time—through the adoption of various holidays in time—rather than space. For the Hebrews, sacred time rather than sacred space would become the privileged locus of encounter with the divine.

Levinas comments further on this freedom experienced by the Levite—and by extension by Judaism—from the sedentary forms of existence:

> [F]ree with regard to landscapes and architecture, all those heavy and sedentary things that one is tempted to prefer to man—Judaism recalls, in the course of its whole history that it is rooted in the countryside or in the town. The festival of "the cabins" is the liturgical form of this memory and the prophet Zechariah announces, for the messianic age, the festival of cabins as though it were a festival of all the nations. Freedom with regard to the sedentary forms of existence is, perhaps, the human way to be in this world.[9]

In other words, the freedom from space, inasmuch as it testifies to a calling beyond that of the material constitutes, for Levinas, the only legitimate human stance in the world. Indeed, only a stance which is not attached to possession and conquest, and as such, to its own establishment in the world, can in turn be awakened to a dimension beyond its own interests. Only a subjectivity which is not preoccupied with its own survival and perseverance in being can, in turn, be concerned with issues transcending its own interests, and as such to the very dimension of the transcendence wherein God might be found. There is then a close connection between exile and metaphysics. And it is precisely such a subjectivity, awakened and attuned to transcendence, which constitutes for Levinas "the human way to be in this world."[10] The Levites are then called to exemplify this "human way" for the Hebrews and to keep alive this preoccupation for an otherwise than being which constitutes precisely the true calling of humanity.

But beyond the metaphysical role described above, the Levites' exile also had an ethical connotation. In other words, their exile, and the ensuing poverty that this exile brought about has an ethical significance. André Neher speaks to that effect of two pillars which constitute the basis of the Hebrew society and which find themselves embodied in the Levite's condition: exile and legislation.[11] The Levites are to be exiled, but not in an aimless sort of way. Rather, their exile has to do with their function as teachers of the law. This connection between the calling to teach the divine law and exile is interesting and not incidental. Indeed, we are here reminded of the Psalmist's words, "I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me" (Ps. 119:19). The Hebrew Bible makes a direct correlation between the condition of exile and the sensitivity to the commands of the divine law, that is to say, to their ethical injunction.

But one does not as yet fully understand how exile is bound to legislation. Indeed, classical political theorists date the emergence of legislation, or of the social contract, to the act of sedentarization on the part of societies having chosen to move beyond the nomadic hunting and gathering stage, and its more loosely binding laws. Inasmuch as the act of sedentarization brought about simultaneously closer proximity and coexistence, more stringent laws were deemed necessary. This law, moreover, has to do with the protection of the self, of its rights, and of its property. Classical social contract theories, then, seem to assimilate legislation with ownership of property. Legislation is here to protect the individual's claims on the land and its property.[12] It is interesting to see how the Hebrew context, far to the contrary, connects legislation to the lack of property, to exile. While classical social contract theories rest on sedentarization and the need to protect property, the Hebrew social contract rests on exile and nomadism. This is an interesting difference, which is laden with significance. But we have yet to understand what this connection means.

Here, again, Levinasian analyses are particularly helpful. Speaking of the endurance of the nomadic spirit in Hebrew society, as embodied by the Levitical condition of exile, Levinas explains:

> We read in Psalm 119[:19], "I am a stranger on the earth; do not hide your commandments from me." . . . This has nothing to do with the strangeness of the eternal soul exiled amidst passing shadows . . . [b]ecause as in Psalm 119, which calls for commandments, this difference between the ego and the world is extended by obligations toward others. Echo of the permanent *saying* of the Bible: The condition—or incondition—of strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt brings man closer to his fellow man. Men seek one another in their incondition of strangers. No one is at home. The memory of that servitude assembles humanity.[13]

In other words, the condition of exile, and more specifically, of poverty and need, is here described as containing the deep ethical significance of binding people together. But this has yet to be clarified. What is it in the condition of exile that is so binding?

The key to understanding this is the word "incondition."[14] In other words, what Levinas is implying is that in order to develop sensitivity to the other, one has to undergo a loss of condition, that is to say, a loss of ground, or of identity. Levinas makes this clear in the following statement: "the humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for others, an extreme vulnerability. . . . Without repose in self, without a solid base in the world, in that strangeness to all places, on the other side of being, beyond being."[15] In other words, only a subjectivity which has come to a point of extreme vulnerability, that is to say, that finds itself exposed without protection or without strong foundations, can genuinely relate to an other. To put it differently, only a subjectivity which has somehow lost its place in the world, its central and strong stance in the world, which finds itself de-centered, can find room in its

existence for another. Indeed, only a subjectivity which has undergone such a contraction and de-centering of itself can make a place for another, and is as such capable of an act of welcoming.

A strong, established and central subjectivity, on the other hand, has no concept of the other. A subjectivity centered on establishing itself in the world and possessing it can only see others as foes and enemies, as is evident in the Hobbesian account of the social contract.[16] Thus, a society entirely centered on possession and on the protection of possessions will always have to reckon with otherness as a foe or as a plague. To found society on exile, however, sets a wholly different tone to the social contract. Such a society has come to terms that the social bond is founded on a welcoming of the other, through the de-centering of the self, rather than through the establishment of the self in the face of potentially dangerous others. The Levitical condition thus constitutes the very foundations of a society founded on the values of hospitality rather than on the values of possession.

Moreover, in their perpetual state of poverty, the Levites enable the constant renewal of the founding act of hospitality inasmuch as they depend on the generosity of others for their fare. In providing for the Levites in their poverty, the Hebrews were thus enabled to constantly remember the true foundation of the social contract as an original act of welcoming. André Neher puts it judiciously when he observes that the Levites are the embodiment of the covenantal relationship.[17] They are the embodiment, the perpetual reminder, of the founding act of the social contract: that of a welcoming of the other. By extension, the lower strata of society, the poor and the disinherited would come to benefit from the special respect given to the Levitical destitution. The welcoming of the Levites is extended to the poor and destitute classes of society. Thus, the act of tending to the poor is given the special dignity of constituting the memory of the founding moment of the social contract and, as such, becomes the very guarantee of social cohesion of the Hebrew society. Rather than a nuisance to be done away with, the poor became the memory of the condition or "incondition" of slavery essential to the constitution of a genuinely human society.

The Levites: from tribalism to universalism

> *We will enter into an agreement with you*
> *On one condition only:*
> *That you become like us.*
>
> Genesis 34:15 (NIV)

At this point, one might observe a complete reversal of the actions of Levi. Profoundly nationalistic and identitarian, the actions of Levi speak to a tribal God and religion whose purity is jeopardized by the other. Deeply committed to the preservation of the integrity and purity of the tribe, Levi's actions testify, furthermore, to a conception of the social which rests on the exclusion

of otherness from its midst. The Levitical condition and calling constitute a complete reversal of both positions. From a conception of the divine as deeply allergic to otherness, we move with the Levites to a conception of God as profoundly relative to the welcoming of otherness. From a God seemingly eager for revenge and willing partner of the holy war led by Levi and Simeon, we now must come to terms with a God "'remaining with the contrite and humble' . . . on the margin, a 'persecuted truth,' . . . not only a religious 'consolation' but the original form of 'transcendence.'"[18] In other words, the divine essence is not manifest in violent acts against the human other but, rather, through the welcoming of that otherness, of the stranger and of the marginalized who, in their exile, testify precisely to an otherwise than being.

The purity of the tribe, then, is no longer the guarantee of God's presence. Rather, the divine presence hangs upon and is relative to the capacity of the tribe to welcome otherness within its midst. Indeed, only a community capable of such a welcome will show itself capable of welcoming the ultimate Other, God. Only a community which shows itself capable of opening up to a dimension beyond itself, to an otherwise than being, as embodied by the stranger and the exiled within its midst, is capable of welcoming the ultimate Other, that of the divine essence. Only a community capable of jeopardizing its "synchronism" and of welcoming "dissidence" through its welcoming of the stranger, is worthy of the presence of the Most High God.

Thus, ethics is the royal road to God and not the elaboration of a metaphysics of purity. God is not to be found in the triumph of identity but, rather, in the opening up of a space for the Other, where the other is received and welcomed as such without having to assimilate or integrate. The God manifested by the Levitical condition is not the tribal God of Levi and of Simeon, but rather the God of the other, the stranger, and the exiled. Thus, as Levinas observes:

> One follows the Most High God, above all by drawing near to one's fellow man, and showing concern for the "widow, the orphan, the stranger and the beggar," an approach that must not be made "with empty hands." It is therefore on earth, amongst men, that the spirit's adventure unfolds.[19]

But beyond the spiritual connotation of this ethical welcome, lies also a wholly different conception of the social.

Indeed, against Levi's conception of society as founded on identitarian strength and integrity, the Levites make for a wholly new conception of the social contract. What one learns from the Levites is that genuine fraternity and social cohesion begins with love for the stranger. In a gesture reminiscent of Kierkegaard's invocation to love the far so that one might better love the near,[20] the Levites allow for the true structure of interpersonal relationships to come to the fore. True fraternity does not lie in like attracting like but, rather, in the difficult and challenging forging of a bond between like and unlike, between the Same and the Other. Levinas puts it as follows: "peace cannot

mean the serene tranquillity of the identical."[21] In other words, genuine peace does not arise from a community which has undergone homogenization and in which the other has been completely assimilated.

On the contrary, genuine peace and community can only arise when the other is respected and welcomed as such without further attempts at integration or assimilation. The peace that emerges from this welcoming gesture is thus a "peace different than the simple unity of the diverse into a synthesis integrating them."[22] Rather, the peace we are talking about here entails a "relation with the other in his logically indiscernible alterity, in his alterity irreducible to the logical identity of an ultimate difference added to a genus."[23] In other words, there can be no true community without an acknowledgment of the other with which one is forming that community. Genuine community implies that the Same is engaged with an Other and not solely with the Same. And it is precisely this perpetual other that the Levites are called to embody in the land of Israel. For only a society which can protect within its borders the sacred sense of the other is capable of genuine metaphysics and of genuine ethics. Only a society which has awakened to the sacred dimension of the other is capable of welcoming the ultimate other. And, by extension, only a society which is capable of welcoming that other is capable of genuine fraternity.

Thus, the exilic destiny of the Levite is associated first and foremost with a spiritual calling. In the midst of the land of Israel, the Levites are to testify to an order beyond the national borders of Israel, to a kingdom which is not of this world. Through their exile, the Levites are to guard the memory of a dimension which can never be reduced to national identity, to a spiritual dimension beyond the material and territorial realities. The role of the Levite was thus to teach that there exist values higher than those of national honor, national solidarity or patriotism: spiritual values which are universal and exhort to love not only one's own brother but the "alien" and the "stranger," to not only respect the one who belongs to one's nation, but also the outcast and the marginalized. Himself an "alien" in the land of Israel, the Levite is the best spokesperson for those values. Marked in his very flesh by the curse of exile, the Levite serves as a living memory of the necessity to remember the outcast and the stranger. For only then would the newly formed nation of Israel remember that beyond its calling to cultivate the land and strengthen its borders, there existed a more lofty and spiritual calling: that of welcoming within that very materiality, the spiritual dimension of otherness—be it that of the stranger or of God himself—within that land.

Thus, one can observe a complete transformation of the destiny of the once xenophobic and nationalistic tribe of Levi. Once the ones to kill the other in the name of national solidarity and honor, they become the ones who teach the nation of Israel the precedence of the stranger's life over national honor and identity. Once the proponents of national solidarity, they become, through their exile, the witnesses to a higher and more universal human solidarity. And it is precisely through the curse, or blessing, of exile that the Levite finds this new orientation. It is as though his exile has broadened his horizon to

include not only fraternal and patriotic values, but also a higher, more universal human solidarity. It is the experience of exile which brings the Levite to the heightened awareness of the spiritual dimension of the other over and against the strictly material preoccupation with the same—with nationalistic or tribal concerns. Such is the calling of the exiled: the awakening to values beyond that of fraternity and patriotism.

Conclusion: the sons of Levi and the sons of Shem

In conclusion, it is possible to observe a number of marked parallels and contrasts between the sons of Levi and the sons of Shem. Both lines are given a religious calling. The builders of the tower of Babel are the sons of Shem, that is, of the chosen son, the one who was to carry the line of the chosen people. The sons of Levi, likewise, are given a religious calling. There exists, however, a marked difference between the two religious callings. The first—that of the sons of Shem—features a central and masterful self described as striving for the divine in the Babelian endeavor of reaching the heavens. This central self constitutes itself furthermore to the detriment of the dimension of otherness, inasmuch as its project excludes any dissent or heterogeneity. The category of the religious must, here, be understood as a closed and rigid entity excluding all genuine transcendence and therefore ultimately failing in its desire to reach God. In contrast with the sons of Shem, the sons of Levi feature a de-centered, exilic and destitute subjectivity. Such a subjectivity is, furthermore, not depicted as striving for the divine, but rather as called forth from the other tribes by God and given the priestly calling. The de-centered and exilic character of the sons of Levi constitutes, moreover, the very embodiment within the people of Israel of the category of the stranger or of the other. The Levites are called to remind the Israelites of the other in their midst, and, as such, constitute the only true witnesses to the divine Other. The curse of exile finds itself turned upon itself into a blessing as the very testimony to transcendence and, as such, of genuine spirituality and community.

Notes

1 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 198.
2 Ibid., 199.
3 Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary Translated into English and Annotated*, vol. 2, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine and Co., 1945), Deut. 10:8, [54].
4 "Le lévitisme est l'incarnation sociale de l'alliance . . . intermédiaires perpétuels entre le sacré et le profane." ["Levitism is the social incarnation of the covenant . . . perpetual intermediaries between the sacred and the profane."] André Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), 169, my translation.
5 Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 75.
6 Ibid., 75.

7 Ibid., 76.
8 "Le nomadisme hébreu est, dans son essence, le refus d'une valorisation de l'espace . . . le refus de valoriser l'espace appelle une dimension historique du temps . . . le nomadisme refusant les tentations de l'espace, aère la collectivité par le souffle large d'une histoire. Par le nomadisme, la vie sociale chez les hébreux n'était pas une collection de faits spatialement juxtaposés mais l'organe d'un faire." ["Hebrew nomadism is, in its essence, the refusal of a valorization of space . . . the refusal to valorize space calls for a historical dimension of time . . . nomadism, by refusing the temptations of space, airs out the collectivity with the large breath of a history. Through nomadism, the social life for the Hebrews was not a collection of spatially juxtaposed facts but the organ of a doing."] Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme*, 154, my translation.
9 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 22–23.
10 Ibid., 23.
11 "L'exode et la servitude sont les piliers de l'une des traditions hébraïque les plus fortement historique et, en dehors de tout rite, ils ont fondé deux soucis concrets et permanents de la société hébraïque, et cela dès les temps les plus reculés: la législation sociale et le nomadisme." ["The Exodus and servitude are the pillars of one of the Hebraic traditions that is very much historical, and, outside of any rite, they have founded two concrete and permanent concerns of Hebraic society, and that from most distant times on: social legislation and nomadism."] Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme*, 147, my translation.
12 See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Classics, 1982).
13 Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 66.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 67.
16 See Hobbes, *Leviathan*.
17 "Le lévitisme est l'incarnation sociale de l'alliance." ["Levitism is the social incarnation of the covenant."] Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme*, 169.
18 Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 71.
19 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 26.
20 Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 158.
21 Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 136.
22 Ibid., 138.
23 Ibid.

Conclusion

As I am writing this conclusion, the leaves are turning shades of gold, red, and orange—Fall is coming to New York City. In the Jewish neighborhood next to which I live, the festival of Sukkot is beginning, the Feast of Booths, where Jews are commanded to build booths, or huts, and live in them for seven days in commemoration of their time of exile in the desert before entering the Promised Land. In the evening, as I walk in that neighborhood, singing can be heard coming from inside the booths where families are gathered around a meal under the stars. For seven days and nights, families will experience all over again the precariousness of desert nomadism. The taste of exile will be mingled with that of the seven fruits of the land, the land flowing with milk and honey that God promised their ancestors when they were still struggling in the desert.

Interestingly, this was the first holiday that God commanded the Israelites to keep upon their arrival into the Promised Land. The first harvest of the fruit of the land, the first signs of their having found a home, was to be celebrated in this way, as a commemoration of exile. One wonders why the homecoming of the Israelites was to remain indelibly marked by exile. Why were the Israelites summoned out of their prosperity every year, precisely around harvest time, to a celebration of exile? Why this memorial of exile and destitution within the very time of harvest, of homecoming and of prosperity? Perhaps so that they might never lose the humanity that they acquired within that exile. That they might remember, even in the midst of their prosperity, that, as human beings, one remains ever vulnerable, fragile, and incomplete and that this is precisely the mark of our humanity; that it is our weakness and not our strength that makes us human, that awakens in us a need for the other, for relationship, and for compassion. That it is our weakness which ignites in us the desire for ethics; not our strength which entrenches us rather in the glorious and proud stance of self-reliance reminiscent of Babel and its arrogant quest for a name of its own. That we remain ever in exile in this world, fragile, precarious, and vulnerable and that it is precisely this exile which inspires in us a passion for ethics, for relationship, for companionship.

Yet, is not the sacred memory of this deep and profound exile which constitutes the very texture of our humanity over and over again forfeited for a false sense of security, of enrootedness in a given place? And does not this

quest for personal security and enrootedness ultimately lead to a loss of our own humanity, to an eroding of the precious ties that the condition of exile had forced us to weave between each other? Such, indeed, is what the biblical text has been attempting to reveal to us: that to be human is to be exiled in the world, is to be fragile, vulnerable, and that the desperate and solitary quest for security will never lead to a genuine home until that exile has been embraced and the other welcomed at the heart of the self. The human condition of exile and our inherent vulnerability to pain and tragedy can never be overcome. But we can allow it to transform us at the core, to make us more human, more able to love and to feel compassion for each other. Such were the journeys of the men and women that we encountered in the book of Genesis. All of them struggled with the desire to overcome their exile. All of them longed to forfeit the deep sense of exile that they felt at the core of their being for that "place in the sun." Such was the impulse behind Eve's longing for absolute control. Such was the motivation behind Adam's cowardice, Cain's murder, Babel's arrogant quest for material and economic self-reliance, Abraham's desire for a progeny, Rebekah's attempt to control the future, and finally, the sons of Shems' national pride.

But this desire for security, this attempt to overcome, repress, bury their ontological exile through power, wealth, and family, all led to a loss of their own humanity. In her quest for absolute power, Eve forfeited the treasures of love and wisdom she might have found in her relationship with the man that she was made for. In his acquiescence of materiality, Adam forfeited his own masculinity vis-à-vis his wife. By killing his brother, Cain never tasted the warmth of community; the Babelians never experienced the richness of human diversity in their obsession for economic and political stability; Abraham became so engrossed in his own progeny that he forgot that his blessing was meant to be released and shared with the world; Rebekah sacrificed one of the most loving relationships between a husband and his wife ever described in the Pentateuch for the sake of her son's material success; Jacob led a wretched and solitary life until he realized his own ontological exile and wound; and the sons of Shem forfeited their destiny to take part in the divine calling to be a blessing to the nations in their national pride and arrogance.

And so it is with us. Our times are marked by the refusal of exile. We cannot stand the idea of our intrinsic weakness and vulnerability. And so we build empires for ourselves, often at the price of our relationships. We strive for and celebrate self-reliance and material success, oblivious to what we sacrifice in the process. We encourage, sometimes demand, hard work even if it comes to the cost of our families. We despise the immigrant and the poor, not realizing that to bind our destinies to theirs would amount to unearthing our very souls. Instead, we do everything to forget that we are clay and easily broken and strive instead to become hard, to become invincible, like the concrete and steel that already permeate our daily lives. But we do not measure anymore how much of our humanity we have lost and will lose in the process. In our solitary quest for security are we not forfeiting the joy that might ensue from

what Irigaray has called a "shared world"? In our quest for our place in the sun are we not forfeiting the warmth and comfort of a human home in this world? Perhaps the time has come to recognize that we are all exiled, that none of us belong here, that none of us own the land and that we are all made of the same clay, inhabited by the same fear of death, wounded by the same pain, broken by the same tragedies; and that no true home, no true comfort, no true joy can be found in this world until we have learned to discover "man before discovering landscapes and towns" and to be "at home in a society before being so in a house."[1]

Note

1 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 22.

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Note: The following abbreviation has been used – *n* = note

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