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Emmanuel Levinas

A Philosophy of Exile

Abi Doukhan

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Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

The following references for the writings of Emmanuel Levinas are given in the text according to the following table of abbreviations:

BV	*Beyond the Verse*
DF	*Difficult Freedom*
EE	*Existence and Existents*
EP	"Enigma and Phenomena," in *Basic Philosophical Writings,* pp. 65–79.
GP	"God and Philosophy," in *Basic Philosophical Writings,* pp. 129–49.
HA	"Humanism and Anarchy," in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* pp. 127–41.
HO	*Humanism of the Other*
LP	"Language and Proximity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* pp. 109–27.
MB	"On Maurice Blanchot," in *Proper Names,* pp. 127–56.
MS	"Meaning and Sense," in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* pp. 75–109.
NI	"No Identity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* pp. 141–53.
OB	*Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence*
OS	*Outside the Subject*
PH	*Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*
PI	"Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers,* pp. 47–61.
PN	*Proper Names*
RR	"The Ruin of Representation," in *Discovering Existence with Husserl,* pp. 111–22.
RS	"Reality and its Shadow," in *The Levinas Reader,* pp. 129–44.
TI	*Totality and Infinity*
TN	*In the Time of the Nations*

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Introduction: The Problem of Exile

Our era is profoundly marked by the phenomenon of exile. While the problem of exile has been observed in the past, the scale to which it is manifested in our contemporary world makes it a unique phenomenon in the history of the Western world.[1] Indeed, the condition of exile, in the past relegated to the oppressed or to the poor, has now become a universal condition. There is not a nation which has not contributed to the flux of exiles in our contemporary world. There is not a nation which, at some point, has not had to welcome a flow of immigrants. In both cases, exile is seen as a problem, as the result or as the cause of various sociopolitical malfunctions. In the former case, exile is seen as the disastrous consequence of conflict or economic deprivation. In the latter, exile can be seen as a threat to the social and political status quo, as a disturbance of the peace. The exiled always carries with him the shadow of a past threat or of a potential threat to the country which welcomes him.

As a result, one can observe an equally universal phenomenon of xenophobia toward the exiled.[2] The exiled is always suspect. We do not know where he comes from. We do not know where he is going. The exiled among us strangely resembles the criminal fugitive of bygone days. Significantly, in the history of the Western world, the exiled has always carried with him an aura of criminality, of a dark and inscrutable past.[3] And indeed, the exiled with her completely different worldview and way of life seems to pose a threat to the very cohesion of society. A society whose cohesion has hereto been based on a common ethnicity or worldview, will see the intrusion of the stranger as a threat to its survival.[4] Such a society sees its very end inscribed in the presence of the exiled within its walls and will do anything to expulse this life-threatening element. It is this negative connotation of exile, as well as the social and political problems associated with it, which has given rise to the profound distrust of the exiled among us.

This contemporary political and social crisis brought about by the exiled—unprecedented in the Western world—makes it necessary to ponder anew the problem of exile. Because of the irreversibility of the phenomenon of exile and the increasing suffering and injustice associated with the xenophobic reaction

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to it, it has become increasingly urgent to rethink the concept of exile and our stance toward it. This renewed reflection on the problem of exile brings to the fore a number of interrogations as to a necessarily negative connotation of exile. Indeed, is there not another way to understand this exilic condition? Can one not shed a different light on the condition of exile, a more positive light? Is there not a contribution of the exiled to the societies it finds itself expulsed into? Is there not a wealth, a wisdom, to be gained from the experience of exile? Such a novel reinterpretation of exile is offered by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. For him, the experience of exile is one that holds both redemptive and ethical implications. Far from being a factor of the disintegration of the social fabric, as it is thought by the Western world, Levinas will argue that exile constitutes the very glue of the social rapport. The experience of exile, is, according to Levinas, what allows a deep and genuine encounter with others and, as such, consolidates rather than disintegrates the social bond.

Such a conception of exile is, incidentally, in line with that of Jewish thought. Indeed, the history of the Jews is one of perpetual exile and has given rise, as a result, to an ever-deepening reflection on the experience of exile. In Jewish thought, exile has evolved from a negative condition, marked by the curse of God's punishment,[5] to an experience pregnant with redemptive and ethical possibilities.[6] Far from being reduced to its punitive function, exile has come to be understood in diaspora literature as redemptive, as that which allows for the turning of a wayward heart back to God and to one's fellow human beings. Far from constituting a threat to society, the memory of exile serves, in the Jewish tradition, to sensitize one again to the plight of the stranger and of the alien, hence ensuring their protection within the Hebrew nation.[7] There are thus ethical implications hidden in the condition of exile and it is precisely these that Levinas, in line with the Hebrew understanding of exile, will explore in his work.

However, the relationship between exile and ethics remains to be thought. While the connection between exile and ethics is simply stated in the Hebrew scriptures,[8] it is never explained. But what is this connection? It is difficult to understand how the condition of the exiled, himself completely cut off from his roots and his community of origin, could ever contribute to ethics. The exiled seems on the contrary to testify to the very disintegration of that bond. It is, nevertheless, precisely such a connection between exile and ethics that Levinas will explore in his philosophy. Drawing from his own experience of exile as well as from the Hebrew tradition and understanding of exile, Levinas will, for the first time, confront this tradition of exile with Western thought's negative conceptualizations of exile. He comes up with what we will show to be

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a comprehensive philosophy of exile. This study of the dimensions of exile in the philosophy of Levinas shall prove profoundly topical and relevant in that it will allow for a reframing of the concept of exile in a more positive light and enable a new perspective to emerge on the present problem of exile undergone by our societies. The purpose of our work will be to shed light on the dimensions of exile in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in order to show the connection between exile and ethics versus the present conception of exile as posing a threat or a danger to the cohesion of society and to its ethos.

This brings us to the main thesis of this book: that Levinas' philosophy can be understood as a comprehensive philosophy of exile. If exile has been perceived by commentators as a central feature of Levinas' biography,[9] style,[10] and vocabulary,[11] we will show that it is his philosophy which most reflects this centrality. The purpose of our project will be to the argue that the place of exile exceeds the mere preoccupation of our philosopher with ethics and can be understood as a central concept permeating the totality of his work, from his discussion of the political, the erotic, the epistemological, the aesthetic, and the metaphysical. Indeed, inasmuch as, for Levinas, ethics is a transcendental concept, every other investigation must rest upon the analyses conducted around ethics. If it can be shown that exile plays a central role in this conception of ethics as first philosophy, can we then not think of the concept of exile as a guiding thread in the elucidation of other parts of Levinassian philosophy, tying it not only to the ethical, but also to his discussion of politics, love, knowledge, art, and spirituality? This is what our work will set out to investigate: can exile be read as a central and pivotal concept not only in Levinas' ethics but in the entirety of his philosophy?

Before reading exile as a central concept in the philosophy of Levinas, something must be said as to the centrality of the experience of exile in the life of our philosopher. A preliminary chapter will be necessary in order to understand how Levinas' biographical experience and Jewish background have informed his thoughts on exile. It can be argued that Levinas' philosophy is not a purely abstract reflection, but emerges above all from a life in exile as well as from Levinas' contact with a millennial tradition of exile: the Jewish tradition. Our first chapter will then attempt to understand the "Sitz im Leben" of Levinas' philosophy of exile by delving into moments of exile in Levinas' life susceptible of having influenced his thinking on exile. We shall examine the elements within the Jewish tradition behind many of Levinas' intuitions on exile. Both moments will give way to a positive understanding of exile as intrinsically connected with the question of ethics. However, before directly addressing the nature of this

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connection, we shall have to define what exile and ethics have come to mean for Levinas and how their specific signification differs from their traditional uses by philosophers and nonphilosophers alike.

Our second chapter will address directly the connection between exile and the very heart of Levinas' philosophy: ethics. This connection between exile and ethics seems, at first glance, uncanny. Indeed, ethics has been associated in the Western world with a set of common principles, with a shared worldview resulting in a common way of doing things, with an *ethos* of a society based on commonalities. In such a context, the exiled can only be seen as disruptive and as posing a threat precisely to the *ethos*, hence to the very foundations of an ethical society. How then can exile be associated with ethics? We shall show that for Levinas, it is precisely this disruptive intrusion of the exiled in a given society or world that constitutes the original moment of an awakening to the ethical dimension. Before there can be any talk of a set of common principles monitoring our behavior with others, the very dimension of otherness must be opened. We shall see that this dimension can only emerge from an encounter with a genuine otherness, an otherness which does not fit within our world and which explodes all of our categories, an otherness understood as *ex*-ilic—as always outside of our world. The encounter between subjectivity and the exiled other thus constitutes, according to Levinas, the original ethical moment and encounter with otherness from which will be derived common principles and shared worldviews serving to preserve and protect that newly found other.

The ethical implications of exile will serve in our third chapter to shed light on the origins of society. This chapter will try to establish a connection between exile and society. Again, we shall encounter a similar problem as when we studied the concept of ethics in our second chapter. Inasmuch as a society is defined along the Hobbesian line as a community assembled by a common objective—be it that of protecting one's possessions or of building a better world together—the exiled will always be seen as a threat to the very cohesiveness of that society. The exiled is precisely the one who does not fit within a given paradigm, who does not partake in the common objective, who thinks, acts, lives differently and according to another order. Moreover, the exiled in his destitution, always presents a threat to my possessions. The exiled strikes a false note in the harmonic whole of society, thus weakening the social bond rather than strengthening it. Why then does Levinas juxtapose the two? We shall show that, far from compromising the social bond, the condition of exile is at the very origin of that bond. Contrarily to Hobbes who bases the social bond on enmity and war, Levinas will found the social bond on a discovery of the world as a shared entity. This discovery is,

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however, possible only upon encountering a human being capable of putting my possessive grasp on the world into question and broadening my world into the shared world which constitutes the very basis of society.

Our fourth chapter leads us from the public square to the more intimate realm of love. Again, it is possible to establish a connection between love and exile in the philosophy of Levinas. Once more, we are struck with the uncanniness of this association. Ever since Plato, love has been understood not as an exile, but as a coming home, as a return to an original wholeness. The beloved is for the most part not an exiled other, but the long-lost soul mate, a companion, a familiar "you" in the Buberian sense. The connection between love and exile is thus again disconcerting. Although Levinas returns several times to the Platonic conception of love, he also opposes it. The beloved, for Levinas, is much more than a long-lost soul mate, she is also a stranger in our world and the intensity of the erotic desire rests precisely on this strangeness, on this perpetual exile of the other from our own world. If the beloved receives the lover in an act of hospitality, she is also the one who escapes his grasp and his attempts at possession, remaining forever "virginal," forever out of his reach, and as such, in exile. Such is, according to Levinas, the ambiguity of love and the very structure of erotic desire.

From love we move, in our fifth chapter, to the love of wisdom, or truth. Once more, a connection can be made between this love of truth, essential to the quest for knowledge, and exile in Levinas. But again, this connection seems unusual inasmuch as the Western philosophical tradition's reflection on knowledge has always been in terms of finding a foundation, a *sul,* for it. What is needed, according to that tradition, is a firm basis, a first certainty on which to build the enterprise of knowledge. There seems to be no place, in such a tradition, for exile. Yet, according to Levinas, exile plays a central role in the quest for truth. We shall show that, far from springing from secure foundations, truth is accessible only to the mind capable of experiencing an exile away from its preconceptions and prejudices. Only the mind porous enough to be receptive to the questions, perspectives and concerns of an interlocutor, of an other exiled from the self, which confronts it from the outside, is worthy, according to Levinas of journeying toward the truth. In this sense, there can be no genuine knowledge without a reference to a disruptive and transcendent other, without a reference to an exiled one. And it is the welcoming of that other, of his or her questions and objections, which purifies the mind of its solipsism and prepares it for an encounter with a truth which is not a construction or a production of the mind, but the fruit of an intersubjective dialogue and search.

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Our quest for truth now leads us, in our sixth chapter, to the quest for the ultimate Truth, that of God. Levinas will once more associate exile with this new spiritual endeavor. Again, this seems counterintuitive. In the main traditions of spirituality, exile is, on the contrary, seen as a degenerative state and spirituality is seen as a coming home or as a return. The neoplatonic conception of spirituality especially sees exile in a pejorative light. The exile of the soul from the One must be overcome by a turning back and a homecoming to that One. This conception can be found again in Jewish and Christian understandings of exile as the painful journey of the believer in a transient world which can only be overcome by conversion understood as a *return* to God. In all three cases, exile is seen as a condition to be overcome in order to achieve genuine spirituality. Not so for Levinas. Inspired by postexilic Jewish thought, Levinas will forge a novel conception of exile as a necessary component of spirituality. We shall show how exile, for Levinas, is central to the spiritual experience and to the encounter with transcendence. Not only is God in exile for Levinas, but exile, far from testifying to a separation from God, constitutes the very nature of the journey toward God.

Finally, our last chapter will lead us to another form of spirituality, that of art. Here again, Levinas' understanding of the alienating, even disruptive nature of certain art forms will come against common conception of art as beauty and as a testimony to the hidden harmony of the cosmos. Opting against Plato for the discordant forms of art over and against harmonious and beautiful forms of art, Levinas will come up with a unique aesthetics in which exile will play a central role. But this taste for the discordant and for the disruptive over and against the healing virtue of beauty raises the question of what accounts as art. Can the ugly, the meaningless, the shocking count as art? Or must art be relegated to the domain of the harmonious and of the beautiful? We shall see that for Levinas, these discordant and fragmented forms, in that they testify to the fragility and intrinsic exile of the human condition must count as art, in the sense that they achieve a truthful representation of reality and testify to its essential fragmentation.

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A Life and Thought in Exile

Introduction

Before anything can be said about Levinas' thoughts on exile, a chapter dealing with the personal and historical context of that reflection on exile is necessary. As Srajek observed in his essay on Levinassian ethics, one cannot understand a problem without first going back to the context or horizon of emergence of that problem. Thus, "it would be negligent to read [this philosopher] of transcendence without realizing that somewhere in [his life] such transcendence must have its 'Sitz im Leben.'"[1] It is precisely to these biographical elements that we must now turn to if we are to understand the genesis of Levinas' thoughts on exile. This intrinsic connection between Levinas' own experience of exile and his reflection on exile has already been, incidentally, noticed by Srajek. Speaking of both Derrida and Levinas, Srajek observes that "their biographies . . . are marked at least in part by the fact of their Jewishness and the fear, persecution, hatred, and exile which they had to confront because of that heritage. In reading their texts, we have to remind ourselves continually of the perennial societal ostracism to which the two thinkers were exposed in order to understand the connections with the philosophy they write that centers around absence, the no-place ('non-lieu'), exile, etc."[2] It is precisely this connection that the present chapter will attempt to not only posit but also elaborate and this, by first showing how Levinas' reflection of exile stems from his own experience of exile as a Jew, but also, by showing how his interpretation of exile is shaped by his familiarity with Jewish interpretations of exile. Finally, we shall show how the latter will influence his understanding of ethics as well as his use of the concept of exile.

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I Emmanuel Levinas: A life of exile

Emmanuel Levinas was born on January 12, 1906, in Kaunas, Lithuania, in a traditional Jewish family. Lithuanian Jews were well integrated in the Lithuanian community because of their openness to the surrounding culture, holding many trade and intellectual connections with Russia and the West. The death of Tsar Alexander II, however, brought about a wave of anti-Semitism and pogroms making life increasingly difficult, if not unbearable, for the Jewish community of Lithuania and forcing many into exile. Levinas' family also chose to leave and settled in the Ukraine to escape ostracism and persecution. Yet, between 1918 and 1920, pogroms started in the Ukraine as well, and Levinas chose exile again, this time to France. In 1923, at the age of 17, Emmanuel Levinas journeyed to Strasbourg and registered as a student at the University of Strasbourg. A few years later, in 1928, he spent a year at the University of Freiburg where he worked under philosophers Husserl and Heidegger; after which, Levinas moved back to France and started his own philosophical work with the writing of a dissertation on the thought of Husserl.

Shortly after his return to France from Freiburg, war broke out and Levinas joined the French army in 1939, only to become a war prisoner a year later and find himself transferred to a labor camp for Jewish prisoners. The particular exile experienced at the work camp was, however, profoundly different from Levinas' prior experiences of marginalization. He describes this exile in a short essay later published in *Difficult Freedom* as follows: "There were seventy of us in a forestry commando unit for Jewish prisoners of war in Nazi Germany. An extraordinary coincidence was the fact that the camp bore the number 11492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain under the Catholic Ferdinand V. The French uniform still protected us from the Hitlerian violence. But the other men, called free, who had dealings with us or gave us work or orders or even a smile—and the children and women who passed by and sometimes raised their eyes—stripped us of our human skin. We were subhuman, a gang of apes. A small inner murmur, the strength and wretchedness of persecuted people, reminded us of our essence as thinking creatures, but we were no longer part of the world" (DF 152–3).

What is interesting about this passage is that it does not describe a mere cultural or geographical exile but an *ontological* exile. What Levinas experienced in his stay in the prison camp is an exile from the human condition as expressed by the behavior of the "free" men, women, and children which "stripped" him of his "human skin" (DF 153). For these, the prisoners were not considered

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human, but "subhuman," belonging to a "gang of apes." It is such an experience of being "no longer part of the world," that is to say, of the human world, the human condition, which will mark the beginning of his distanciation with the Western philosophical tradition giving rise to a single question: How is it that being at the forefront of philosophy, the arts, and religion, the West could arrive at such degrading actions toward other human beings? How could the West, the birthplace of the Enlightenment, give lieu to the systematic ostracism and eventual massacre of the human other as was evident in the Holocaust? And indeed, while the West benefited from a millennial tradition of ethics, it found itself curiously lacking in moral strength in the face of the radical evil incarnated by Nazism. Levinas himself observes this weakness, all the while recognizing that while "European moral conscience did exist . . . it flourished in that happy period in which centuries of Christian and philosophical tradition had not yet revealed, in the Hitlerian adventure, the fragility of their works" (DF 5).

The question is, of course, what was missing in the European *ethos* that caused it to give way so easily to the tide of Nazism. An overview of Western ethical systems shows an *ethos* primordially concerned with the next of kin. Such an *ethos* is built around a community of "like individuals" (TI 213) belonging to "a common concept" (TI 213). The neighbor with whom one must show solidarity belongs, for the most part, to the same community as the self; such an ethos has no glimpse of "a human society and horizons vaster than those of the village where we were born" (DF 23). Modernity has no concern with the stranger or the exiled as such, and when it does deal with those dimensions, it is strictly terms of their assimilation to the dominant *ethos*.[3] What characterizes Western ethics is thus a radical neglect of the dimension of the stranger or the exiled *as such.* Whatever ethics there are, in Western philosophical thought, it is limited to the next of kin. But what of the stranger?[4] What ethics is there for the exiled? Is not this neglect of the dimension of the stranger the very cause of the downfall of the Western *ethos*? Is not the allegiance to the next of kin, to the detriment of the stranger, the very moment of inversion of Western ethics into immorality?

Moreover, is not the stance of the exiled the only possible ethical stance in an *ethos* entirely dominated by xenophobia and anti-Semitism? In a context where hatred of the other has become the norm, it seems that only one who is able to maintain himself or herself in exile with regard to the dominant *ethos* of the time is capable of retaining a sense of the humanity of the other.[5] In a context where evil is rampant, only a "small inner murmur" can ascertain that one is still a human being, still a *Mensch.* Only that which resists the system—be it one's own conscience or one's own individual stance against the dominant *ethos*—retains,

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in the context of radical evil, an awareness of ethics, a sense of the humanity of the victims. Levinas illustrates this phenomenon by telling a very poignant story of a dog encountered during his time as a war prisoner in Nazi Germany: "Halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men" (DF 153).

In this story, there was but one witness of the humanity of the prisoners: a stray dog. The description of it as a "wandering dog" is particularly interesting, as though only a wandering, exilic stance, could resist the overpowering *ethos* of xenophobia and genocide characterizing Nazi Germany. This stray, wandering dog is "the last Kantian in Nazi Germany" (DF 153), the last witness to the humanity of the victims, to their being "ends" and not mere "means," to their being persons worthy of respect in the midst of their annihilation and degradation by the Nazi apparatus. In this context, the exilic stance, far from signifying the dissolution of ethics, must be recognized as its sole and lonely guardian. Moreover, in this context, ethics is no more a set of rules binding to a given community, but the keen sense of the humanity of the other.[6] Ethics is no more an external imposition of abstract principles, but the "inner murmur" of a conscience[7] sensitive to the humanity of the victim even at the basest moment of their degradation by their persecutor. The ethical subject is thus no more a subject capable of deliberating over right and wrong and acting willfully, but the exiled, de-centered subject susceptible of being affected by the suffering of another human being. But more will be said on this reformulation of ethics by Levinas later.

Suffice it to say at this point that exile constitutes, arguably, a pivotal moment in Levinas' reflection on the crisis of ethics undergone during the Nazi era: His own experience of exile brings up the urgent question of the status of the exiled and of the stranger in the Western *ethos* as well as the realization that the condition of exile, far from going against ethics, might in fact constitute the very condition of ethics as "the inner murmur" of a conscience oblivious to the external and despotic imposition of values. Thus, it can be argued that exile will take on for Levinas, not only a central place but a positive signification in his working out of an ethics susceptible of resisting radical evil. Our work will show that the problem of the stranger and of the exiled will become the very

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locus of Levinas' ethics inasmuch as the neglect of the latter constitutes precisely, according to him, the malady of the Western *ethos.* Likewise, the exilic stance will take on a strategic place in the articulation of his ethics, inasmuch as it is only such a stance which can maintain itself, according to our philosopher, in the face of radical evil. Far from signifying an arbitrary position and a threat to ethics, we will argue that exile will come to signify for Levinas the very condition of ethics. It is no more a central subjectivity capable of deliberation and action which will constitute, for Levinas, the ethical subject, but an exiled, de-centered subjectivity acutely aware of and sensitive to the suffering of others. This central place given to exile in Levinas' reworking of ethics is, however, profoundly similar to the Jewish significations of exile. Indeed, Levinas' twofold emphasis on exile, while unfamiliar to Western readers, resonates with the writings of Judaism.

II Levinas and Hebrew thought

The Hebrew conception of exile

The emphasis given to exile within the Jewish tradition is, however, not incidental inasmuch as Judaism is a worldview which itself was shaped in exile. Since Biblical times, the Hebrew's experience has always been one of exile, from the calling of Abraham out of the land of his fathers to the Exodus; from the twice-repeated Babylonian exile to the present Diaspora of the Jews. Hebrew thought, in this context, is indissociable from the experience of exile and has constituted itself with a constant reference to this exile. As such, however, Hebrew thinking will come to profoundly differ from Western categories themselves constituted within a framework of sedentarization and nation-state. Miguel Abensour describes this profound difference between Hebrew and Western thought as an "opposition between paganism, closed off within the world and powerless to leave it, and Judaism, the anti-paganism per excellence, because lacking any definitive stance in the world" (PH 102, my translation). This exilic stance of Judaism will give rise to an interpretation of exile which would come to profoundly differ from Western views on exile. While the West has always viewed exile with suspicion, as a curse or as a lesser state, the Hebrew tradition will come to see exile as a pivotal concept laden with positive significations and possibilities.

Far from being a symptom of degradation, exile in the Hebrew tradition signifies the elevated stance of a subjectivity attuned to transcendence.

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Comparing the Plotinian account of the exile of the soul with the Jewish perceptions of exile, Levinas comments: "Contrary to the philosophy that makes of itself the entry into the kingdom of the absolute and announces in the words of Plotinus, that the soul will not go towards any other thing, but towards itself . . . Judaism teaches us a real transcendence, a relation with him whom the soul cannot concern and without whom the soul cannot in some sense, hold itself together" (DF 16). Contrarily to the Greek view of the soul's exile as a degradation of its prior state of unity with itself, the Hebrews see exile as the prerequisite of genuine transcendence, that is to say, of a rapport with a transcendent God and a transcendent other. For the Hebrews, exile constitutes thus a veritable pedagogy of otherness in that it constitutes a rupture of the self's hereto self-enclosed world thereby preparing it for an encounter with otherness. As such, exile opens up the self to the dimension and possibility of sociality. According to Levinas, "the Jewish man discovers man before discovering landscapes and towns. He is at home in a 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 find a meaning to the earth on the basis of a human society" (DF 22). Far from posing a threat to sociality, exile is seen as the very prerequisite of society and a sensitivity to the humanity of others. Levinas concludes: "Freedom with regard to the sedentary forms of existence is, perhaps, the only human way to be in the world" (DF 23).

It is, hence, this capacity for exile to approach the dimension of otherness which gives it its positive connotation as a factor of ethics and of spirituality. Inasmuch as the condition of exile profoundly transforms the structures of subjectivity as to make room for transcendence, it becomes a condition worthy of respect. The exiled is henceforth seen not as a nuisance but rather as a valuable presence testifying to the possibility of a rapport with the transcendence of God and of the human other. This positive signification given to exile explains its privileged status within Hebrew society. Alluding to an oft-cited passage in the book of Deuteronomy, Levinas comments: "One follows the Most High God above all by drawing near to one's fellow man and with concern to 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" (DF 26). Far from being seen as a threat to society, the exile embodied in the figures of the widow, orphan, stranger, and beggar, constitutes a figure of transcendence. Inasmuch as God is wholly other and can only be approached by a subjectivity already sensitive to otherness, the welcoming of the exiled figures of the widow, orphan, stranger, and beggar paves the way for a subjectivity

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capable of encountering God. For only when subjectivity has learned the lesson of otherness through its engagement with the widow, orphan, stranger, and beggar, will it be able to encounter the Wholly Other.

The Jewish significations of exile thus profoundly differ from Western/Greek views on exile. While the West views exile as a negative condition, as a lesser state and even as a curse, the Hebrew view privileges the condition of exile as well as the interaction with the exiled as a pedagogy of transcendence and as the prerequisite of a subjectivity capable of engaging with an other. Exile, in this context, entertains an intrinsic connection with ethics, that is to say, with a subjectivity capable of relating to an other, to a dimension exterior to itself. Such an understanding of exile as containing ethical possibilities will, incidentally, be precisely what we will find in Levinas' reflection on exile. There are thus profound resonances between Levinas' philosophy of exile and the conclusions of Hebrew thought. But more needs to be said here of Levinas' connection with Judaism.

The problem of Levinas' Jewish source

Indeed, Levinas' close connection with Judaism has cast a shadow on his work and stance as a philosopher. Peperzak speaks of certain critiques' understanding of this connection as a "contamination of philosophy by religious reminiscences."[8] Inasmuch as Judaism is seen primordially as a religion, the problem of the place of Judaism in Levinas' thinking must be addressed. Is Levinas doing theology? Or is he simply trying to conduct a philosophical apologetics of the Jewish religion as some commentators have argued? We remember here Peperzak's observation that "some interpreters think that Levinas' work is nothing more than a translation into contemporary French of old pre and non-philosophical thoughts and commandments. Such a translation may be praised as a new version of Biblical spirituality but would not justify the promotion of its author as a first class philosopher."[9] Is Levinas simply giving a philosophical garb to religious ideas and beliefs? Is he simply using philosophy to sustain a religious position which in turn goes unquestioned? Were he to be doing so, this would be a grave accusation inasmuch as philosophy is above all a questioning of the very foundations of belief. How then can one be a philosopher all the while assuming a position that goes unquestioned? Levinas would then appear as a pseudo-philosopher: One that uses philosophical language but whose agenda is far from philosophical.

One way to solve the problem of Levinas' philosophical ties to Judaism is to think the rapport between the two in terms of exile and hospitality. In this context, Levinas' Jewish source is no longer a position which needs to

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be affirmed or strengthened through apologetic means but rather a stranger in a strange land. Hebrew thought, in fact, defines itself as a thought in exile in the words of the Psalmist: "I am a stranger on the earth, do not hide your commands from me" (Ps. 119.19 New International Version). The commands here refer to the very core of Judaism, that is to say, to the Law constituting the basis of all Hebrew thinking and endeavor. Yet, far from seeking universal affirmation, these commands attach themselves to the "stranger," to the one who is not of the world and who remains on the fringes of existence. Hebrew thought thus profoundly differs from Western thought. Whereas Western thought is ever in search of universality and objectivity, Hebrew thought remains intrinsically bound to the particular, to the "secret of interiority." As such, Hebrew thought refuses to be encompassed in a universal or rational argument. Its attunement to the concrete and the particular dimensions of human life resists such a reduction to abstract and universal categories of thinking. In fact, the temptation to establish itself rationally and to attain a philosophical foundation goes against the very structure of Hebrew thinking which, as we shall see, is intrinsically unfounded and, in Levinassian terms, an-archic. To do an apologetics of Hebrew thought would thus go against its very essence. Even the Medieval masters, as intent as they were to find a rational grounding for Judaism, had to admit the limitations of this task as far as Hebrew thinking was concerned.[10] Accordingly, Hebrew thought is intrinsically exiled, or an-archic, and must remain so, even in the Western context of thinking if it is to maintain its specificity.[11]

Reciprocally, the philosophical tradition of the West could come to adopt a novel stance in the face of otherness. Instead of attempting to integrate it and assimilate this thought in its own categories, thereby neutralizing anything which does not fit its worldview, it could adopt a different stance: a welcoming stance. Thereby, the Western philosophical tradition would not show itself, as it usually does according to our philosopher, allergic to a thought which thinks differently than itself, but rather would welcome this novel way of thinking in a way that would enrich and deepen its own search for truth. This would entail, however, that philosophical thinking sees itself no more as emerging from itself, but as capable of being inspired by another. This revolutionary reorientation of Western thought toward an other that precedes it, is that which is inaugurated here by Levinas, as observed by Catherine Chalier in her book *L'inspiration du philosophe:* "His attentiveness to the Hebraic source remains intimately connected to his philosophy, that is to say, to his desire to disturb the foundations

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of rational thinking . . . in order to awaken the mind from its slumber. His whole philosophy rallies itself to this awakening, thereby paving the way for a more demanding thought which breaks with the primacy of ontology in order to revive the memory and the disquietude of an alterity incommensurable to concepts . . . This alterity does not do violence to the life of the spirit but forces it to take a new direction. It dislodges philosophy from its masterful position, signifies to it that rationality does not possess the ultimate key to intelligibility, and orients it to the weakness, the vulnerability, and the precariousness which signify, before concepts, in the word of the prophets, towards a call to responsibility."[12]

In this context, it is no longer about philosophy giving a philosophical grounding to Jewish thought, but, on the contrary, about Jewish thought giving a new "inspiration"[13] and orientation to Western thought. Thus, far from seeking philosophical garb in order to establish itself, Hebrew thought as manifest in Levinas' philosophy, serves to give a new impulse to Western thought and open new venues in philosophy. In the words of Lorenc, the Jewish source in Levinas' writings would constitute "an attempt at constructing a vision of culture which, being alternative to the generally accepted paradigm of Western European culture, would offer a chance for endowing the ideas of humanism and universalism with new contents."[14] It is precisely this new impulse given by Hebrew concepts to Western structures of thought which makes for Levinas' profound originality and for his specificity as a Jewish philosopher. And indeed, what distinguishes Jewish philosophy from Western philosophy is precisely this attunement to an other which precedes the self. While Western thought originates in the self, Jewish thought thinks and philosophizes with the keen awareness of its having been preceded by an other, by revelation.

Philosophy is, in this context, no more the enterprise of a solitary subject erecting itself at the origin and foundation of truth as in the Cartesian endeavor, but the product of a de-centered subjectivity, always preceded and inspired by an other. Such a subjectivity is thus no more the grounded and central self of the Cartesian egology, but the de-posited, exiled self whose philosophical questioning has not emerged from itself but constitutes a response to an other which precedes it. Levinas speaks to this effect of an "ontological inversion" brought about by an attentiveness to a thought which precedes oneself (TN 133). It is as such that the Jewish philosopher, and the emerging Jewish philosophy, is an-archic inasmuch as it cannot find an origin within itself but is always relative to an other which has come before it and which has inspired, or more precisely, *awakened* it to its fundamental questions.

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III Ethics and exile in Levinas

This "ontological inversion" brings out the intrinsic connection between exile and ethics inasmuch as it is only a subjectivity which has undergone a rupture of its categories and found itself de-posited by a thought which exceeds it, that can approach a transcendent other. But more needs to be said here of Levinassian ethics. Indeed, the description of ethics just mentioned comes from an understanding of ethics that profoundly differs from the traditional conception of ethics as a set of rules and principles binding to a community. Levinas is not concerned, in Bernasconi's terms with "generating an ethics."[15] Levinas is not occupied with the prescriptions of an "ought" to his readers based on rational categories of good and evil as Kant has done. Ethics for Levinas is not the product of a rational subject. The rationalizations of good and evil are rather a by-product of a subject already interested in, already awakened to ethics. In other words, the moral deliberation of a given subject is but the result of its already having a sense of ethics. Part of our work will be to show that ethics is, for Levinas, a sensible event rather than a rational one. The ethical subject is not a rational subject capable of moral deliberation, but a sensible one capable of sensing another's need. *There* lies the originary moment of ethics according to Levinas, in this capacity to hear another's plea for help. *There* lies the first awakening of the subject to ethics, that is to say, to an *other* capable of disturbing the hereto peaceful and self-possessed world of the self.

This understanding of ethics as pertaining to the sensible realm rather than to the rational realm is, incidentally, profoundly Jewish. In the Hebrew tradition, ethics, as taught by the prophets, was not a factor of the intellect, but rather of the senses. The lack of ethics denounced by the prophets had nothing to do with an intellectual deficiency on the part of the people of Israel, or with an incapacity for them to make the right judgments in terms of right and wrong, but rather on an incapacity on their part to "see" or to "hear." Catherine Chalier comments on this appeal to the senses of sight and hearing on the part of the Hebrew prophets: "When the prophets denounce the deafness and blindness of man, it is not just an appeal to the heart to open up to the good. Before interpreting the eyes and ears as metaphors, one must take seriously their sensorial potentialities. The prophets demand above all that one hears and sees differently, and yet that this hearing and seeing remain on the level of the sensible inasmuch as there exists a profound connection between the sensible and the spiritual realms."[16] We now understand better Levinas' strange statement that "ethics is an optics" (TI 23). Far from being the product of an intellectual deliberation, ethics is seeing and

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hearing a plea, it is a sensibility to an other, a sense for the other's suffering and wretchedness.

Thus, ethics does not emerge, as it did traditionally, from a solitary and central subject capable of rationally deliberating over right and wrong, as the Kantian subject for example, but from a de-centered, exposed subject capable of seeing its central stance put into question by another's need. We have now a better sense of how exile is intimately connected to ethics in Levinas' philosophy. It is no more a masterful subject who is capable of ethics, but a vulnerable subject, acutely sensitive to its surroundings and susceptible of being dislodged from its comfortable stance in the world by the pain he sees around itself which, for Levinas, constitutes the originary moment of ethics. Ethics is in this context no more a set of rules, but an inner disposition on the part of subjectivity. Levinassian ethics is no longer prescriptive of an "ought," but descriptive of an "ethical constitutedness of human beings,"[17] of a given subject's capacity to sense the presence and need of an other and to be dislodged by such a need. Framed as such, it is possible to better grasp the connection between the subject's fragmentation or exile and their capacity to encounter otherness. But this exile of subjectivity needs to be further analyzed.

Indeed, we have not yet clarified in what sense Levinas will understand that exile. Does he mean a concrete exile out of a given physical space, or is he merely describing a metaphorical exile taking place within the psyche of a given subjectivity? Our analyses of exile shall reveal that there are two main dimensions of exile in Levinas: a phenomenological exile and an ethical exile. One must be reminded that although Levinas draws his inspiration from Hebrew thought, his starting point is phenomenological. Drawing on the Husserlian analyses of the constitution of otherness in the sphere of the self, Levinas will attempt to work out the structure of the encounter between subjectivity and a *human* other. All the difficulty of this enterprise will reside, however, in the description of the phenomenalization of an other who by essence must exceed the structures of consciousness. The other *qua* other cannot be comprehended by a given consciousness. He or she must necessarily remain outside of the scope of consciousness if they are to maintain their otherness. The other is thus necessarily *ex-sul,* that is to say, exterior or outside (*ex-*) the world or ground (*sul*) of consciousness. The question of exile is then, first and foremost, a phenomenological one. Levinas will speak to that effect of an "exile" of the face (TI 213) out of the world of consciousness. Of course, the problem will arise of the possibility of such an encounter. How indeed is it possible to relate to a being who remains resolutely exiled from the world of consciousness?

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We shall see that this problem will lead Levinas to translate the problem of exile from a phenomenological setting to a sensible one, to the concrete level of embodied existence. Indeed, our analyses will show that, while the other cannot be encountered in Levinas on the cognitive or phenomenological level, she can be encountered on a sensible level in the daily occurrences of her need and desire for my help and resources. Thus, for Levinas, the other is no more the one who escapes my perceptions and categories, but the one who solicits my help from the margins of my world. We shall see that, in this context, the encounter with the exiled other is only possible at a price: That of sharing one's world and resources with that other and as such, of acknowledging that the world one hereto was the sole possessor of, is in fact a shared world. Thus, ascertains Levinas, the other can be encountered but only at the price of an exile, this time of the self, whereby it sees itself de-posited of its central position in the world in a generous gesture toward the other. Thus the exile is no more a phenomenological exile of the other from the intentional structures of the self, but an ethical gesture on the part of the self toward the other. The details of this shift in the understanding of exile from the phenomenological to the ethical still need to be explicated and this will be the purpose of our second chapter. Yet, one can already ascertain the profoundly Jewish character of this shift from the cognitive to the ethical operated by Levinas.

This emphasis of the ethical and embodied dimension of human existence over and against the cognitive and abstract realms constitutes the specificity of Jewish thought versus Greek thinking. Whereas the Greek advocates a departure from the sensible and material realms of the body for the realms of ideas and wisdom, the Jewish mindset continually resists this vertical movement for the more mundane preoccupation with the realm of human existence here and now. The exilic thought of the Hebrews never constitutes, as for Greek thought, a flight unto the spiritual and heavenly realm, but rather serves to bring the Hebrew back to one's responsibilities on earth. The Hebrew's exile has the purpose of awakening him to plight of other exiled. As Levinas observes: "the condition—or incondition—of strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt brings man closer to his fellowman" (HO 65–6). We are here reminded of the distinction effectuated by Abraham Heschel between the Greek philosopher and the Hebrew prophet. While the Greek philosopher seeks a flight to the world of ideas, the Hebrew prophet remains weighed down by mundane events of injustice and corruption: "What manner of man is the prophet? A student of philosophy who turns from the discourses of the great metaphysicians to the orations of the prophets may feel as if he were going from the realm of the sublime to an area of

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trivialities. Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, he is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the marketplace. Instead of showing us a way through the elegant mansions of the mind, the prophets take us to the slums."[18]

Likewise, the problematization of exile, while primordially a phenomenological one, will always find itself, in Levinas, brought back to the realm of ethics. While Levinas' problem of exile is first and foremost a phenomenological one—that of the exile of the face from the cognitive world of consciousness—it sees itself almost simultaneously translated into an ethical concern for the widow, orphan, and stranger. As such, Levinas' thought is closer to the prophetic (in the Heschelian sense) than to the philosophical. His preoccupation is less the structure of the phenomenology of the face within the world of the self, than the ethical possibilities opened up by the face. And indeed, we shall see throughout our analyses of exile in the philosophy of Levinas, an oscillation between these two moments of exile: phenomenological and ethical, cognitive and concrete. Thus, our chapter on ethics will begin with the problem of the phenomenological exile of the face which Levinas will resolve by translating the exile of the face on the concrete and embodied level of ethics. Our descriptions of the origin of the social bond will show that, for Levinas, the emergence as well as the preservation of society rests on this ethical moment of exile. Our descriptions of the erotic in Levinas will likewise begin with a description of the concrete exile of woman from the possessive grasp of the self, only to open upon the possibility of the self's ethical and concrete exile and gift in order to open up a space for the woman as a person. Our chapter on Levinas' epistemology will begin with an acknowledgment that cognitive knowledge necessitates the ability to relate to an object retaining a certain epistemological exteriority or exile with regard to the constituting activity of the self. We shall argue that such an ability, however, rests on the ability of the self to concretely and ethically engage with a human other. Our chapter on Levinassian metaphysics will likewise begin with the problem of the epistemological exile of God, absent from perception, only to invert into a God accessible as trace in the face of the exiled other and through ethics. Finally, our chapter on Levinas' aesthetics can be read as an essay contrasting classical art's escapist exile into the world of forms to modern art's depiction of human frailty and precariousness thus paving the way to an ethics.

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2

An Ethics of Exile

Introduction

The question of ethics has been traditionally associated with the finding of a set of principles binding to a given society. Indeed, ethics, etymologically *ethos*, pertains to the customs and sets of principles adopted by a given society. Ethics as we know it, is a communal affair and has to do with a given societal consensus as to what is a right or wrong behavior. Something is thus ethical if it fits this societal consensus and unethical if it doesn't fit. Ethics constitutes the glue that binds society together and ensures harmony, cohesion, and togetherness. Philosophers and nonphilosophers have adopted such a definition of ethics. As such, "to be unethical in the Greek idiom simply meant to be unusual or unaccustomed. Both Plato and Aristotle make the Greek pun which associates *ethos* with ethics, character with habit. Ethics was not something to be generated or deduced; it was almost by definition, already in place, defining the community which embraced it."[1] Our interpretation of Levinassian ethics as intrinsically connected with exile can, in fact, strike one as uncanny. If ethics is understood as *ethos*, that is, as the commonality which binds a community together, what does exile, which testifies precisely to the dissolution of the communal bond and the expulsion out of one's homeland or community, have to do with ethics?

This is incidentally Michel Haar's central question to Emmanuel Levinas: "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' ethics: Can there be an ethics without such a place? Or would such an ethics exist, as Levinas claims, in exile, given the absence of topos."[2] In other words, can there be an ethics without an *ethos,* that is, a common and shared communal space where the other and the self already coexist? Does not the presence of the exiled constitute precisely the rupture of such a

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common space, of such an *ethos,* and as such, dissolves the very condition of ethical behavior? Indeed, Haar's objection finds its confirmation in the fact that the experience of exile constitutes more often than not the very breakdown of the social bond in that the exiled finds herself either cut off from her community or alienated and estranged within a new community. The exiled is she who never fits a given societal consensus but, in virtue of her past, always carries the trace of another world, of another way of life, worldview. But, by introducing by default such an other worldview or way of life within a given community, the exiled jeopardizes the established *ethos*. The presence of the exiled in a community thus marks the beginning of fissures in the very *ethos* of this given community. And as such, the exiled necessarily presents a threat to the cohesion of that particular society. The exiled hence seems to go against the ethical enterprise, against all attempts to bind a community together under a given *ethos*.[3]

But such an ethics as founded on the Greek conception of *ethos*, as a code morally binding to all members of a given community has a central flaw: Such an ethics can only be wary of the stranger which antagonizes and endangers it, of the one who does not fit into the prescribed *ethos.* Thus, ethics conceived as *ethos* has no use of the stranger and, indeed, is wary and distrustful of the stranger. Such an ethics, however, is profoundly problematic in the light of the events of World War II where the exiled found herself negated precisely in the name of the common good and *ethos.* It is such an ethics which has, as a result, "flown under suspicion."[4] And indeed, after Auschwitz, there can be no more talk of an *ethos* limited to members of a given society, to the ones sharing a common space. The dimension of the stranger, of the exiled, of the one who does not share the same space, must be reintegrated into the ethical discourse if the events of World War II must be prevented for future generations. In other words, ethics must find itself reformulated no more in terms of an *ethos* which binds people sharing a common space, but in terms of an *ethos* opened up to the outsider, the stranger belonging to another space and world. This is arguably Levinas' orientation in his reflection on ethics; attempt which will lead to a profound inversion of ethics as *ethos* grounded in a common space into an an-archic ethics, irrupting from precisely a *non-lieu* of the exiled.

Levinas' work on ethics must then not be read as a reiteration of a discipline which, in the aftermath of World War II up until today, has come under heavy suspicion, but precisely as the shattering of the traditional understanding of ethics as *ethos* and the reformulation of an ethics which no longer expels the stranger but welcomes her and the disturbance she is susceptible of bringing to the established *ethos.* Thus, Bernasconi is right to say that "ethics in Levinas'

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sense is more concerned with questioning than with providing answers . . . to this extent Levinas has more in common with the contemporary suspicion of ethics than with the ethical tradition itself. Indeed, Levinas' response to the hermeutics of suspicion is to insist that its suspicion of morality has an ethical source."[5] Far from constituting an anachronic voice for ethics, Levinas proposes not only an inversion of traditional ethics, but the very shattering of the foundations of traditional ethics—the shared space of the *ethos*—for an ethics originating in exile, in the *non-lieu* of the exiled other. It is this exiled other which will guide Levinas' deconstruction of ethics, and as such, which will constitute the new an-archic foundation of Levinas' discourse on ethics.

According to Levinas, there exists a deep connection between exile and ethics.[6] The purpose of this chapter will be to show, that, far from going against ethics, the experience of exile paves the way to an ethics understood as a relationship with an other, which welcomes this other's alterity and transcendence. For Levinas, ethics is more than just harmony and cohesion, or *ethos*. Levinas' ethics describes first and foremost a relationship with an other *qua* other, as transcendent and exiled with regard to the world of the self. Such an ethics implies for Levinas, however, that the other be encountered as absolute from the world of the self. This description of the other as absolute, that is, as absolutely exiled from the world of the self will raise a number of objections, notably from Derrida. Indeed, how is an encounter, let alone a relationship, with an other remaining stubbornly absolute from the world of the self possible? Our analyses will have to address these questions and explain how an encounter or relationship is possible with an other described as absolute. We shall argue that this encounter, while absolute on the cognitive level, can be read as relative on the sensible level thus allowing for a relationship to take place. But this encounter of the other on the sensible level is possible only at the price of a profound transformation of the self.

Indeed, according to Levinas, the self must itself experience exile—a de-centering, a de-positing of itself as center of the universe—if an encounter with the exilic dimension of the other is to be possible. This, however, brings up the problem of how a de-centered self, a self stripped of all its prerogatives and stance in this world, can possibly still enter into a relationship with another. This is in essence Haar's objection to the Levinassian discourse on ethics: Such a self, according to Haar, is in danger of being dominated and consequently annihilated by the other. How then could it constitute the originary moment of ethics? It is this critique which we shall address in our analyses in an attempt to show the emergence, in Levinas' philosophy, of a definition of the self which no longer

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claims centrality and priority as the Western conception of the self, but which gains its selfhood from an intrinsic de-centeredness and relationality. Indeed, only such a self, for Levinas, is capable of ethics. Thus we will have shown that it is not a common *ethos* which, according to Levinas, constitutes the basis of community, but an encounter with an exiled other. This chapter will show the centrality of the concept of exile in the Levinassian discussion of ethics. We shall see that the dimension of exile is present at every stage of the ethical encounter. Far from being an obstacle to ethics, we shall see that exile paves the way to an ethics, to an ethical encounter and to ethical behavior.

I The exile of the face

The exile of the face is described by Levinas in a key passage in *Totality and Infinity*, which reads as follows: "The epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity. The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and *exile* which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves over to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face" (TI 213, my italics). This passage has layers of meaning and we shall endeavor to uncover each one throughout this chapter. One of these meanings is that of an exile of the other from the world of the self, from the constituted world of perceptions and conceptualizations of the self. The other does not "deliver" himself or herself to the cognitive and perceptive powers of the self. The other remains in exile (*ex-sul*): outside (*ex-*) of the world (*sul*) constituted by the self. There is always something within the face of the other which escapes cognition, which escapes our vision, our understanding. While the face of the other does lend itself to vision and to a limited understanding of its features and expressions, there is something within its appearing that escapes, that refuses to appear. Levinas observes that "the transcendence of the face is at the same time its absence from this world into which it enters, the exiling of a being" (TI 75).

Levinas explains this paradoxical way of manifestation by having recourse to the concept of "nakedness." The other appears in my field of vision, as a physical body, as a face rich in features and expressions. And yet, something of that other escapes me. I perceive, constitute the other as a body within my world, and yet, along with this body, I sense that something in that other escapes me, I sense that I can never gain full knowledge of him or her. Levinas speaks of this mystery or secret of the other in terms of the "nakedness" of the other: "The nakedness of the

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face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it" (TI 75). For Levinas, nakedness is used metaphorically to describe that part of the other which escapes the visible "exteriority" of the world. Nakedness must be understood in Levinas as that which remains hidden within the visible world of things, sceneries, and institutions. Nakedness, according to Levinas, can never be disclosed within the world of the self and, in this sense, it reveals an exilic dimension.[7] The other remains exterior (*ex-*) from my world (*sul*). It is in this sense that Levinas speaks of the other as the "stranger" who is "not wholly in my site" (TI 39). Levinas speaks to that effect of the infinite transcendence of the other as "infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign" (TI 194). The nakedness of the other speaks thus of his or her exile from the objective and discovered world originating from the self; it remains exiled from the world of the self.

But this phenomenology of otherness raises an important question: How is the other to appear *outside* of the world of objects? If there is to be appearance, must it not always be *within* a world, within a field of vision, of perception?[8] How can something appear *outside* of the world of light, outside of the world of visible objects? How can something *appear* in the world and yet present itself as an *absence*? These are precisely Derrida's objections to Levinas' descriptions of the exilic character of the face. For the self to enter into a relationship with the face, it is necessary, according to Derrida, that the latter manifests itself, exposes itself to the objectifying activity of the self, lets itself be seen in the context of a world: "My world is the opening in which all experience occurs, including, as the experience par excellence, that which is transcendence toward the Other as such. Nothing can appear outside of my appartenance to 'my world' for an 'I am.' 'Whether it is suitable or not, whether it appears to me monstrous (due to whatever prejudices) or not, I must stand firm before the primordial fact, from which I cannot turn my glance for an instant, as a philosopher."[9]

According to Derrida, it is impossible to speak of a relationship with alterity without such an original moment of "violence" by which this alterity lets itself be encompassed within my world, "shows itself" to the self:[10] "If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. . . . The philosopher . . . must speak and write within this war of light, a war in which he always already knows himself to be engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is by risking the worst violence."[11] There must be a presentation, a phenomenalization of the face in my world for a relationship to be possible. How can we then speak, with Levinas, of a relation

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with the face without prior vision of that face? How do we encounter the other beyond appearances? How may we access the genuine self of the other? If all of our attempts to understand the other in fact distanciate us from this other, how are we to approach this other in a way that will allow us to have a genuine encounter with him or her?

According to Levinas, there is another way to relate to otherness which does not pass by cognition but which allows for a genuine encounter with that other. While the face will not be approached on the cognitive level, it is nevertheless possible to approach it, according to Levinas, on the sensible level. To try to encounter the other on a cognitive level is bound to fail for Levinas because the other always escapes the mastery of the self. Yet, it is possible, according to Levinas to encounter this other from the standpoint of the sensible world.[12] The sensible dimension thus becomes the *lieu* of "proximity," of what Levinas terms a genuine encounter with the other *qua* other: "The sensible is superficial only in its role being cognition. In the ethical relationship with the real, that is, in the relationship of proximity which the sensible establishes, the essential is committed" (LP 118). Lingis had already observed this affinity of the manifestation of the other with the dimension of sensibility in an essay where he describes "two kinds of sensibility; a sensibility for the elements and the things of the world, a sensuality, which is appropriation and self-appropriation, and a sensibility for the face of the other which is expropriation and responsibility."[13] The sensible is then the context of the ethical, the support of the ethical. But one does not immediately grasp this connection between the sensible dimension and the *ethical*. How does the sensible constitute the medium wherein an ethical relationship is susceptible of taking place? How does the sensible constitute a better context to an approach of the exilic dimension of the face? Why is the standpoint of the sensible better than that of the cognitive world to approach otherness? And, what is this standpoint? Before we can understand the way the other appears within that sensible world, we must first understand what Levinas means by sensible world.

Before we perceive objects and turn our interest to understanding the world around us, our experience of the world is, according to Levinas, a sensible one.[14] Before all cognitive attempts to give meaning to the world, we experience this very world as already given and as a source of enjoyment. Before we see the world as a multiplicity of objects, we "live from" the world, "we live from 'good soup,' air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc. . . . These are not objects of representations. We live from them" (TI 110). Before endeavoring to understand the molecular structure of living things, or the physical properties of light, before we even come to terms with the things in the world as "objects" distinct

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from ourselves, we live from them, we experience their effect on us, we enjoy them. This, according to Levinas is a sensible way of relating to the world. This sensible way comes before and independently of any cognitive and conceptual understanding of the world. It is preconceptual and precognitive.

The sensible world is thus an experience of otherness which does not pass through an act of mastery on the part of the self. Moreover, the experience of the sensible world precedes any act of mastery or power on the part of the self and affects this self before any act of constitution or mastery on its part. In that sense, the act of "living from . . ." can be understood as constituting an experience of genuine otherness, of an otherness which will not be derived from a cognitive action from the part of the self, but which precedes and affects the self. The experiences of feeling the warmth of the sunlight on one's skin, or of desiring a fruit and tasting it are all experiences which offer themselves to the self before any initiative on its part—they surprise the self, they affect the self. "Living from . . ." thus can be understood as the first awakening of the self to a dimension outside of itself. It is in this sense that for Levinas, the experience of enjoyment paves the way to the encounter with genuine otherness. Enjoyment, because it precedes the self's activities and awakens it to otherness, can thus be understood as one of the modes of "proximity," of an approach to genuine otherness.[15]

Yet, this conception of enjoyment as signifying transcendence becomes problematic upon closer analysis when one realizes that, while the movement of enjoyment does allow for an experience of an otherness preceding all initiatives of the self, it ultimately reabsorbs this otherness into the self in a movement of assimilation and appropriation. In the act of enjoyment, the "exteriority" of life is ultimately assimilated, repatriated to the self and this, in spite of its obvious external character. The tasting of a fruit or the sensation of sunlight is reduced to experiences of the *self*. They remain pure sensations of the self. And indeed, enjoyment is without object; it is not worried about that which it is the enjoyment of: "To sense is precisely to be sincerely content with what is sensed, to enjoy, to refuse the unconscious prolongations, to be thoughtless, that is, without ulterior motives, unequivocal, to break with all the implications" (TI 138–9). According to Levinas, the enjoyment of a given sensation occurs before any synthesis, before any objective preoccupation with the object of that sensation. Enjoyment is not worried about the objective support of the qualities, of the sensations it is enjoying; it does not aim at the *felt* but at the *feeling*.

One naturally comes to wonder how enjoyment, inasmuch as it is preoccupied with the *feeling* over the *felt*, truly constitutes a movement of transcendence on the part of the self. If enjoyment does not prolong its sensation into an

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object, into an entity exterior to itself, how then does it transcend itself? Does not enjoyment then become a mere subjective experience which never leaves the immanent sphere of the ego cogito? One cannot speak in terms of a true opening of transcendence inasmuch as "the self sufficiency of the *enjoying* measures the egoism or the ipseity of the Ego and the same. Enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution" (TI 118). Far from constituting a transcendent dimension with regard to the self, enjoyment constitutes the world as "mine." According to Levinas, the self that enjoys is "at home" in the world: "The world, foreign and hostile, should, in good logic, alter the I. But the true and primordial relation between them, and that in which the I is revealed precisely and preeminently the same, is produced as a *sojourn* in the world, the *way* of the I against the 'other' of the world consists in *sojourning* in *identifying oneself* by existing there *at home with oneself*" (TI 37). In the world which emerges from enjoyment, beings have meaning, definition only with regard to myself. While the movement of enjoyment implies an experience which precedes all cognitive action on the part of the self, it nevertheless ends up making sense of the world as belonging to the self, as "mine." According to Levinas, "an energy that is other . . . becomes in enjoyment *my* own energy, *my* strength" (TI 111, my italics). Thus the world is no longer characterized as a dimension existing objectively and distinctly from the self, but as existing *for* the self. As Levinas observes, "the world is for me" (TI 137).

One can, however, wonder how a relationship with the alterity of the other is possible in a context where everything is mine. Can otherness subsist in a world where everything is mine? Can there be an other in such a world? Levinas himself defines enjoyment as a total ignorance of the dimension of the other: "In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist 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" (TI 134). How then can the dimension of the other appear within the sensible world? One does not, at this point, understand how the sensible world can possibly constitute the *lieu* of an encounter with otherness.

According to Levinas, the other nevertheless manifests herself in such a world; but she does so as *exiled*. This exile is not, however, the cognitive exile of a face which refuses to be grasped or understood. The exile of the face takes on a whole new meaning in the context of a sensible world revolving around the self: the meaning of destitution and dispossession. We now understand in a whole new way the quote cited at the beginning of our chapter describing the exile of the

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face: "The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and exile which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face" (TI 213). The exile described in this quote describes the status of the other who, in a world centered on the self, can only be encountered as a "stranger" and as a "poor one." And indeed in a world where everything belongs to the self, the other can only appear as destitute! There is no room in such a world for him or her. In a world defined wholly as *mine*, the other can only remain *exiled*. In a world where everything is my possession, the other can only appear as the *dispossessed*. In a world possessed by the self and where the self is at home, the other can only appear as destitute, as not-at-home in that world, as exiled from that world. But if the other again presents herself as exiled, as remaining on the margins of my world, how is the self to encounter her? What encounter is possible in a world where the other finds herself marginalized, exiled, expulsed?

According to Levinas, an encounter is possible on the sensible level with the exiled other inasmuch as it profoundly differs from the cognitive relationship with the face. Whereas the cognitive exile of the face constituted an absence of the face, an escape of the face from the cognitive grasp of the self, the sensible exile has a wholly different structure: It does not withdraw from the self, but *affects* it. In fact, there can be no escaping this effect of the destitute other on the self, there is no choice in the matter. But the face does not directly affect the self, rather it affects it indirectly by affecting its relationship with the world, a relationship which Levinas characterizes, prior to the intrusion of the face, as innocent and happy. Indeed, before the intrusion of the destitute face, the self's relationship with the world is that of "happiness": "Life is *love of life*, a relation with contents that are not my being but more dear than my being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun . . . the reality of life is already on the level of happiness. . . . The final relation is enjoyment, *happiness*" (TI 112–13). This happiness is, furthermore, experienced by the self as innocent: "In enjoyment, I am absolutely for myself. Egoist 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" (TI 134). Before the intrusion of the destitute and exiled other, the whole world is mine to possess, and my possession is innocent—that is, it does not hurt anyone, it does not constitute a danger to others.

Everything changes however, upon the intrusion of the destitute and exiled other. With the intrusion of the other, my relationship with the world

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as possession and mineness becomes, all of a sudden, problematic: "Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger, the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself" (TI 38). The other casts a shadow upon that relationship of possession, his/her presence problematizes this relationship. Yet, at no point, does the other *threaten* my relationship of possession. Levinas is not recapitulating here the Sartrean descriptions of the phenomenalization of the other. Like Levinas, Sartre hinges the manifestation of the other on my relationship with the world.[16] Just like Levinas, the Sartrean other problematizes that relationship. But unlike Levinas, Sartre sees the intrusion of the other in the world of the self as, in effect, *stealing* the world from the self, as operating a shift in its ownership from the self to the other: "Perceiving him as a man, on the other hand is not to apprehend an additive relation between the chair and him; it is to register an organization without distance of the things in my universe around that privileged object. To be sure, the lawn remains two yards away from him, but it is also a lawn bound to him in a relation which at once both transcends distance and contains it . . . we are dealing with a relation. . . . Inside of which there unfolds a spatiality which is not my spatiality, for instead of a grouping toward me of the objects, there is now an orientation which flees from me."[17]

For Sartre, then, the other appears as other in my world, not due to a particular way she presents herself to the self, but in the way in which she impacts my relationship with the world. Whereas, before the intrusion of the other, the world was organized and grouped toward me as objects *for* me, for my own consciousness, the intrusion of the other reorganizes the world around a new point of consciousness—that of the other. The world "flees" from me and manifests itself as also constituting the world of the other, as also belonging to her. The other, in effect, *steals* the world from the self. The self sees itself, through the intrusion of the other, as deposited from its prerogative as center and sole possessor of the world. The self, in Sartre's terms, is "decentralized."[18] Levinas' description of the intrusion of the other follows those lines, yet, without ever constituting a threat to the self.

According to Levinas, the other does not *steal* the world, thus becoming, through a violent act, co-possessor of my world. The other only casts a shadow on my possession, without ever losing her exilic and destitute character. The other never appropriates herself of my world. He or she remains on the margins, on the edges of that world in his destitution. What she *does* do is transform my innocent possession into a problem. The joyous possession of the world by the self is profoundly altered by the intrusion, in that world, of the dispossessed. All of a sudden, the self realizes that its possession of the world in fact *dispossesses*

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the other. The self realizes that it is at the origin of the very exile of the other. In a world where everything is mine, what could possibly belong to the other? In such a world, the other can only shiver, hunger, and thirst, as nothing belongs to her—she is not at home in such a world, cannot survive in such a world. That the other cannot survive in a world defined as mine now casts a huge shadow on the innocent possession of the world. That possession now is experienced by the self to be at the very root of the other's suffering. The self's innocent enjoyment of life is now experienced as the usurpation of the other, as a threat to her own life and existence, as the very source of the other's exile and destitution.[19]

II The exile of the self

The intrusion of the exiled other thus profoundly alters the self's happy immersion in the world, calling it into question: "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 of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other, ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics" (TI 43). The self is, upon the intrusion of the face, called out of its innocent enjoyment and forced to face the suffering of the other and its own responsibility in that suffering. This "calling out" of the self from the world by the other is not unlike Heidegger's own rendition of the self's emergence from the world. Just like in Levinas, the Heideggerian self or Dasein, is primordially immersed in the world, albeit not of enjoyment, but of material things (*Seiendes*). Thus, according to Heidegger, Dasein lives first and foremost in a preoccupation for material things that make up the routine existence of its life. There is no awareness at that point of any reality or concern outside that daily preoccupation for the material things of the world. There is one event, however, which will call into question this daily routine: It is the intrusion, in Dasein's world, of the event of death. This event forever changes the way Dasein relates to the world of beings and reveals the intrinsic precariousness of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Dasein realizes, upon encountering death, that its own being in the world is fragile and precarious, that it is not at home in the world, that this world does not truly hold it or shelter it from annihilation. In other words, it feels anxious: "In anxiety, one feels '*uncanny*' . . . But here 'uncanniness' also means 'not-being-at-home' . . . As Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the 'world.' Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein

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has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential 'mode' of the '*not-at-home*.' Nothing else is meant by our talk about 'uncanniness.'"[20] The realization of the inescapable event of death through anxiety (*Angst*) is lived by Dasein as a feeling of uncanniness, of not feeling at home in the world (*Unheimlichkeit*). And it is precisely this feeling which will give birth in Dasein of the higher question of Being, thus ascribing to it a new destiny—that of becoming the guardian of the metaphysical question of Being.

Levinas' description of the intrusion of the other holds similarities with Heidegger's description of Dasein's encounter with death. Just like Heidegger's Dasein, Levinas' self is primordially immersed in the world of enjoyment. Like in Heidegger, the self is jolted out of that immersion by the intrusion of an other. The intrusion of the other is thus comparable to the intrusion of death in Dasein's world. Levinas himself ascribes to that comparison when he describes the event of the face as taking place in the shadow of death: "In the being for death of fear I am not faced with nothingness, but faced with what is *against me*, as though murder, rather than being one of the occasion of dying, were inseparable from the essence of death, as though the approach of death remained one of the modalities of the relation with the Other. The violence of death threatens as a tyranny, as though proceeding from a foreign will. The order of necessity that is carried out in death is not like an implacable law of determinism governing a totality, but is rather like the alienation of my will by the Other" (TI 234). Like death, the other puts the joyous possession of the self into question and calls it out of its innocent enjoyment of the world; the self finds itself expulsed from its immersion in the world by the other. The other sheds a shadow on its fundamental relationship of possession, and hence, on its feeling "at home" in the world. With the intrusion of the other, the self realizes that its being "at home" in the world is profoundly problematic. Indeed, not unlike Heidegger's account of death, the other causes to arise in the self a feeling of uncanniness with regard to its prior relationship to the world. Its at-homeness in the world is, in effect, ruined by the intrusion of the destitute other.

The intrusion of the other hence has the effect of expulsing the self out of its being-at-home in the world. The intrusion of the other exiles the self from its situation as center and sole possessor of the universe: "The I approached in responsibility is for-the-other, is a denuding, an exposure to being affected, a pure susceptiveness. It does not posit itself, possessing itself and recognizing itself; it is consumed and delivered over, dislocates itself, loses its place, is exiled, relegates itself into itself, but as though its very skin were still a way to shelter

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itself in being, exposed to wounds and outrage, emptying itself in a no-grounds, to the point of substituting itself for the other, holding on to itself only as it were in the trace of its exile" (OB 138). With the intrusion of the destitute other, the world will never be the same for the self. It will be forever tainted by the presence of that other. With this intrusion, the world of the self has lost its original purity and a shadow is now cast on every single possession of the self. In such a world, the self is not at home anymore, it finds itself a stranger within its own world, it finds itself expulsed, exiled from its very home. The question remains, however, as to how this exile can make way to hospitality toward the other? How can such a "dislocation," such a "loss," such an "exile" of the self render a welcoming of the other possible?[21]

This is precisely Haar's objection to Levinas: "If the ego is herself deprived of every center, possessed by the other, from which place or from which absence of place can she answer to and for the other . . . can she or he bring something to the other if the other has been traumatized to the nuclear fusion of her or his own psychism?"[22] In other words, how can this exile of the self bring about a welcoming of the other, let alone ethics? Can the self, expulsed as it is from its own dwelling place, even welcome an other? While it is true that a dwelling place is the prerequisite of any form of hospitality, it is also true that as long as this dwelling remains closed to otherness, there can be no form of welcome possible. Without a rupture in the self's hereto central identity, there can be no sense of the other. In other words, only when the central position of the self in the world is problematized, only when its dwelling and at-home-ness in the world is put into question, is a glimpse of the other possible. Only when the self realizes the arbitrary violence of its central and solitary position within the world, is the exiled other manifest. Namely that for the self to awaken to the dimension of the other, it must be jolted out of its self-complacency. The other's manifestation in the world of the self thus necessarily passes through a rupture in the hereto complacent and solipsistic stance of the self in the world.

The structure of manifestation of the other within the world of the self passes by a necessary de-centering of the self. Yet, while the other is glimpsed through the disturbance of the self's central stance in the world, she is not yet fully encountered. The self is only at this point aware of its arbitrary violence. The other is merely appealing to the self for a place in the world. But the other has not yet such a home. The encounter of the other passes through a necessary response to this appeal on the part of the self to the appeal of the exiled other. Such a response, Levinas terms generosity: "Positively produced as the possession of the world I can bestow as a gift on the Other—that is, as a presence before a

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face. . . . my orientation toward the Other, can lose the avidity proper to the gaze only by turning into generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands" (TI 50). The act of generosity is thus the only way through which, in a world hereto entirely centered on the self, a space is opened for another. In Husserlian terms, we can come to understand generosity as an intentionality whereby the other appears, is manifest, finds a place within the world of the self. Without the intentionality of generosity, the other remains on the margins of the world and does not access the presence in the world necessary for an encounter to take place. The manifestation of the other within the world of the self is then relative to the response of the self. Without this generous response on the part of the self, whereby it welcomes the other within its world, the other is condemned to remain exiled, on the margins of the world, and hopelessly absent and withdrawn from the realm of the self. It is in this sense that the other is relative to the self. Its manifestation, its place in the world, depends profoundly on the response of the self.

Such a response, while solicited by the other, however, is in no way compelled by the other. Indeed, throughout his descriptions, we do not get a sense of an other which compels or terrorizes the self as Haar infers in his interpretation of generosity. Commenting on the gift of generosity Haar objects: "It is even more difficult to understand and imagine the meaning of a gift which would not be thematically thought as a gift, and moreover which would not be given but painfully torn out of us. Giving would not be free but absolutely forced on us . . . but is a compelled gift still a gift? Is every act of giving forced on us?"[23] In his critique of Levinas, however, Haar seems to mix up two moments of responsibility: The moment of the plea, wherein the self is called to an unavoidable responsibility, and the moment of the response of generosity which is entirely free. For Haar, the response itself is understood as not being free and thus as not being genuinely responsible inasmuch as responsibility implies free will. While it is true that responsibility is not chosen for Levinas, that is, that the other's claim and plea on the self cannot be evaded, the self's response *is* chosen and *is* free. Indeed, the self is free to choose from two options: It can refuse or ignore the claim of the other, thus relegating the other into the realm of its absolute exile, or it can acknowledge this claim and welcome the exiled other into its world.

Likewise, the welcoming of the other by the self does not emerge, as was maintained by Haar, from a position or stance of at-home-ness in the world, but, paradoxically, from the stripping of the self of its central position in the world. Indeed, to hear the plea of the destitute other thus amounts to recognizing

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that the world is not my sole possession, that the other also has a claim on it too; it is to acknowledge my own exile in the world, my own home-less-ness within a world which is no more unquestionably mine, which does not revolve around me anymore. Far from signifying my ownership of the world, generosity emerges from a sense of my own homelessness in the world, my own exile within the world, in a sense that the world is not my sole possession but also belongs to another. Accordingly, it is paradoxically only when the self realizes, acknowledges its own exile within the world, its own destitution, that it becomes capable of generosity and of hospitality. Contrary to Haar who maintains that a welcoming of the other necessitates a grounded self in a space of its own, a "topos" or "lieu," for Levinas, "ethics exist . . . in exile, given the absence of topos."[24] It is then not "dwelling" which, as Bernasconi maintained, is "the condition of hospitality"[25] but exile. Inasmuch as dwelling describes the central position of a self at-home in the world, it implies the negation of any genuine otherness. Dwelling as such holds no ethical possibilities. Only when dwelling is inverted in generosity and becomes a lieu of hospitality does it acquire an ethical dignity. Thus, according to Levinas, "the chosen home is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of a relationship with the Other" (TI, p. 172).

This exile of the self is, in this sense, at the antipodes of the Sartrean descriptions of the self's expulsion from its world upon the intrusion of the other. The exile which the movement of generosity assumes does not signify, as it does for Sartre, the *usurpation* of the self's possession by the other, but the *welcoming* by the self of that dimension of otherness. The other never poses a threat to the self and partakes of the world of the self only upon an act of generosity by the self. Moreover, the act of generosity does not, as insinuated by Sartre, constitute a loss for the self—the self losing its world to the other—but, on the contrary, a gain. Indeed, while the exile assumed by generosity dispossesses the self of its at-home-ness in the world, it does so by opening up, within that world, the transcendent dimension of otherness. The dimension of the other is opened within my "at home" through the movement of generosity. One can further describe this exile of the self in generosity as a contraction of the self permitting the opening, within the world of the self, of a space for the other[26]—that is, a hospitality of the other. The other could not coexist with a consciousness defined as the center of the universe; there is no place for the other in a world where everything pertains to consciousness, where consciousness is at the center. It is necessary for the self to be de-centered, to find itself exiled and to accept this

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exile for the other to find a home in the world, for the other to find a place within the world. Through the gift of the world to the other, consciousness deposes itself of the prerogative of center of the universe, but, in doing so, it opens up a space for the other within the world. The dimension of the face can only enter the world of consciousness—that is, appear, be manifested in that world—if that consciousness opens up a space for it through the act of generosity which interrupts its own possessive grasp of the world.[27]

Through the moment of generosity, the world of the self, once entirely organized around the self, widens to welcome—without ever possessing him or her—the dimension of the other. The *homeland* of the self has now become a *haven* for the other. The world is no longer the place where the self accumulates its possessions, but the place of the welcoming of the other: "This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality" (TI 27). The exile of the self furthermore allows for a hospitality of the other without ever reducing that other's intrinsic exile. The other remains outside the grasp of consciousness, outside its mastery and control, yet lets itself be approached by consciousness through the act of generosity. The other escapes the self-contained movement of theory, but allows herself to be approached through the ethical movement of generosity. It is therefore on the level of ethics that the other can be approached and not on the level of epistemology. The other always remains exiled with regard to the world of theory, yet, she lets herself be approached through the welcoming stance of generosity. Thus the ethical moment of encounter of otherness passes through a double-exile: The exile of the other with regard to the intentional grasp of consciousness, and the exile of the self—through generosity—which permits an approach of the other as *exiled*, yet as capable of receiving the hospitality of the self. Exile finds itself at the very core of the ethical moment in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. One cannot understand the structure of the ethical encounter without first understanding these two moments of exile. For without the first exile, whereby the other remains out of my grasp, there would be no otherness as such to serve as my interlocutor. And without my generous exile toward him or her, there would be no encounter with that ever-escaping and exiled other. Exile finds itself not only at the origin of the subjective awakening of consciousness to the dimension of the other, but also constitutes the very structure of the approach of that other, of an ethical relationship between the self and the other.

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3

Exile and the Political

Introduction

From a conception of exile as an awakening to the ethical dimension of the other, we shall now address the broader problem of society and of its emergence. However, the connection between society and the dimension of exile is also difficult to grasp. Liberal political theories situate the moment of emergence of a given society as involving a necessary rejection of the dimension of exile. The birth of society coincides, according to political theorists like Hobbes with the neutralization of the threat posed by the exiled other and her integration in the uniform and stable form of the state.[1] For Hobbes, the exiled lifestyle is in many ways antithetic to the project of the state inasmuch as it disturbs the categories of uniformity and of harmony necessary to its emergence. And indeed, inasmuch as we define a given society as based on commonalities,[2] whether in kin or in ideology, the presence of an exiled, of someone who is not of kin nor like-minded, can be seen as a threat to the society's cohesion. In this context, the exiled can only be perceived as disturbing a given society's bond of kinship or like-mindedness, thus dissolving the harmony and cohesion necessary for this society's survival. Far from contributing to the makeup of society, exile is perceived by the above as contributing to the very dissolution of society.[3] How then can a connection be made between exile and society?

It is, nevertheless, such a connection between exile and society that this chapter will attempt to show as constituting a central moment of Levinassian political thought. For Levinas, the origin of the social bond does not reside, as is thought by liberal theorists, in the necessity to protect the self from the threat of the other, but in a higher necessity: that of the protection of the stranger. Insodoing, we shall show that Levinas' thought not only achieves the very inversion of liberal political theory, but constitutes the only possible response to the problems faced by liberal states today in the face of increasing immigration

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both legal and illegal. Levinas' thought of the stranger as the basis of society speaks, in this sense, to an increasingly urgent problem. In fact, it can be shown that Levinassian politics constitute a response to the very concrete problem of the stranger.[4] Thus, the dimension of the stranger upon which Levinas will found his political thought should not be thought, as it is by Bernasconi, as an abstraction or as a concept.[5] The stranger in Levinas is always the concrete stranger, the one who hungers, thirsts, and shivers in the world of the self. And it is precisely in the solicitation of the stranger and in the response to this stranger that Levinas will situate the origin of the social bond. Thus, far from emerging from the necessities of being and survival of the self, it can be argued that society emerges from the "extra-territorial" dimension of the stranger and from the ethical response it solicits from the self. Politics, in Levinas, is founded and answers to a higher authority: that of the extra-territorial moment of the ethical encounter.

This idea of an extra-territoriality of ethics to politics has raised, however, a number of critiques. To Dussel, for example, Levinas' use of the stranger as a crucial point of reference for the political sphere is problematic on a number of levels. First, the central role given by Levinas to the stranger *qua* stranger in his politics, seems, according to Dussel, to crystallize the stranger in its needy status, thereby never offering a way out for that stranger to perhaps forge herself a place in the world and achieve economic and social integration.[6] The stranger is condemned in Levinas to remain as such, if the political sphere is to preserve its ethical orientation. But what then of the stranger herself? Of her needs, desires, of her place in the world? The problem of the stranger's exilic status in Levinassian politics is further problematized by Dussel inasmuch as he finds in Levinas only what he terms a "negative politics."[7] Although Levinas makes an important contribution to political theory in his highlighting of the centrality of the dimension of the stranger, there is nothing in Levinassian politics, which, according to Dussel, makes way for concrete political action in favor of that stranger, that is to say, there is no room in Levinas for the emergence of a "positive politics."[8]

It is this problem which the last part of our chapter will address in its thematization of the concept of hospitality in Levinas. In this section, we shall show that, although the foundation of politics for Levinas is an-archical, the passage to the political realm necessitates an act of hospitality on the part of the self whereby the hereto exiled other finds herself welcomed within the ontological space of the political sphere. Such a politics would then enact what Dussel terms a "liberating praxis"[9] whereby the an-archical stance of the stranger finds a response in the practice of hospitality by a given society. And it is this act

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of hospitality which, as we shall show, constitutes for Levinas the transition from the ethical to the political. Thus, for Levinas, it is not, as is thought by most commentators, the Third which constitutes the pivotal point between ethics and politics, but the stranger. The dimension of the Third remains in fact, in Levinas' own avowal, a problematic notion inasmuch as the generous stance of the for-the-other sees itself in Levinas' terms "corrected" or "contradicted" by the emergence of the Third (OB 157–8), that is, of the other *of* the other, thus setting a limit to the event of proximity for the sake of the other others out there. As such, however, the Third jeopardizes the very foundations of society and poses a continual threat that politics will reabsorb into ontology and forget its originary an-archical source.

The Third seems, then, a rather problematic foundation for the political in the Levinassian sense. Rather than focusing on the dimension of the Third, our argument will thus propose—and this in response to Dussel's critique—to sketch out what Levinas himself hints to as "new politics" (BV 180): One wherein the passage from ethics to politics does not interrupt the event of proximity, but, on the contrary, is experienced as the very continuation of the ethical encounter with the face. Such a politics will have to be contrasted with the present liberal model which remains, according to Levinas, a deficient model of the political. Indeed, the liberal model fails in its very foundations, in the self's need to protect its own possessions and place in the world and, as such, constitutes only a fragile model of society. Levinas' "new politics" presents, arguably, a way out of this failure while evading the problem posed by the Third in its interruption of the ethical. Thus, in Levinas' "new politics," the moment of justice, law, and institutions is not understood as an interruption of ethics, but on the contrary as the continuation of ethics, that is to say, as the trace of the anarchical moment of ethics. Such a society would then no more be premised on the need to limit ethics, but on the contrary, would be built in the very trace of ethics.

I Exile and the dawning of society

Far from emerging from exile, society has been described by liberal political theorists like Hobbes as precisely the overcoming of exile. According to Hobbes, the dawning of the social bond emerges from the need to protect the self from the threat of an other exterior to its world and posing a threat to its dwelling or possessions. It is thus the perceived threat of the exiled other which constitutes the beginning of a reflection on the necessity of the social bond.[10] The role of

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society would consequently be to neutralize the threat posed by this exiled other either by protecting itself against it or by integrating this threat within its walls as an orderly and cooperative citizen.[11] For Hobbes, then, society plunges its roots and impulse not from a natural desire of the self to cohabit with the other, but, paradoxically, on an original enmity between the self and the exiled other. We remember here Hobbes' observation that "man is a wolf for man."[12] In this context, political institutions will be geared to protect the self and the interests of the self against the threat of the exiled other. It is then the self that is at the locus of the political endeavor, over and against the other. Thus, the origin of the social bond lies in the need for the *self* to protect itself against the *other* and to preserve its original stance and place in the world over and against the threat posed by that other.

One wonders, however, as to how a society can possibly be founded, as Hobbes maintains, on an original and natural enmity between its members, where every man is "against every man."[13] Where an original enmity exists between the self and the other, and the primordial concern remains that of the preservation of the interests of the self, as is more evident in Locke for example, then any bond between them is bound to be artificial and precarious. The peace between the self and the other will only be forced and, at the first opportunity will dissolve. In the words of Levinas, "transcendence is factitious and peace unstable. It does not resist interest" (OB 5). To found society on enmity feels contradictory. How can society—characterized by human solidarity and peaceful cohabitation—ever emerge from an original enmity between its members? This is also Simmons' observation. Commenting on Levinas' critique of the Hobbesian model he says: "Although he embraces the liberal state, Levinas distances himself from the classical liberal state of Hobbes and Locke" wherein "politics is based on egoist intentions and these drives are not transformed by the founding of the state. The potential for violence to the other always remains."[14] Quoting Pascal, he adds, "men have contrived and extracted from concupiscence excellent rules of administration, morality and justice. But in reality this vile bedrock of man, this figmentum laum, is only covered not removed."[15]

Thus, the Hobbesian attempt to found society on the exiled other perceived as a threat poses a number of problems. Moreover, we shall see that it does not do justice to the complexity of the original human rapport. While Hobbes is right to say that enmity is present, that is not all there is. Yet, like Hobbes, Levinas recognizes that the other poses a threat to the self. Levinas goes even so far as to compare the encounter with the other with the experience of death:

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"In the being for death of fear, I am not faced with nothingness, but faced with what is *against me* . . . as though the approach of death remained one of the modalities of the relation with the Other" (TI 234). Like death, the other is then, according to Levinas, *against me*. He or she is a mortal threat not only to me, but to every spontaneous claim I have on the world. Levinas speaks to that effect of "a calling into question of the same—which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same" and which is "brought about by the other" (TI 43). We are not far here from the Hobbesian paradigm of the other as a threat to my possessions and to my finding a place in the world.

But this threat posed by the other will take on a whole new signification for Levinas than for Hobbes. Far from signifying the annihilation of the self, this threat will constitute, in Levinas the beginning of ethics. Indeed, in his analyses on dwelling, Levinas argues that before the other's intrusion on the world of the self, the self had no conception of the other as such but behaves like a "hungry stomach" as though it were "egoist, without reference to the Other . . . alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone" (TI 134). The self exclusively preoccupied, as in the Hobbesian model, with dwelling, with finding a place in the world is a being for whom the concept of the other has no reality. Such a being can only become aware of the dimension of the other through a destabilization of dwelling, of its feeling at-home-in-the-world, and of its comfort zone. The intrusive threat of the other which lays an equal claim on the world of the self is thus, to be sure, a threat as Hobbes describes it, but it is a threat which contains ethical possibilities: That of the self's becoming aware for the first time, albeit painfully, of the dimension of the other. This is why, for Levinas, the entry of the other into the world of the same hangs upon a "calling into question of the same" (TI 43). Only when the self realizes that it is not the center of the universe, that it is not the sole being in the world, can a space be opened for the other. It is in this sense that, in the words of Abensour, the resistance of the other in Levinas "belongs to a wholly different order"[16] than in Hobbes, inasmuch as it opens up not upon the annihilation of the self, but upon the dimension of ethics.

As such, then, it is possible to understand the threatening intrusion of the other in the world of the self not as an obstacle to the social bond, but precisely, as its prerequisite. Without the intrusion of the exiled other into the hereto solitary and self-centered world of the self, there would be no awakening of the self to another, and, consequently, no possibility of a social bond. Far from constituting a threat to the social bond, the threatening or exiled other is the very condition of that social bond. Likewise, it is not the self's desire for a place in the world, or dwelling, that marks the beginning of the social endeavor, as Hobbes thought, but, on the contrary, its exile by the other from

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its centrality in the world. It is only inasmuch as the self acquiesces to the legitimacy of another's claim on its world, thus relinquishing its central stance in the world for one of de-centeredness, that a possibility is opened for a social bond. According to Levinas, it is precisely "this condition—or uncondition—of stranger and slave in the land of Egypt [which] draws man together with his neighbor. Men seek themselves out in their uncondition of strangers. The latter unites humanity" (HO 184).

It is then not the quest for dwelling but rather the condition of stranger, both of the self and of the other, which constitutes, for Levinas, the dawn of society. Far from constituting a threat to society, "the inevitable human alienation, the common experience or pathos of homelessness brings us together."[17] Far from being founded on finding one's place in the sun or on the perseverance in being intrinsic to all beings, the political plunges its roots in exile, or an-archy. The principle of society is then not to be found within the economy of being, as was inferred by Hobbes, but rather outside of it. Society is not grounded, as in the liberal model, in preserving the self's "place in the sun," but, far to the contrary, in a shared condition of exile whereby both acknowledge that the world is not their own. There is an an-archical foundation of the political. The stranger or the exiled other constitutes not a threat to society, but its very foundation.

The originary moment of the social bond is then not, as is often inferred by commentators, the Third, but the stranger. Most commentators situate the beginning of the political in Levinas with the interruption of the ethical encounter by the Third. Thus Drabinski argues that "the presence of the third signifies the point of passage from ethics to politics."[18] Levinas himself seems to infer this: "The third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction. It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? . . . Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of face . . . essence as synchrony is togetherness in a place" (OB 157). In other words, far from implying exile, the dawning of the political necessitates a sense of "togetherness in a place" where both the self and the other, no more strangers to each other, coexist. In the context of this definition, the "Third" in Levinas comes to signify this visible other contemporary to and coexisting with the self. Such an other is no more a stranger but a friend, no more in exile but has found a place in the world besides the self.

This founding of the political on the Third brings forth, however, a number of problems and contradictions. The first being that the emergence of the Third, inasmuch as it signifies an integrated other within the realm of the self, also

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means that the exilic and disturbing character of that other has been neutralized. Our analyses have shown, however, that it is precisely this disturbing character which constitutes the ethical awakening of subjectivity to the dimension of otherness necessary for the social bond to be possible. Inasmuch as the Third signifies the end of the exilic other, it signifies by the same token, the end of the possibility of ethics. Far from bringing forth the social bond, the Third, in that it signifies the neutralization of the other as exiled into the other as contemporary, would then constitute the beginning of its demise. Ethics is here dissolved into politics. But can the political subsist without the ethical? Levinas himself acknowledges the problem contained within the emergence of the Third and speaks in terms of a "betrayal of my anarchic relationship with illeity" (OB 158). The Third then constitutes, in Levinas' terms a betrayal of the ethical encounter and of the very foundations of the political. As such, the moment of the Third constitutes a threat to the political in that it rests precisely on the encounter with an exiled and disturbing other susceptible of awakening the self to the dimension of otherness. It is then difficult to assume, as most commentators do, that the Third constitutes the basis of society. On the contrary, we have argued that the moment of the Third in fact constitutes the beginning of society's demise.

We would venture to argue then that the political rests, not on an ontological basis opened up by the Third, but, on the contrary, on a dimension of "extra-territoriality." Levinas explains: "The capacity to guarantee that extra-territoriality and that independence defines the liberal state and describes the modality according to which the conjunction of politics and ethics is intrinsically possible" (OS 122). It is thus the extra-territorial dimension of the stranger which ensures the passage from ethics to a society attuned to its ethical origins and not the dimension of the Third. This is incidentally also Bernasconi's intuition when he says that "just as justice needs to be always put in question from elsewhere so that conformity to its abstract rule does not become a new tyranny, so one cannot rely on the politicians for protection and implementation of the rights of man. Hence the need of voices from outside, like those of the Old Testament prophets."[19] According to Bernasconi, the "extra-territorial" dimension of the stranger is essential to the makeup of society and must be honored if society is to maintain its original signification.

The question of extra-territoriality and of the transcendental function of the stranger with regard to the political brings up, however, a number of problems the most important of which have been expounded by Dussel. In a critical article on Levinas' politics, Dussel takes issue with Levinas' outlining of the transcendental character of the stranger in his politics. While Levinas'

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conception of the stranger as constituting an essential component of the political event is a laudable one, it does not, according to Dussel, culminate in a politics susceptible of genuinely and concretely protecting and preserving that other. Thus, Levinassian politics are at their best a "negative politics,"[20] meaning that the importance is put on the negation of the political and on the bringing to accountability of justice, but nothing is said as to how the political could, rather must, positively contribute to the protection of the stranger. In other words, while the dimension of the stranger is said to safeguard the political, nothing is said in Levinas of the political's responsibility to protect the stranger. Thus, according to Dussel, while "the great philosopher of Nanterre brilliantly describes . . . the face to face position . . . he does not culminate his discourse. The other calls into question, provokes, claims . . . but nothing is said, not only about the knowing how to listen to the voice of the other, but above all about the knowing how to respond through a liberating praxis."[21] According to Dussel, "the poor provokes, but in the end, he stays poor and miserable forever."[22]

This critique is echoed and further made explicit by Gauthier and Eubanks in their own analysis of the Levinassian concept of homelessness or exile. Gauthier and Eubanks situate Levinas' failure to genuinely account for a politics genuinely concerned with the other's welfare and integration, precisely in the philosopher's primordial concern with exile. According to Gauthier and Eubanks, Levinas' allegiance to the nomadic—and this perhaps as a result of his attunement with Jewish thought's emphasis on exile—sidetracks him from showing a genuine interest in the other's finding herself a place in the world: "Although Levinas does discuss the nature of the dwelling in Totality and Infinity, for the most part, his focus on the self-other relationship renders him largely indifferent to the question of context. This is borne out by Levinas' celebration of the nomadic relationship to place."[23] Thus, according to Gauthier and Eubanks, Levinas' philosophy does not do justice to the other's "ontological need for rootedness."[24] What the other needs is not a description of the transcendental value of her exile but rather a "politics of place" that recognizes her need to find a home and a place in the sun. It is these two points that the next section of our chapter will need to address.

II Hospitality and the accomplishment of society

Indeed, the first point to be made in response to Dussel's and Gauthier/Eubank's critiques is that, although Levinas emphasizes the transcendental condition of exile for the political, he does not stop there. There is a second step needed for

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the building of a politics. Commentators again tend to situate this second step in the moment of the Third whereby the ethical moment sees itself interrupted, or rather, in Levinas' terms, "corrected" (OB 158) by the latter in order to ensure justice for all. Again, our question to this perspective is concerned with how an interruption of ethics can possibly bring about a politics attuned to the ethical. How can an interruption of the ethical, brought about by the other's loss of her exilic and disruptive character and dissolution into the social realm, possibly bring about an ethical politics? The contradiction that the Third introduces in the Levinassian political discourse seems to us not only problematic, as argued before, but forced—almost as though Levinas were artificially trying to justify the institutions of the already existing liberal state when what he should be doing is, as Dussel intuited, come up with a "new politics."[25] We would like to opt, in this section, for the explication of this "new politics" in Levinas' philosophy as constituting more than a mere "correction" of totalitarian or liberal political models, but rather as foreshadowing what Levinas will describe as an altogether different political model. Only upon formulating this "new politics" will it be possible, arguably, to reconcile the ethical and political moments of Levinas' philosophy as well as offer a proper response to the critiques of Dussel and Gauthier/Eubank.

This new politics would no longer be founded, as is indicated by the problem of the Third, on the neutralization of the exilic character of the other and the consequential interruption of ethics, but rather would be structured as the welcoming of precisely this exiled other in an act of generosity attuned to the original event of ethics. But this welcoming act of generosity must be still made explicit. How does such an act constitute the passage from the ethical to the political? How is a shared space created through this act? And, more importantly, how does this shared space differ from the one opened up by the Third? Indeed, the space opened up by the Third is one of coexistence, whereby the other finds her disturbing character and exile neutralized in her integration into the world of the self. Levinas, however, will distinguish between "coexistence" and "welcoming" of the other. But what is, one might ask, the difference between the coexistence and the welcoming of the other? Indeed, both seem to open up a shared space between the self and the other. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the shared space opened up by generosity and the one opened up by the interruption of generosity. It is this difference that we would like to analyze at this time. First, however, we must come to understand how generosity constitutes in Levinas the key to the passage from the ethical to the political.

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Levinas describes the movement of generosity as putting "an end to power and emprise. This is positively produced as the possession of a world I can bestow as a gift on the Other—that is, as a presence before a face" (TI 50). In other words, the presence of the other within the world of the self is possible only through the act of generosity. What the concept of the Third achieved—the co-presence of the other with the self within the political space—is here achieved by the act of generosity. It is the latter which constitutes the end of the exiled and destitute other and her welcoming into the realm of the self thus allowing for an objective rapport to take place. Thus, the other is not left to her exile, but rather, is welcomed, cared for, responded to through the concrete action of generosity. The "liberating praxis" yearned for by Dussel is in fact already present within Levinas' political thought through the act of generosity. The other is not left to her exile, but calls for a response on the part of the self, calls for an end to that exile and a welcoming into the realm of the self.

This action of hospitality is what, in turn, allows for the opening up of a "shared space" prerequisite to the political. Indeed, the welcoming movement of generosity is not a movement whereby the other is integrated into the world of the self. Rather, it operates a transformative effect on the world of the self, opening it into a shared space thus paving the way to the political realm. The act of generosity in Levinas consists then in much more than the mere encounter with the other. Such an act has an effect on space, transforms space as it hereto was structured. Levinas describes this transformation as follows: "Things acquire a rational signification, and not only one of simple usage, because an other is associated with my relations with them. In designating a thing I designate it to the Other. The act of designating modifies my relation of enjoyment and possession with things, places the things in the perspective of the other" (TI 209). In other words, through the act of generosity, the world which hereto entirely revolved around the self, is opened up as a shared space thereby inaugurating the very reality of public space necessary to the political.

The transition to the ethical *non-lieu* to the public space of the political is, however, ensured without sacrificing the exilic character of the other. The welcomed other is not the integrated other. She is not integrated into the world of the self, thereby losing her exilic character, but rather, the world of the self is opened up unto the other. The other remains other. She is welcomed, cared for, loved, but not assimilated or integrated within the realm of the self thereby losing her disruptive and transcendent character. The hospitality of the other is thus, as Derrida would put it, "unconditional"[26] inasmuch as it does not entail that the other sacrifice her otherness to be welcomed within the realm of the

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same. And as such, the presence of the other within the shared space retains an element of risk. Her otherness, inasmuch as it is never assimilated, retains its full potential for disruption and of putting into question of the self.[27] But as such, the shared space is never allowed to close itself back onto the self and as such, it remains an open space, it retains its full character as a shared space. The exilic character of the other can therefore be welcomed but never integrated. Were it to lose its exilic character, the shared space would be ever under the threat of closing back onto the self's interests and comfort zones. It is thus the presence of the unassimilated, albeit welcomed, other, which ensures the preservation of the shared space as such.

A genuine society is then not, for Levinas, one in which the other and the self coexist in peaceful harmony but rather where their differences remain and with them the possibility of disturbance and threat to the political order. It is in this sense that, for Levinas, genuine society is pluralistic—made up of the self and an other who refuses totalization, who disturbs and remains resolutely exiled from the scope of totality.[28] Only then does one escape the regression to the preethical egoistic reign of the self. Society is thus not structured as totality, as is implied in the event of the Third, but as "non-coincidence" (TI 214). It is only inasmuch as there is a noncoincidence, a nonintegration to the whole on the part of the other that there can be account of a genuine society. In that sense, the dimension of the exiled and disturbing other must ever be preserved if society is to maintain its original meaning and not be integrated into coexistence with the self as is implied by the moment of the Third. Indeed, only by preserving and protecting the dimension of otherness in a given society, will that society continue to survive *qua* society, that is as a shared world, and not contract back into the world of a single ego or self. *Therein* lies the essence of the social bond.

The political is here ensured not as the interruption of ethics and of the disruption of the other, but as a response to that very disturbance through the act of generosity. The exile of the other is neither assimilated nor neutralized as in the thematic of the Third but welcomed and protected within the political realm. From there it is easy to imagine the kind of institutions which could emerge from this conception of the political: Institutions which would no longer solely protect individual rights, but the rights of the *other.* Levinas speaks to this effect when he situates the concern for human rights as "a vocation outside the state, disposing in a political society of a kind of extraterritoriality, like that of prophecy in the face of the political powers of the Old Testament, a vigilance totally different from political intelligence, a lucidity not limited to yielding

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before the formalism of universality" (OS 122). Only when the institutions see themselves founded on a concern for the other and remain attuned to the voice of that other, will the political realm retain its openness and its essential character as a shared space. Only as the political realm retains this "vigilance" and "lucidity" to the voice and face of the other will it escape the crystallization upon an unhealthy "formalism" detrimental to both the self and the other.

We can now see how Levinas' "new politics" would profoundly differ from the liberal model. In his essay on the philosophy of Hitlerism, Levinas mentions the problems inherent within the liberal political model and wonders whether we must not "ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve authentic dignity for the human subject" (PH, prefatory note). And indeed, as observed by Bernasconi, while "classical liberal social contract theory highlights the rights or property thereby securing the home or domicile which guarantees the independence of the private realm" it at the "same time ignores those who do not have a home: The homeless and of course the refugees."[29] We have seen, however, the problem that is posed by the liberal model's founding itself on the need to protect the rights of the self. Such a model, according to Levinas, does not forge an authentic social bond inasmuch as the latter necessitates a rupture of the self's emprise on the world and an opening of its world to the other. The liberal model bypasses this moment altogether and as such, can only constitute the appearance of a social bond. A genuine social bond, according to Levinas, can only be founded on an awakening on the part of the self to an other and on a sensitivity to that other. As such, a genuine form of the political is founded not on the need to protect the self, as in the liberal model, but on the contrary, on the need to protect the other.

We can now come to a clear picture of Levinas' "new politics" as solicited by Dussel. Such a politics, while founded on exile, does not exclude the notion of space or property as thought by Gauthier/Eubanks. However, this space is transfigured in the Levinassian model as a "shared space." Space and property have meaning only inasmuch as they are shared, as they become the *lieu* of hospitality. Levinas states the following in his analysis of the dwelling: "The chosen home is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other, metaphysics" (TI 172). Levinas does then articulate a "politics of place."[30] But space has a wholly new signification for Levinas than for the liberal model. While in the liberal model, space was understood as that which belongs to the self, as the *lieu* of the self's possessions and dwelling, in Levinas, space is transfigured into the

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"shared space" of hospitality. Space has meaning only inasmuch as it is shared. Indeed, for Levinas, there is in fact no concept of objective space before the moment of generosity whereby the world emerges as an objective, shared space. Thus, space is necessary, but it is sanctified as a space of welcome and not as a territorial or tribal possession. Indeed, only such a view of space as the site of hospitality can ensure the coexistence of a society upon it. The welcoming of the stranger is for that matter the very foundation of the social bond. It is essential to it and not accidental. Society rests on this act of generosity and hospitality whereby the shared space essential to the political is opened up.

In this particular understanding of the social bond, Levinas reconnects with the ancient Hebrew commemoration of exile as an act serving to safeguard society. We remember the Biblical injunction given just before the Hebrews were to settle down as a society in the Promised Land: "You shall love the stranger for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt" (Deut. 10.19 NIV). The obscurity of this command is illuminated in the light of Levinassian analyses: We love the exiled for she is the guardian of otherness, and therefore the guardian of humanity within a particular society. It is this other who reminds us that society is much more than the protection of common possessions, as in the liberal model. Rather, society is what emerges out of an original act of hospitality. It is this gesture of hospitality whereby the exiled other is welcomed into a shared space which constitutes the origin of society and thus its very life force. The influx of exiled among us makes possible the constant repetition of this original gesture of hospitality, thereby constantly preserving the openness of society and preventing its contraction upon closed egoisms. It is these daily acts of generosity toward the exiled among us which ultimately constitute the glue of the social bond. In other words, a society is only as strong as its respect of the stranger dwelling within its walls; to forget the sacred duty to the stranger is to consequently endanger the very vitality of a given society.[31]

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4

The Exile of Love

Introduction

We now leave the wider issues of society and approach the intimate realm of love. In our preceding chapter, we saw that the social bond rests on the dimension of exile. Likewise, for Levinas, the intimate bond of love shall have to do with exile. And yet, love has been on the contrary, understood in the history of philosophy as the soul's quest for a home. For Plato, the movement of love describes precisely this quest and signifies, consequently, the end of the soul's exile in the world. In *Symposium,* Plato describes Eros as the quest for a soul mate and a return to an original state of wholeness wherein the fragmented, lost, and exiled soul finds a home.[1] Levinas himself recognizes this dimension of Eros when he describes the lover and, more precisely, the woman, as a fundamental act of hospitality and as an opening up, within the realm of being, of a home for the self.[2] The Platonic influence is here obvious with love being defined in this context as a return to oneself and to an origin or a home forgotten by the soul's wanderings in the world. In such a context, exile is perceived as a negative state of being, a loveless state. Exile signifies solitude and is overcome by the finding of one's soul mate and forgotten other half. Love therefore neutralizes the exile, overcomes the exile and gives the soul a home. Our thesis which seeks to establish a connection between love and exile in Levinas can thus seem uncharacteristic of his philosophy.

Yet, while Levinas acknowledges the Platonic thesis of love as the finding of a home, he does not remain there. For Levinas, exile is a central characteristic of love and cannot be done away with. If the partner—more specifically the woman—can be experienced as one's soul mate, she is much more than that. Woman is also, according to Levinas, an other; she also presents herself as exiled from the world of man. But this otherness of woman will, to the reader's surprise, be described in terms radically and *intentionally* different from that of the destitute Other at the origin of the ethical encounter. The encounter with

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woman does *not* occur, according to Levinas on the ethical level. On several occasions, Levinas mentions the woman as not appearing to the self as a "face" (TI 258) or as a "person" (TI 263). Her otherness is explicitly distinguished from the otherness of the disruptive other as not carrying its connotation of "height" (TI 155) or "transcendence" (TI 254). What are we to make of this? Levinas' views on the status of woman seems to betray his central preoccupation with otherness and respect. How are we then to understand this preethical status of woman?

This description of woman as unable to rise to the status of the Absolute Other in Levinas thus raises a number of questions. And indeed, the dichotomy between Eros and ethics in Levinas' descriptions of the rapport with the woman has been the object of a number of critiques on the part of commentators. Catherine Chalier will interrogate this dichotomy and ask why woman is not relegated to the same height as the Absolute Other in Levinas. Is there not a possibility for the erotic encounter to take on an ethical structure?[3] While Levinas admits that woman may be encountered ethically as a person, the question arises as to why woman *qua* woman may not be encountered on an ethical level? Perpich makes the same critique of Levinas' relegating of woman to the "silent language" (TI 155) of enigma. When one knows the importance that discourse takes in Levinas' ethics, one cannot help but be disturbed with this exclusion of woman from language. Inasmuch as discourse constitutes, in Levinas, the very structure of the ethical encounter, woman's exclusion from discourse amounts to her exclusion from ethics or from an ethical mode of encounter. What is then to prevent her sinking back into the status of mere object of enjoyment? According to Perpich, Levinas' account of the otherness of woman fails inasmuch as this otherness never reaches its full accomplishment in ethics.[4]

But we need to further understand what Levinas means by the specific otherness of woman before we can judge them to be derogatory. This chapter will attempt to understand in what way the exile of woman from the self's world is different from the exile of the disruptive other. Our analyses will then have to understand whether or not the encounter with woman necessarily takes place outside of the ethical realm. While the erotic encounter clearly does not leave much room for an ethical encounter, we shall see that its structure nevertheless contains "all the possibilities of the transcendent relationship with the Other" (TI 155). This is incidentally Tina Chanter's concession to Levinas' descriptions of woman. According to Chanter, although Levinas seems to exclude the possibility of an ethical encounter with woman *qua* woman, his analyses nevertheless open up the possibility of such an encounter.[5] We shall see that both Catherine Chalier

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and Claire Katz intuit the ethical possibilities inherent in Levinas' description of the erotic encounter and go even so far as to show the woman in Levinas to have a transcendental function with regards to the ethical dimension.[6]

Our work will attempt to show these ethical possibilities inherent to the erotic encounter with woman. First, however, we will attempt to describe how Levinassian descriptions follow the Platonic line of woman as soul mate and hospitality to the self. We shall see that already at this level of Levinas' analyses, there are indications of woman opening up ethical possibilities for the self. This will be the view of both Tina Chanter and Catherine Chalier. We shall then explore the exilic structure of the erotic relationship as well as try to understand the nature of the passage from Eros to ethics. For this, however, it will be necessary to go beyond the Levinassian corpus to the interpretative work of Luce Irigaray. It is her work on the Levinassian caress which will inspire our descriptions of the possibility of such a passage from Eros to ethics in Levinas. We shall see that this passage from Eros to responsibility will be facilitated by an exile, this time on the part of the self toward the woman it loves.

I Love as nostalgia

Levinas' analyses on love start by acknowledging the Platonic line of thought on love as a return to self, as a quest for a soul mate. In a direct reference to Plato's *Symposium*,[7] Levinas observes: "Love as a relation with the Other can be reduced to this fundamental immanence, be divested of all transcendence, seek but a connatural being, a sister soul, present itself as incest. The myth Aristophanes tells in Plato's *Symposium,* in which love reunites the two halves of one sole being, interprets the adventure as a return to self" (TI 254). For Plato, love is understood as a quest for one's other half, as a quest for a home. Love helps the self to find itself, to discover itself through contact with the other. Without the other, the self remains exiled in the world, thirsting for a part of itself which it feels is missing and hungering for an origin which remains resolutely elusive.

Thus, in Plato, one loves the other because the other is similar to us, because she reflects who we are. But this view holds a number of problems. In the Platonic context, love is nothing more than a return to the self. Love is nothing more to finding one's soul mate, one's alter ego. The emphasis is placed on the self. It is a quest for the one who is *like* us, for the one who completes *us,* that is sought in the Platonic view of love. Thus, according to Levinas, the Platonic description of the erotic intention does not perform a transcendent movement, but remains

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a "fundamental immanence" (TI 254). The self never genuinely comes out of itself toward an other, but returns, rather, to its own self through the movement of love. The other is nothing more than a being who completes the self and who fulfills the self. Love is nothing more than a homecoming, nothing more than recovering one's lost identity. Love in the Platonic philosophy does not constitutes a genuine journey of transcendence, but like the Greek hero Ulysses, only seeks to return back to its own origin and self.

Levinas himself acknowledges this structure of return in the erotic movement. For Levinas, the erotic intention is essentially a movement of appropriation and of assimilation whereby the other is *enjoyed*. There is thus an intimate connection between the movement of Eros and the general movement of "enjoyment" described at length in Levinas' philosophy. For Levinas, the structure of enjoyment consists precisely in this thirst for otherness as that which is capable of fulfilling the self's deepest emotional and physical needs. Consequently, enjoyment constitutes an ambiguous movement which aims for otherness only to ultimately assimilate and neutralize it: "The enjoyment justifies this interpretation. It brings into relief the ambiguity of an event situated at the limit of immanence and transcendence. This desire—a movement ceaselessly cast forth, an interminable movement toward a future never future enough—is broken and satisfied as the most egoist and crudest of needs" (TI 254). Enjoyment constitutes a movement whereby the otherness of the other is assimilated into the self, fulfills a need or desire. Levinas speaks to that effect of the need for a woman's love as a "sublime hunger": "For we speak lightly of desires satisfied, or of sexual needs, or even of moral and religious needs. Love itself is thus taken to be the satisfaction of a sublime hunger" (TI 34). The hunger is sublime, but it remains a hunger, a need to be satisfied. When one loves in that way, when the other is someone who satisfies a need or a hunger, we are, according to Levinas, in the context of enjoyment.

These descriptions, however, reduce the other to nothing more than an object of enjoyment, an object that we seek to possess, to conquer. This is incidentally Irigaray's critique of the reduction of Eros to the enjoyment of the self: "In such a phenomenology . . . the function of sexuality as a relationship-to . . . and the role of perception as a means to acceding to the other as other" is overlooked.[8] The transcendence of the other is reduced to the immanence of the self. There is no sense, in the context of enjoyment, of an exteriority or objectivity distinct from the self: Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same (TI 111). In the context of enjoyment, therefore, there is no genuine otherness. Everything is reduced to "me," to my needs, to

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my desires. Everything revolves around the self. The other, be it the bread I eat, the air I breathe, the person I love, is transmuted "into the same" (TI 111). The self remains at the center of the relationship. The other is only important and recognized inasmuch as she brings satisfaction of the self's needs and desires. While there is an obvious part of enjoyment in the erotic relationship, it cannot account for the totality of the structure of Eros.

Yet, Levinas himself distinguishes Eros from enjoyment in that, in Eros, the transcendence of the other, unlike that of other objects, is maintained: "Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other, of the beloved. An enjoyment of the transcendent almost contradictory in terms" (TI 254–5). While the erotic relationship is made up, largely, of enjoyment, its structure cannot be reduced to that of enjoyment. The otherness of the woman, unlike the bread I eat, or the air I breathe, can never be fully assimilated or ingurgitated. Levinas speaks of this specific unassimilated otherness of woman in terms of "extraterritoriality": "But the interiority of the home is made of extraterritoriality in the midst of the elements of enjoyment with which life is nourished" (TI 150). There is thus an essential difference between woman and other objects of enjoyment. While woman does satisfy the self's sexual needs to a certain degree, she does not compare with the other objects of enjoyment. She remains "extra-territorial" to the elemental world—to the world of objects of enjoyment. But what kind of "extra-territoriality" is Levinas referring to here? If woman does not belong to the world of enjoyment, to what dimension does she belong to? What distinguishes woman from the other objects of enjoyment and what gives her this specific character of extra-territoriality?

The extra-territoriality of woman reminds one of the exiled character of the other described in our first chapter. As Levinas' choice of language suggests, the woman, like the destitute other does not belong to the world of the self. For Levinas, the destitute other is described in terms of an exile with regard to the world of the self. She is never "wholly in my site" (TI 39). She escapes the grasp of the self, its understanding, and constitution of a world. The other, in his or her mystery always escapes the self's conceptualizations and categories. She remains exiled from the world of the self. To describe the woman as extra-territorial is to echo these descriptions of the destitute other. Like the destitute other, the woman is, according to Levinas, "extra-territorial." She is therefore, like the destitute other, never reduced to the territory or the world of the self. The extra-territoriality of the woman must, however, be distinguished from the exile of the destitute other. There are several important differences between the two.

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Contrarily to the destitute other's exile, the exilic character of woman is not one which is experienced by the self as coming from a transcendent dimension, an otherwise than being. Rather, the exile, or extra-territoriality of woman is manifest and is part of this very being. It is not u-topian like the otherness of the destitute other who always remains "not wholly in my site" (TI 39), but rather is experienced *within* the immanence of the world of enjoyment of the self. According to Levinas, this extra-territoriality is experienced "in the midst of the elements of enjoyment from which life is nourished" (TI 150). Woman is thus encountered as part of the world of the self and not as transcendent. She is manifest from within the very immanence of the world as extra-territorial.

The otherness of woman is also wholly different from that of the destitute other in that it is *familiar.* Whereas the otherness of the destitute other is experienced by the self as "infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign" (TI 194), that of the woman is experienced by the self as familiar: "The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not *the you* of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the *thou* of familiarity" (TI 155). Levinas is here referring to the Buberian distinction between the "you" and the "thou."[9] "You" translates a formal understanding of the other, whereas "thou" is the familiar form of addressing the other. Woman is here addressed in this familiar form. She is not the outsider, the distant one, the stranger whom one addresses formally. She is the close one, the kin, the familiar one. Her otherness must be distinguished from the destitute other in that, unlike the destitute other, she is not experienced as a "stranger" or a "foreigner," but as someone familiar to the self, as someone *like* the self.

Furthermore, unlike the destitute other who intrudes violently on the world of the self, the familiarity of woman is, in turn, not experienced as disruptive. Her otherness does not negate the self, does not call it into question. It is, on the contrary, experienced by the self as gentleness: "This extraterritoriality has a positive side. It is produced in the gentleness or the warmth of intimacy, which is not a subjective state of mind, but an event in the oecumenia of being a delightful 'lapse' of the ontological order. By virtue of its intentional structure gentleness comes to the separated being from the Other. The Other precisely *reveals* himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness" (TI 150). Like the destitute other, the feminine otherness affects the world of the self, but not in a disruptive way. It affects it as gentleness. But what does Levinas mean by gentleness? How does gentleness affect the world of the self? According to Levinas, this gentleness is experienced by the self as a "lapse of the ontological order." In other words, the feminine other creates a

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niche within the ontological order, within the external world of possessions and of conquest. She opens up a human space for man within the elemental world, within the precarious world of enjoyment and of conquest. In other words: she welcomes man unto herself: "This peaceable welcome is produced primordially in the gentleness of the feminine face, in which the separated being can recollect itself, because of which it *inhabits,* and in its dwelling accomplishes separation" (TI 150–1). Unlike the destitute other, the feminine other does not alienate the self from its world, does not expulse it from its world. There is no calling into question of the self's centrality in a world available for possession and mastery. Rather, the woman opens, from within that world, a dimension of humanity, of familiarity where the self can feel at home.

Man thus experiences this event of hospitality as a coming home—as a coming back to his own self, to his own forgotten humanity—and not as an expulsion as when faced with the destitute other: "To dwell is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality of a being cast into existence as a stone one casts behind oneself; it is a recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome" (TI 156). This coming home of man to woman is, in turn, very different from the "at home" of man's possession of the world. In speaking of the home opened up by the woman, Levinas distinguishes it from the "at home" of possession; it "is not a simple echo of possession" (TI 170). While the "at home" of possession does permit the self to find some rest within the elemental world, the home opened up by woman is not structured in the same way. The "at home" of man is the universe created by the sweat of his brow, in an act of possession of the world. Here the home offered by the woman constitutes the reversal of this act of possession into the unexpected event of hospitality. She is not captured or possessed by him but welcomes him unto her. According to Levinas, the external world of enjoyment, possession, and conquest is inverted by the presence of the woman into the internal world of habitation and welcome thereby awakening man to his own humanity, to the dimension of interiority.[10]

In this sense, the welcoming by the woman is already, according to Tina Chanter, a lesson in ethics. Here lies, according to Chanter, "the radical potentiality of the feminine to break up the categories of being and to create the possibility of ethics."[11] In other words, it is woman who first awakens man to the possibility of an otherwise than being, of a destiny beyond that of the struggle for existence. This is incidentally also Chalier's interpretation: "Without woman, without her weakness and the intimacy of her home, man would know 'nothing of what transforms his natural life into ethics.' The reception given by

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woman in the home suggests a halt of the masculine spirit assaulted by history and to his self-dispossession in his works. Woman would therefore represent in her gentleness, the beginning of ethics."[12] According to Chalier, woman is the one who shows man that there is more to life than the mere perseverance in being, more to life than the conquest of matter. In opening up the dimension of interiority and of relationality through her welcoming of man unto herself, she reveals to him a realm other than being—the dimension of the inter-human. It is in this sense that we can understand the welcoming of woman as being proto-ethical. For the first time, the self realizes that there is more to life than possession and conquest. And, more importantly, for the first time, the self realizes that it is not alone in the world.

Yet, the self's place as center of the world is never fully called into question by the woman. Not only so, but the event of hospitality by woman remains an event centered on the self. The self is thus not only "at home" in the world of enjoyment, but "at home" in the realm opened up by the woman. As for woman, she remains there *for* man.[13] This the essence of Sikka's critique of the Levinassian descriptions of Eros: "Far from maintaining her in her alterity in the sense of granting her the right to define herself, these portraits of woman define her as the other who is needed for oneself. She is needed for both the reproduction of oneself, as in Levinas' description of the erotic, and for the spiritual progress of man."[14] Her definition is, in these passages, completely centered on her role for the self. She is there for the self, in order to enable its own "recollection," in order to open up a home for it, to help it rediscover its own humanity. There is no sense, in the passages studied above, of an identity of the woman *apart* from this role of hospitality. But is woman not more than the revelation of man to its own self? Is she not more than a home for man? Where, in the Levinassian analyses, is there an account of the otherness of woman as distinct from her role toward man? Whether she functions as an object of desire or as the primordial act of hospitality, woman is always there *for* man.[15] Woman is either assimilated by man or envelops man. In both cases, the self is the center, either as conqueror, or as guest! He is in both cases "at home."

Levinas himself acknowledges this: "The metaphysical event of transcendence—the welcome of the Other, hospitality—Desire and language—is not accomplished as love" (TI 254). But this absence of ethics in the Levinassian descriptions of the encounter with woman poses problem. Why is woman not encountered as an other apart from man? Is she not more than man's soul mate? Is she not also a stranger to man, an other for man? Thus according to Chalier, "her intimacy and gentleness do not open up the dimension of the height where the ethical unsituatable lives. . . . The feminine welcome cannot lay claim to

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being anything but a condition of ethics. . . . Is it an outrage to the thinking of the philosopher to expound, in the feminine, an ethical act?"[16] The Levinassian analyses of the encounter with woman seem here to lack a fundamental element. But we must further deepen the Levinassian descriptions. While woman does open up a home for man and is encountered as a kindred spirit, there is also, in the Levinassian analyses, a description of woman as fundamentally other and inaccessible to man.

II Love as an exile

This description of woman as fulfilling a hunger in man while at the same time escaping his grasp reveals, according to Levinas, a profound ambiguity of love: "The possibility of the Other appearing as an object of a need while retaining his alterity, or again, the possibility of enjoying the Other, of placing oneself at the same time beneath and beyond discourse—this position with regard to the interlocutor which at the same time reaches him and goes beyond him, this simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence, tangency of the avowable and the unavowable, constitutes the originality of the erotic which, in this sense, is *the equivocal* par excellence" (TI 254–5). The woman simultaneously appears as an "object of a need," as a source of enjoyment, *and* as belonging to a dimension transcending the self. She is between the "avowable" and the "unavowable," what can be revealed or given and what cannot be revealed, what remains a mystery, a secret.

This mystery of woman is, in turn, described in Levinas as an "absence" from the world of the self in terms not alien to the description of the destitute other as not "wholly in my site": "And the other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman" (TI 155). The woman is thus more than a familiar presence which opens up a home for man. She is also "discreetly an absence." But again, this absence is not experienced by the self as a traumatic event, as an event of alienation which transforms the face of his world into an inhospitable place. The absence of woman is different from that of the destitute other's in that it is "discrete"; it is imperceptible, and often goes unnoticed. More importantly, it does not disturb the self's at-home-ness. It is a gentle, nonthreatening, non-traumatic absence lived within her very presence to man and her very welcome of him.

Yet, it is precisely in this absence, that she reveals herself to man as woman. Were she only presence, she would be nothing more than an object of desire, an object among objects in the world of man. As an absence, she reveals herself

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as more than an object of desire, as containing a dimension of transcendence within her, as mystery and enigma, that is as other! Interestingly, it is precisely this absence which is expressed in what constitutes for Levinas the specifically feminine quality of "discretion": "For the intimacy of recollection to be able to be produced . . . the presence of the Other must not only be revealed in a face which breaks through its own plastic image, but must be revealed, simultaneously with this presence, in its withdrawal and in its absence. This simultaneity is not an abstract construction of dialectics, but the very essence of discretion" (TI 155). Discretion is the manifestation, within the very presence of woman in the world of man, of an absence. It is this discretion which elevates woman above being a mere object of desire and reveals, within this very availability of woman to man's desire, a dimension of otherness, of mystery, of transcendence, beyond the grasp of man.[17] Discretion constitutes, according to Levinas, the very mode of manifestation of woman *qua* woman, as an absence, a mystery, within the immanence of the world.

Thus, what distinguishes woman from the objects in the world of man, what gives her the status of being a human other and distinct from the material world, is precisely this mystery that woman carries within herself and which is manifest in discretion. Woman is thus other in that she deploys within the dimension of the externality of objects, a dimension of mystery and darkness: a dimension of exile. She is other, she is exiled with regard to the world of light. She belongs to darkness. She is mystery, she is enigma yet not in a disturbing way as the destitute other, but in a discrete, nonthreatening, non-alienating way. There is, as a consequence, always a part of her which remains hidden from man's gaze and grasp. To seek to grasp[18] or disclose[19] a woman's essence will never work, for she belongs to the enigma, she is ever exiled from the gaze and grasp of the self. But if what characterizes woman *as* a woman is this absence, this way of escaping the grasp of man, how is man to relate to her? If the essence of woman escapes man, how is he ever to connect, to encounter woman? How is he ever to reach her *essentially*?

According to Levinas, there is one way to connect with woman on an essential level, to encounter her *as* absence: through the intentionality of the caress: "The movement of the lover before this frailty to femininity, neither pure compassion nor impassiveness, indulges in compassion, is absorbed in the complacence of the caress" (TI 257). The movement capable of encountering the woman's frailty, that is, her withdrawal, her absence, is, according to Levinas a movement of touch which Levinas defines as "caress." Levinas' recourse to touch to describe the mode of encounter with an absence, or a withdrawal, is, however, unusual

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in a phenomenological context, where touch, is on the contrary regarded as the primordial moment of the constitution of objects in a world of light.[20] It is touch which makes possible, through its exploration of the world, the constitution and the phenomenalization of objects by the self.

The touch that Levinas is mentioning here is, however, structured differently than the tactile and kinesthetic movement involved in the constitution of objects. In fact, the caress constitutes, in its structure, the very inversion of the movement of cognition and possession involved in the constitution of objects: "The voluptuous in voluptuousity is not the freedom of the other tamed, objectified, reified, but his freedom untamed, which I nowise desire objectified. But it is freedom desired and voluptuous not in the clarity of the face, but in the obscurity and as though in the vice of the clandestine, or in the future that remains clandestine within discovery, and which precisely for this reason, is unfailingly profanation. Nothing is further from *Eros* than possession" (TI 265). Thus, the intentionality of the caress does not consist in objectifying or in revealing the other. It is not an intentionality of disclosure and discovery as the kinesthetic intentionality. On the contrary, the intentionality of the caress is a touch which finds itself ever thirsting for more, never satisfied, never fulfilled, never possessing: "The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips away as though it *were not yet*. It *searches,* it forages. It is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search" (TI 257–8). The caress is structured as the yearning to possess and as the incapacity, the failure to possess, to grasp. The caress, by definition, never closes upon the other, never closes its grasp, is ever seeking, ever searching the other. The caress is an intentionality which does not find what it is looking for and which lives, which gains its impulse, its movement from this very failure.

Levinas understands this failure, however, in a positive sense as a "movement unto the invisible" (TI 258). The caress, in failing to grasp and to hold, initiates the self to that which is above it, to that which transcends it. The caress thus, in its very failure to fulfill the self leads it out of itself to hereto unexplored horizons, constitutes a journey of the self unto the unknown, to a dimension outside of its world, to an exilic dimension. While touch was once understood as the origin of the constitution of material objects, it now leads to the threshold of the invisible. Yet, in doing so, it never leaves the sensible dimension to which it pertains: "The caress, like contact, is sensibility. But the caress transcends the sensible" (TI 257). The caress does not constitute a metaphysical movement which escapes the world, but which finds, discovers, *within* the sensible world, the metaphysical

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dimension: "It is not that it would feel beyond the felt, further than the senses, that it would seize upon a sublime food" (TI 257). The caress remains in touch with the sensible world, does not seek to elevate man above it, to transcend it. Yet, this kind of touch, while remaining sensible, brings the self to the frontiers of the invisible. It is in this sense that woman, in her very immanence within the world of the self, can be understood as initiating man to the metaphysical dimension, to the invisible. Woman is the being who, from within the world possessed and mastered by the self, points to another dimension, a dimension of transcendence, of otherness, over and beyond the self.

It is in this sense that one can understand the erotic movement of the caress to contain a reference to ethics. Interestingly, Levinas will himself further develop such a connection between Eros and ethics in a later work entitled "Language and Proximity." In this article, Eros comes to be experienced as an ethical event of proximity whereby the other is encountered as a face: "In reality, the caress of the sensible awakens in a contact and tenderness, that is, proximity, awakens in the touched only starting with the human skin, a face, only with the approach of a neighbor" (LP 118). This is one of the first instances where Levinas will come to acknowledge a connection between Eros and ethics reinterpreting the hereto problematic notion of a "language without words" in an ethical sense: "This relationship of proximity, this contact unconvertible into a noetico-noematic structure, in which every transmission of messages, whatever be those messages, is already established, is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication . . . proximity, beyond intentionality, is the relationship with the neighbor in the moral sense of the term" (LP 119). Although Levinas does not develop further this connection between the ethical event of proximity of the face with the "language without words" which had hereto characterized the erotic relation, the possibility is opened for such a connection.

The possibility exists then *in potentia* to understand the erotic relationship as one of the modes of encounter of the other *qua* other. Such is, according to Ewa Ziarek, "the most original contribution of Levinas' work to the contemporary debates on the body in the fact that it enables the elaboration of the ethical significance of flesh and by extension opens a possibility of an ethics of Eros. Even though this possibility is never realized in Levinas' own work, and even though his own conception of Eros and femininity remains entangles in both patriarchal and metaphysical traditions, the necessary interdependence of responsibility and incarnation paves the way . . . to the feminist ethics of sexual difference."[21] In other words, according to Ziarek, Levinas appears as

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one of the pioneers of an ethics of the body or of the erotic relation which no longer subsumes it to abstract ethical categories, but describes it as containing intrinsical ethical possibilities. It is in this sense that the relationship with the woman takes on, according to Katz, a "transcendental" character with regard to ethics. Woman, according to Katz, "is the condition of the possibility of ethics."[22] And as such, the encounter with the woman can be understood as containing a reference to ethics. For the first time, man experiences a being that escapes his grasp, a mystery, an enigma fringing on the Invisible, a dimension of exile.

Yet, while the woman does contain within her essence a dimension of enigma and of mystery, her otherness is nevertheless not commensurate with the dimension of "height" and "transcendence" reserved to the destitute other: "But habitation is not yet the transcendence of language. The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not *the you* of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the *thou* of familiarity: a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret" (TI 155). This relegation of woman to the sphere of silence raises, however, a number of questions. For example, according to Diane Perpich, the retrenchment of woman in silence constitutes a highly problematic move on the part of our philosopher: "The feminine other says nothing; she does not speak during the erotic encounter. And although this is consistent with the descriptions of the feminine as withdrawal, mystery and absence, this silence is nonetheless eerie, even as it begins to seem all too familiar."[23] This silence is all the more problematic that it testifies, in Levinas, to a certain facelessness of woman in the erotic context. She is, according to Levinas, "beyond object and face" (TI 258). While one understands perfectly how woman is "beyond object," we do not follow Levinas anymore when he says that she is also "beyond face." Does this mean that woman is no more than a body, lacking the individuality and faculty of expression belonging to a face? Levinas seems to infer this inasmuch as, for him, "The caress aims at neither a person nor a thing" (TI 259). But what then does Levinas mean when he says that woman is "beyond face," and worse yet, that she loses her status as *a person!*

It seems that, although the woman can well be encountered as a transcendent other in nonerotic contexts, this mode of encounter is, according to Levinas, "reserved," set aside, during the erotic encounter for this "delightful lapse in being, and the source of gentleness" (TI 155) to occur. But in its bypassing of the dimension of the face, the erotic intention never genuinely encounters woman. Levinas himself admits this incapacity of Eros to ever reach the woman's transcendence. The woman remains "absence" (TI 155), the erotic

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intention "seizes upon nothing" (TI 257), it reveals a "less than nothing" (TI 258). In other words, although the Levinassian description of the caress accounts for the transcendence of woman, for her infinite capacity to escape possession, it speaks also of a deep incapacity to connect with her, to genuinely relate to her. The erotic relation remains, in Levinas' own terms "negative" (TI 262). It only accounts negatively for the incapacity to possess the woman; it never describes the possibility of positively connecting or relating with woman. This is the essence of Irigaray's critique of Levinas: "The beloved woman falls back into infancy or beyond, while the male lover rises up to the greatest heights. Impossible match. Chain of links connecting from one end to the other, a movement of ascent in which neither is wed, except in the inversion of their reflections . . . No 'human' flesh is celebrated in that *eros*. . . . He 'takes communion' without benefit of rites or words."[24] Thus, although Levinas does mention that it is possible to encounter woman as a face, that the erotic relationship contains the possibility of an ethical relationship with woman as a person, this possibility is never actualized within the erotic relationship. As a *woman,* susceptible to be encountered erotically, she does not gain the status of personhood.

This is one of the fundamental problems in Levinas' descriptions of the erotic relationship. While it accounts for a certain mode of transcendence of woman within the erotic relation, it never accounts for her as an ethical subject or person. This is in part due to limitations in the way that Levinas thinks the "caress." While the caress in Levinas' philosophy is structured as the very incapacity to possess (TI 265), it remains thought from the perspective of possession. The caress remains thought in the categories of possession and grasp. And as such, the caress is articulated to a centralized self. Therefore, according to Diane Perpich, "the caress is a relationship to the other in which the relationship does not diminish the distance between the terms and the distance does not prevent the possibility of a relationship. As such, it seems to offer a perfect model of transcendence. And yet, we can question whether the transcendence of the caress is, as it were, transcendent enough. Doesn't the caress inevitably include the possibility of the self's return to itself in sensuous enjoyment?"[25] While the caress constitutes a movement unto transcendence and mystery, it remains a movement initiated on the part of the self and, as such, does not constitute a genuine movement of transcendence.

There is, however, a wholly different way to think of the caress, not as an attempt (failed or not) to possess, but as a *gift* of the self to the other. Such is Irigaray's reworking of the caress. For Irigaray, the caress is much more than a

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failed attempt to possess the other, it can become an "offering of consciousness": "Thus, the gesture of the one who caresses has nothing to do with ensnarement, possession or submission of the freedom of the other who fascinates me in his body. Instead, it becomes an offering of consciousness, a gift of intention and of word addressed to the concrete presence of the other, to his natural and historical particularities."[26] Irigaray agrees with Levinas that the caress is not an act of possession or of grasp. The caress, far to the contrary, testifies to the ungraspable character of the other. Like Levinas, Irigaray situates the caress as a movement of nonpossession and of exploration. However, unlike Levinas, Irigaray sees in the caress a positivity hereto unforeseen by our philosopher: The caress can become "a gift."[27] In other words, for Irigaray, far from emerging from a desire to possess, the caress can become *offering* of the self to the other. But what is this offering to consist in? What gift is given through the caress?

According to Irigaray, the caress becomes a gift when its intention is reversed from one seeking pleasure for oneself to one that seeks to give pleasure to the other: "The caress is an awakening to intersubjectivity, to a touching between us which is neither passive nor active; it is an awakening of gestures, of perceptions which are at the same time acts, intentions, emotions. This does not mean that they are ambiguous, but rather, that they are attentive to the person who touches and the one who is touched, to the two subjects who touch each other."[28] It is this attentiveness to the other, to her feelings, to her sensations which constitutes, according to Irigaray, the caress as gift. Such an intention stems no more from a self-centered desire to possess, or even a desire to explore, but from a self willing to give to the other. Irigaray speaks of this gift of the caress as that which "gives the other to himself, to herself": "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."[29] The caress is here no more concerned with either possession or exploration but with a gift which, in its attentiveness to the other, gives the other back to herself, awakens her all over again to her essential humanity, to her *you*-ness in the Buberian sense, beneath the everyday persona and role that society necessitate she plays.

The caress becomes in this sense the very *expression* of an attention given to the other, to her feelings, her sensations, her humanity. Far from constituting a "silent language" (TI 155) the caress is here understood as a "word": "The caress is a gesture-word which goes beyond the horizon or the distance of intimacy with the self. This is true for the one who is caressed and touched,

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for the one who is approached within the sphere of his or her incarnation, but it is also true for the one who caresses, for the one who touches and accepts distancing the self from the self through this gesture."[30] The structure of discourse and language which for Levinas was hereto reserved to the ethical encounter with the face, is now given to the caress. The caress, as a distanciation of the self from the self, as a gift of the self to the other, rises here to the status of language. We saw in our first chapter that for Levinas the act of generosity was language in that it created a distance between the self and its world, and offered the world to the other; it designated the world *to* the other, and, insodoing opened an ethical space for the other within my own world. Language, for Levinas is therefore primordially an ethical act which signifies toward the welcoming of otherness. Irigaray is here transposing the Levinassian conception of language to the erotic encounter and to the movement of the caress. Likewise, inasmuch as it is experienced as a distanciation of the self with itself, as a gift of the self to the other, as an *expression* of the self's love and respect, the caress can be understood as language, as an expression, a "word" of love and respect. And as such, the caress takes on a whole new meaning. It is no more the "silent language" of exploration which inevitably fails to connect with the woman, but an expression of love which, as such, encounters her on a deep personal level.

But this brings us to a veritable *inversion* of the Levinassian definition of the caress. Far from emerging from a centralized self, the caress can testify to a decentralization of a self willing to give of itself to the other rather than seeking to possess that other. Far from negating discourse and dialogue, the caress can thus initiate it, can enable a deep connection to form between the self and the woman. For, as we have seen, only when the self has been de-centered, is a place possible for the other to exist *qua* other; and only then is a genuine dialogue and relationship possible. Irigaray's contribution is to have shown that such a de-centering of the self is possible even within the erotic encounter, even within enjoyment otherwise structured as completely centered on the self. Thus, the erotic relationship does not exclude the possibility to connect with the woman on an ethical level. The caress takes on, in this context, a whole new structure: That of an encounter which, within the primordially self-centered realm of enjoyment and Eros, redeems her as a person and as a face. To the "inversion of the face" (TI 262) described by Levinas corresponds an inversion of the caress whereby the face can be again apprehended as such, the personhood of woman can once more be recovered. But only at the price of an inversion of the caress, stemming no longer from a desire (failed or not) to

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possess, but as a gift, a generosity of the self to the other, whereby the structure of enjoyment is inverted from a self-centered endeavor to a self-less gift of pleasure to the other.

To become dialogue, the caress must hence emerge from a de-centered self, which puts the other before itself and the pleasure of that other before its own. It is not enough for the caress to constitute a journey of the self into voluptuousness. The caress at that level still remains articulated to a centralized self. Only when it has inverted its intention, seeking no longer to draw pleasure from the other, but to give pleasure to the other, does the caress recover its genuine exilic intention and initiate a genuine encounter with woman *qua* woman. And only as such does the caress enable, according to Irigaray, an "alliance" between the self and the woman: "I seek an alliance between who you are and who I am, in myself and in yourself. I seek a complex marriage between my interiority and that of a *you* which cannot be replaced by me, which is always outside of me, but thanks to which my interiority exists."[31] The exile of the caress, whereby the self relinquishes all selfish attempts at enjoyment and proceeds rather to give pleasure to another, thus makes possible a genuine alliance between the self and the other. And as such, the exile of the caress makes possible a hospitality within the realm of the self for woman *qua* woman.

Consequently, it is only through such an exile of the self, by which it gives of itself to the woman, that she can be manifest as an other and as a face, that she can be welcomed unto the self as a woman. The only way the woman takes on the traits of the face is for the self to welcome her, to relinquish its freedom, its independence, its possessions, its time, its spontaneity. The only way the woman can be encountered as a person is for the self to give her not only its home but its very self. Only when the self is capable of exiling itself toward the woman, of giving itself to her, will her essence as a face and as a person be disclosed. Exile is thus the mode by which the self discloses woman to herself as a person and as a face. Just as the hospitality on the part of woman disclosed to man his essence as an interiority and as belonging to the dimension of humanity, the exile on the part of the self now discloses to woman her essence as a face and as a person. It is thus the caress inverted into gift, into generosity and exile on the part of the self which marks the passage from erotic to ethical, which marks the passage of woman from faceless to having a Face: "No human or inter-human relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home" (TI 172). Thus, according to Irigaray, "a new birth comes about, a new dawn for the beloved. And the lover. The openness of a face which has not yet been sculpted."[32]

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This in turn leads to a wholly new conception of the home. The home is no longer, in this context, the place where the self is "at home," center of the world, master and possessor of the universe. On the contrary, the home is now connected to hospitality, to a receiving of otherness and to a contraction of the self in a welcoming stance: "Recollection in a home open to the Other—hospitality—is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent" (TI 172). This transformation of the self's egoistic at-home-ness in the world into its capacity to welcome otherness within itself is brought about by an inversion of the erotic intention from possession to gift. It is only when this inversion has taken place, when the self has experienced this exile from within the very context of enjoyment and Eros which otherwise constitute primordial modes of at-home-ness of the self, will the self be ready to found a genuine home. Only when the self shows itself capable of giving of itself, of putting another first, will it be capable of perceiving the woman who shares its home as a face in herself and not only as one who serves the desires and needs of the self. The home thus is no longer a mere space for the self to accumulate its possessions, but an oasis of humanity, of welcome, and of hospitality. The hospitality offered by woman by which man recovers his lost humanity can thus be completed by a hospitality offered by man by which woman recovers her status as a person and as an other. A genuine home as an oasis of humanity emerges from this double act of welcome, of dispossession, of disengagement on the part of woman, but also on the part of man: "The chosen home is the opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering which has made it possible, which is not a *less* with respect to installation, but the surplus of a relationship with the Other, metaphysics" (TI 172).

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5

Truth in Exile

Introduction

From the love of a person, we now proceed to the love of truth. In Platonic philosophy, this was considered the highest form of love. The love of another served only in Plato as an intermediary stage to the love of truth.[1] Interestingly, the journey to truth again takes, in Platonic philosophy, the structure of an exile from the material world to the spiritual realm.[2] Levinas follows this line of interpretation and also speaks of the quest for truth in terms of a journey *beyond* the world of the self: "But the critical essence of knowing also leads us beyond the knowledge of the *cogito*" (TI 85). Truth is here described as that which awaits the self when it has resolved itself to journey beyond itself, in order to encounter something totally new. The exile of the self—its departure from its world, from its comfort zone—is thus the prerequisite, in this passage, of a genuine access to the exteriority of a given being, to an authentic knowledge of that being. There is therefore, according to Levinas, an intrinsic connection between exile and truth. But in what consists this connection? Levinas' thought needs to be further clarified; the connection between the two concepts is not immediately obvious.

It is all the less obvious that the concept of truth has become in Western thought less a journey unto the Other than a conquest by the Same. Indeed, too often, truth has been brandished as an instrument of oppression and conquest rather than sought out as an end in itself, to the point that philosophers like Foucault will come to identify truth with power and with the negation of otherness rather than the quest for the latter.[3] Thus, in the name of truth it is precisely this otherness which is jeopardized and annihilated. We shall see that Levinas himself comes to this conclusion with regard to the Western conception of truth when, identifying it to ontology, he says: "Ontology which reduces the Other to the Same, promotes freedom—the freedom that is the identification

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of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other. Here theory enters upon a course that renounces metaphysical Desire, renounces the marvel of exteriority from which the Desire lives" (TI 42). The quest for truth, in the Western sense, has altogether renounced its exilic character, its course of desire in order to crystallize into an "identification with the same" (TI 42).

And it is precisely this violent character of the quest for truth which has brought it under fire by commentators of the like of Caputo. According to Caputo, and in line with Foucault's thought, the quest for truth has systematically led to the domination and imposition of a given worldview onto all others and thus, to the annihilation of other or alternative perspectives. As such, the quest for truth coincides, according to Caputo, with the destruction of otherness perceived as a "disturbance to be quelled, and abnormality to be normalized, a cry to be silenced."[4] This intrinsic violence of truth is what has led Caputo and others to do away with the very concept of truth in an attempt to recover the silent cry of hereto repressed and forgotten worldviews. Hence, according to Caputo, there should be no more absolute, no more exterior criterion of judgment of the world around us; rather, the diversity inhabiting our world must be recovered by giving free reign to the play of different worldviews and perspectives. But this absence of criterion and this neutralization of any possible absolute brings about a number of problems, the first of which being, in Levinas' terms, an "essential disorientation" (MS 86) making it impossible to judge between true and false statements.

Indeed, there is an inherent danger to this free "play"[5] of different perspectives without an absolute criterion by which to judge them. In the absence of any absolute criterion or of truth, what is to distinguish truth from error? This is Wendy Farley's objection to Caputo's obliteration of truth. While Caputo's condemnation of the absolute character of truth makes way for diversity, it also neutralizes the very possibility of making value judgments. And although diversity is good, not all voices which arise from this diversity are. What of the voices of racism, or of hatred?[6] Should these be given free reign in the name of diversity? Is not then the way opened up for unchecked injustice? Is there then not a direct correlation between the obliteration of truth and injustice? We will see that Levinas himself will question this sacrificing of truth to diversity as an essentially "absurd" stance leading ultimately to moral indifference: "Absurdity consists not in non-sense, but in the isolation of innumerable meanings, in the absence of a sense that orients them" (MS 89). But as such, this absurdity coincides with "indifference" (MS 89), that is to say, with the impossibility of judging between good and evil. There are then moral implications to the abandonment

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of truth. And while Caputo does recover the importance of diversity, his claims also make it impossible to make moral judgments.

One might wonder, furthermore, whether Caputo's defense of diversity over and against domination and homogeneity is not itself a value judgment? Indeed, is not Caputo somehow making the point that diversity is *better* than homogeneity? And if so, what criteria serve at the basis of this judgment? Is there not then an implicit reference to an absolute in Caputo—unbeknownst to himself of course—which brings him to these conclusions? This is where Levinas' conception of truth becomes interesting inasmuch as it outlines precisely the structure of such an absolute which, over and against its use by Western philosophy, will constitute precisely the guardian of otherness. The question remains of course as to what this redefinition of truth will look like in Levinas. We will see that, contrarily to the Western definition of truth which situates its origin in a grounded and masterful self, Levinas will describe the quest for truth as resting on a necessary uprooting of the self from its previous epistemological stance and opening up onto an other which puts it into question. Thus, far from coinciding with an ontological agenda of power, the quest for truth necessitates a self having undergone an ethical transformation and having awakened to a dimension over and beyond its interests and agendas. It will hence be argued that exile constitutes the very structure of the epistemological quest for truth, consequently salvaging the authentic quest for truth from its Western association with power.

It is here that Levinas is closest to Plato's definition of the Good beyond being which, in Plato, serves to orient the quest for truth.[7] Indeed, we shall see that for Plato, the journey to truth is possible only in reference to a dimension which is otherwise than being, which remains resolutely exiled from being: the dimension of the Good. The Good in Plato will however find itself completely deformalized in Levinas as the face of the other, which, like the Good retains an absolute character with regard the realm of ontology, and as such, constitutes the only entity capable of orienting the self's exilic journey to truth. There is thus, in Levinas, an implicit connection between the face of the other and the exile of the self toward truth. But we do not yet see at this point the connection between the other and the self's epistemological awakening to truth. How is the other an absolute? And what does the other have to do with the quest for truth? We are here reminded of the Levinassian connection between "justice and truth" (TI 82). But we do not yet understand the connection posited here between justice and truth. How is the absolute other a key player in the self's exilic journey toward truth?

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I The conquest of truth

Our introductory words have alluded to the crisis surrounding the concept of truth in the contemporary epistemological discussion. Indeed, as shown by Foucault, truth has too often been the handmaiden of power and imperialism to not come under suspicion. Levinas is not ignorant of the problem posed by the Western conception of truth and traces it back to the Platonic understanding of truth as outlined in the *Republic:* "For Plato, the world of meanings precedes language and culture, which express it; it is indifferent to the system of signs that one can invent to make this world present. . . . It thus dominates the historical cultures . . . as the Platonic Republic which sweeps away the allusions in the alluvium of history, that Republic from which the poets of the mimesis are driven" (MS 84). Thus, according to Levinas, truth in Plato is an absolute which not only encompasses the diversity of perspectives, but "dominates" them (MS 84). It is in the name of truth that the "poets," symbols of dissent and opposition, are driven out. Therefore, according to Plato, the "particularities, peculiarities, and oddities" (MS 84) represented by the poets are to be obliterated in the name of the unicity of truth: In the name of truth, diversity is sacrificed and with it all conception and respect of otherness.

But Levinas goes even further as to situate the instinct of domination in the very structure of the quest for truth. The epistemological quest for truth is not only used as an instrument of domination, as Foucault accurately observed, but is itself structured as domination. As Merold Westphal observes: "Whereas Foucault says that knowledge always functions as social power, Levinas argues that even if the purely epistemological domain is an abstraction from more concrete social scenes, knowledge is already power in its abstract purity simply as knowledge."[8] And indeed, inasmuch as in Western thought the criteria for truth remain relative to a given subjectivity, they are indissociable from the threat that truth will come to coincide with subjective agendas and will to power. Truth as grounded in subjectivity, as a subjective endeavor or activity, was incidentally the essence of Descartes' teaching. Contrarily to a conception of truth as existing outside of subjectivity, waiting to be discovered, Descartes shows in his *Discourse on Method* that truth, that is the revelation, the disclosure of being, cannot be thought distinctly from an activity on the part of subjectivity, from an act of judgment on its part.[9] This is the first principle of the Cartesian method: "To accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so."[10] It is the subjective I, the ego, which is the voucher for truth. Knowledge thus stems from an activity of the I of recognition and of acceptance of a given content as being true.

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As such, knowledge becomes relative to subjectivity, as Levinas comments: "The knowledge of objects does not secure a relation whose terms would absolve themselves from the relation. Though objective knowledge remains disinterested, it is nevertheless marked by the way the knowing being has approached the Real. To recognize truth to be disclosure is to refer it to the horizon of him who discloses. Plato, who identifies knowledge with vision, stresses, in the myth of the chariot of the *Phaedrus*, the movement of the soul that contemplates truth and the relativeness of truth to that course. The disclosed being is relative to us and not *kat auto*" (TI 64). The objectivity of a given knowledge does not annul its intrinsic connection with subjectivity. Indeed, it is subjectivity which remains the final authority as to the objective quality of a given knowledge. It is subjectivity which decides, which determines what is real and what is not.

In this sense, while subjectivity does not constitute the origin of truth—truth remains to be found within being—it certainly constitutes its *ground,* or foundation. It is from subjectivity that an act of genuine knowing emerges, from its activity and judgment. There can be no genuine apprehension of being apart from this subjective activity intent on detecting the truth hidden within being. Levinas thus sees the quest for knowledge as a "work eminently individual, which always, as Descartes saw, comes back to the freedom of the individual, atheism affirms itself as atheism" (TI 89). Such a subjectivity freely disposes of its powers, it is in charge, it is masterful in the face of being working as an artisan of truth, wrenching it from the muteness of being.[11] It answers only to itself; it is "atheist,"[12] that is, it answers to no one else, it is alone in the world, answering to no authority than its own preoccupation and quest for truth.

Intelligibility of a given being thus emerges from an act of violence on the part of the self. It must be wrenched from being, it must be upheld against competing paradigms. Levinas speaks of an act of "mastery" on the part of subjectivity:[13] "This mastery is total and as though creative; it is accomplished as a giving of meaning: the object of representation is reducible to noemata. The intelligible is precisely what is entirely reducible to noemata and all of whose relations with the understanding reducible to those established by the light. . . . Descartes's clear and distinct idea manifests itself as true and as entirely immanent to thought: entirely present, without anything clandestine; its very novelty is without mystery" (TI 124). Intelligibility is therefore the product of an act of mastery on the part of the self, an act of creation which, out of the indistinctiveness of being, speaks to the meaning of a truth. Knowledge constitutes in this passage a triumph of light over darkness, of word over matter. It allows for no part of "mystery" or of "clandestinity." Light must triumph, meaning

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must be established over the darkness and muteness of being. Subjectivity thus "holds its ground" in the face of external opposition. It is in this sense that one must understand Descartes' understanding of truth as emerging from a solitary subject and all philosophy as "egology" (TI 44), in the Levinassian sense of the term.

This egology, however, poses a number of problems. One may wonder how a genuine discovery of alterity is possible from an egological stance, from a subjectivity defined by its centrality and which sees itself as "master and possessor" of the world.[14] This is precisely the Levinassian critique of a knowledge emerging from a grounded self: "Absolute experience is not disclosure; to disclose on the basis of a subjective horizon is already to miss the noumenon" (TI 67). Such a self will never genuinely approach exteriority, according to Levinas, but has renounced "metaphysical Desire," that is the genuine and disinterested thirst for truth which alone allows the "marvel of exteriority" (TI 42) to be revealed. Thus, the quest for truth as a way of seeking the affirmation of the self, never truly engages in the journey toward otherness, but, like Ulysses, ultimately always comes back home to the self's interests and agendas: "For the transcendence of thought remains closed in itself despite all its adventures—which in the last analysis are purely imaginary, or are adventures traversed as by Ulysses: on the way home" (TI 27). The self which practices ontology ultimately remains with itself, with its own constructions and productions. Such a self has firmly established itself in the face of overwhelming odds, has "stood its ground," but insodoing, has distanced itself from the truth, inasmuch as for Levinas "truth is neither in seeing nor in grasping" (TI 172). On the contrary, alterity is neutralized by such an act of mastery; it dissolves at the contact of a dominating self.

But this egological quest for truth has deeper implications than the mere cognitive neutralization of otherness: It has political implications. Commenting on Levinas' critique of the Western conception of truth, Farley explains: "Totality subsumes the other into itself, stripping it of its infinity and making it into something different from itself. When this subsumption is seen in its ethical dimension, it becomes real, physical, historical power that strips away the humanity of persons. . . . Levinas reminds us of what is at stake in criticism of philosophical or political absolutisms: The complete degradation of human persons."[15] In other words, it is possible to trace the Western tendency for domination in its very epistemological structures.[16] The necessity then arises for a reevaluation of the West's epistemological discourse. It follows then, as Peperzak observes, that a "proposed redress of the faults committed by our culture could not be brought about by a refinement of the sciences or an extension

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of emancipation but only by a radical reversal that changes our civilizations' fundamental intention."[17] And it is precisely such a reversal that Levinas opts for when he speaks of a "radical reversal, from cognition to solidarity" (OB 119). That is to say, according to Levinas, the epistemological discourse has been too often complicit with the domination of the other and as such, its very foundations must be again scrutinized in the name of ethics and of the otherness of the Other.

This scrutiny of the Western epistemological discourse in the light of ethical concerns has been, incidentally, inaugurated by a number of our contemporaries of which Caputo represents one of its most radical attempts. Following up on Levinas' analysis of the Platonic expulsion of the poets from the Republic, Caputo will decide to restore the poets by doing away with the absolute that kept them at bay. Thus, according to Caputo, "there is no royal road that some philosopher's method or divine revelation will open to us . . . the absolute secret means that we all pull on our pants one leg at a time, doing the best we can to make it through the day, without any divine or metaphysical hooks to hoist us over the abyss."[18] The "royal road" of truth must be done away with if a space is to be opened for the diversity of ways and of perspectives as observed by Farley: "The ambiguity of truth condemns any form of absolutism, thereby creating an ethical sensibility more inclusive of differences."[19] This inclusion of difference comes at a price however: That of the obliteration of truth, or, in Foucault's terms, the "night of truth"[20] whereby, for the sake of diversity, there is no more unique and universal truth susceptible of judging one worldview from the other. All share an equal status in being; there is none that may be proclaimed as somehow "superior" or "better" in the name of a given truth.

With thinkers like Caputo, the epistemological climate moves then from one of foundations to one of "abyss," to recover a Caputean term, whereby one realizes that there is no foundation to truth, no solid basis on which to base our judgments. The opening up of the epistemological space to diversity thus comes at the price of an essential "disorientation" as observed by Levinas: "The saraband of innumerable and equivalent cultures, each justifying itself in its own context, creates a world which is, to be sure, deoccidentalized, but also disoriented" (MS 101). Hence, in place of the Cartesian solid grounding of truth in subjectivity's experience of "clarity and distinction," we find ourselves condemned to wander in an epistemological context where all sense of clear direction or clear criteria has been obliterated. This wandering is, however, a source of delight for thinkers like Caputo who see there the condition of a genuine apprehension of otherness and diversity. Indeed, according to Caputo, otherness does not lend itself to

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a subjectivity having opted for a solid position or stance. What characterizes the apprehension of otherness is, on the contrary, its capacity to surprise and/or disturb the hereto unquestioned stance of a given subjectivity.[21] Levinas himself recognizes the necessity for a subjectivity desiring truth to surrender its desire for stability and control: "Being is not in such a way as to congeal into a Parmenidean sphere, identical to itself, nor into a completed and fixed creation. The totality of being envisioned from cultures could nowise be a panoramic view. There could not be a totality in being, but only totalities. There is nothing that could encompass all of them. They would not be open to any judgment that would claim to be the final judgment" (MS 88).

This view, however, opens up a number of problems as observed by Farley: While Caputo's discourse "condemns any form of absolutism, thereby creating an ethical sensibility more inclusive of differences . . . it leaves the status of ethical claims unclear. Is for example the condemnation of racism a moment in the game or is it a serious and enduring claim about human dignity and obligations to respond to the social, interpersonal and political realities that threaten human beings?"[22] In other words, the abandonment of an absolute criteria serving to distinguish between truth and error has not only an epistemological impact, it also has a moral impact inasmuch as it makes moral judgments impossible and as such, gives free reign to injustice. In a world where truth cannot be distinguished from falsehood and where there is no value judgment hierarchizing them, there can be no constraint put onto falsehood, and as such, no limits to possible distortions and false assumptions about the world and people around us. This, however, marks, according to Farley, the beginning of the reign of terror whereby people find themselves falsely depicted and as such, unduly discriminated against.[23] Thus, while Caputo's claim aims at preserving diversity, in fact, there is also a danger that this very claim work *against* diversity and otherness. If there is no more absolute against which we can judge the different perspectives and worldviews, the danger arises that in the free "play"[24] proposed by Caputo, racism and the obliteration of the other are not only not opposed, but condoned as moments in being. To lose the category of truth would then amount, not in the emergence of diversity, as proposed by Caputo, but in its very obliteration.

We now understand how truth might be, in Farley's words, necessary to justice: "The struggle for truth is a part and parcel of the struggle for justice."[25] This is incidentally also Levinas' view. For Levinas, the category of truth is essential to the resistance of tyranny or of injustice. In his critique of Plato, Levinas nevertheless concedes that "philosophy [was] born on Greek soil,

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to dethrone opinion in which all tyrannies lurk and threaten" (PI 48). Thus philosophy in the Platonic sense, that is to say, in the sense of a quest for an absolute orienting all truth, is necessary to fight against tyranny. And indeed, in the absence of such an absolute, there can be no criterion against which to judge for or against tyranny, for or against diversity: "It is most important to insist on the antecedence of sense to cultural signs. To attach every meaning to culture, to not distinguish between meaning and cultural expression, between meaning and the art that prolongs cultural expression, is to recognize that all cultural personalities equally realize the spirit. Then no meaning can be detached from these innumerable cultures, to allow one to bear a judgment on these cultures" (MS 100). Without such an absolute, or "sense" as Levinas puts it, there is no more criterion for the judgment of morally right or wrong cultural expressions hence clearing the way for tyranny and injustice. For Levinas, the absolute character of truth must be regained if Caputo's dream of a diverse world is to be preserved and protected.

II The exile toward truth

Indeed, it can be argued that the Caputean critique of foundationalism for the sake of diversity rests on the false assumption that diversity left to itself, untouched by truth, promotes itself. Levinas observes: "One reasons as though the equivalence of cultures, the discovery of their profusion and the recognition of their richness were not themselves the effects of an orientation and of an equivocal sense in which humanity stands. One reasons as though the multiplicity of cultures from the beginning sunk its roots in the era of decolonization, as though incomprehension, war and conquest did not derive just as naturally from the contiguity of multiple expressions of being" (MS 88). Indeed—and Levinas makes this interesting point—the going back to being in all its diversity as it stands before its ordering by truth does not necessarily coincide with an Edenic coexistence and cohabitation between diverse beings. The world before its ordering by truth may, on the contrary, come closer to the Hobbesian context of war and of the annihilation of the other by the strongest. What emerges from diversity is not necessarily diversity, but rather precisely its annihilation. Left to itself, without the intervention of truth, diversity self-destructs.

But there is more. The Caputean call for diversity over and against the tyranny of a monologic truth stems itself from a certain value judgment: That diversity is *better* than tyranny. What orients the Caputean judgment of value

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here if not a sense for the importance of diversity over and against tyranny? As we have seen, a diverse state of being does not naturally give rise to a sense of its value. On the contrary, war is much more often the result of such a state of being. There must then be a sense over and beyond the state of being which gives rise to the Caputean preference for diversity. It is to such a "sense" that Levinas alludes to when he asks: "Must we not then distinguish the meanings in their cultural pluralism, from the sense, orientation and unity of being—a primordial event in which all the other steps of thought and the whole historical life of being is situated?" (MS 88). According to Levinas, diversity itself is possible only because of a "sense" which gives it value and which ordains its protection. But for such a sense to be in a position to ordain being, it must situate itself, according to Levinas, in the absolute, over and beyond being if it is to judge between diversity and tyranny. The quest for truth becomes then a crucial moment in the protection of diversity over and against tyranny. The question of course remains as to how the quest for truth, which hereto Levinas himself described as complicit with tyranny, can possibly function as the guardian of diversity. Indeed, the Levinassian description of truth will have to avoid the pitfalls of foundationalism and of the resulting egology if it is to avoid the temptation of complicity with tyranny. We shall see that for Levinas, this pitfall can be avoided only in resituating the quest for truth to its original Platonic character, that of stemming from an orientation toward an absolute, exiled from being.

Which is where Levinas will return to Plato, albeit in a totally different way than was seen in the West's appropriation of the Platonic discourse on truth.[26] For this, Levinas goes back to the Platonic description of the Good beyond being as the criterion for all truth within the realm of being. We remember that for Plato, the criterion of truth within the realm of being hanged upon one's intuition of the Good beyond being. It was this intuition—beyond the discursive attempts of the lover of truth—which served to orient his quest for truth within the realm of being. Levinas will situate his discourse on truth along the same lines of the Platonic Good beyond being as the absolute sense serving to orient the quest for truth. But, insodoing, Levinas will deformalize this notion into the face of the other: "The goodness of the Good—the Good which never sleeps or nods—inclines the movement it calls forth to turn it from the Good and orient it toward the other, and only thus toward the Good" (NI 165). According to Levinas, the "sense" serving to orient the quest for truth and the ensuing moral judgments is therefore the face of the other. It is this face which becomes, in Levinas, the absolute criterion for truth. It is here that we come to the famous

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Levinassian conjunction of "justice and truth" (TI 82). But one does not right away understand this connection between justice and truth, between the face of the other and the orientation toward truth. Indeed, if the Good is beyond being, how may the other—who dwells among us—coincide with this absolute Good? Moreover, one may wonder as to how the other—who has more affinities at times, it seems, with evil—can come to be identified here with the Good?

Levinas describes this coincidence between the other and the Good in terms of responsibility, that is to say, of an awakening of the self to the dimension beyond its own sphere of interests: "Responsibility that is undeclinable, yet never assumed in full freedom is good. . . . Starting with this anarchical situation of responsibility, our analysis has, no doubt by an abuse of language, named the Good . . . Passivity is the locus, or more exactly the non locus of the Good, its exception to the rule of being, always disclosed in logos, its exception to the present" (HA 135). In other words, the other orients the self toward the Good in her capacity to interrupt the self's hereto self-focused stance and awaken it to a dimension outside of itself. The other is the only being which does not let itself be absorbed by the interests of the self and which is capable of interrupting this self-absorption on the part of the self and, as such, the only being capable of turning the self toward the Good, that is, toward a preoccupation beyond its own agendas and interests. As such, however, the other ever remains "absolute" with regard to the realm of the self. But it is precisely as absolute, that is to say, as over and beyond the scope and interests of the self, that the other is susceptible of orienting the self toward exteriority, toward a dimension which it does not encompass and, insodoing, awaken the self to the Good. The irruption of the exiled other into the realm of the self is thus a central moment in the awakening of the self to a dimension beyond its own self-interest, and as such, to the Good. But we do not yet see at this point the connection between this awakening of the self by the other to the Good and the quest for truth. Which brings us now to the Levinassian definition of truth.

According to Levinas, truth is the capacity to see a being for what it is and, as such, implies a certain respect for exteriority. Far from defining the quest for knowledge as an activity derived from the spontaneity of a subjectivity, Levinas describes the encounter with exteriority as a stance on the part of subjectivity which allows for the alterity of the known to remain, which "lets the known being manifest itself" (TI 42). A genuine approach of the exteriority of a being hence protects the otherness of the known being and does not taint it with preconceptions or a priori conceptualizations on the part of subjectivity.[27] Such a stance, which protects the alterity of the known being, is described by Levinas

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as "respectful": "Knowledge or theory designates first a relation with being such that the knowing being lets the known being manifest itself while respecting its alterity and without marking it in any way whatever by this cognitive relation. In this sense metaphysical desire would be the essence of theory" (TI 42).

The stance of respect consequently implies a limitation on the natural freedom and spontaneity of subjectivity: "The famous suspension of action that is said to make theory possible depends on a reserve of freedom, which does not abandon itself to its drives, to its impulsive movements, and keeps its distances. Theory, in which truth arises, is the attitude of a being that distrusts itself. Knowledge becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin—in an unnatural movement to seek higher than one's own origin, a movement which evinces or describes a created freedom" (TI 82–3). Genuine objectivity, which allows for the known being to exist independently of subjective whims and desires, is born, according to Levinas, from this "reserve of freedom" on the part of subjectivity. Such a reserve is fundamental if the known being is to be known *as such* and not merely as a construction of subjectivity. Levinas thus speaks of a "conversion" of subjectivity to exteriority: "The conversion of the soul to exteriority, to the absolutely other, to Infinity, is not deducible from the very identity of the soul, for it is not commensurate with the soul" (TI 61). Indeed, natural subjectivity is not intent on respecting otherness or letting it be. It is intent in affirming itself and its worldview in the face of that otherness.[28] As such, it is not naturally disposed to encountering genuine otherness. A "conversion of the soul" is thus, according to Levinas, necessary.

The question remains, however, as to what event is to bring about such a conversion. If subjectivity is not naturally bent on letting otherness reveal itself, what brings about such a change of heart? What makes this conversion possible? According to Levinas, such an awakening cannot come from within the act of knowledge for the latter depends itself on such an awakening, on such a conversion. Indeed, this conversion, this calling into question of the self's freedom and spontaneity, which allows for the very concept of exteriority to emerge, is necessary for the encounter with truth to be even conceivable: "Knowledge as a critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can arise only in a being that has an origin prior to its origin—that is created" (TI 85). According to Levinas, the quest for knowledge can only emerge from a subjectivity which already has a sense of exteriority, of otherness. Such a subjectivity, according to Levinas, is "created": It has a sense of an exteriority outside of its world, of a transcendent being. Only such a sense of otherness can

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give to subjectivity its thirst for knowledge, can kindle in it the desire to know and to encounter something other than itself. The question remains, however, as to how this sense of otherness can emerge in a subjectivity hereto entirely self-absorbed.

According to Levinas, there is only one being susceptible of interrupting the world of the self and opening it up onto otherness, it is the human face. Only the latter is capable of marking the original interruption of the self's spontaneity: "It is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls into question my freedom" (TI 84). For the first time, the self finds itself in the presence of the genuine exteriority of a being which refuses to be encompassed or subjected to the self. For the first time, the self learns the limits of its spontaneity and apprehends a being exterior to itself. When faced with the other, the self realizes the limits of its spontaneity; it realizes that it is not alone in the world and that the other has an equal claim on that world. This awakening to exteriority can, in turn, inform the way that the self had hereto apprehended the world and give it a renewed sensitivity to the otherness of that world. Instead of situating itself as master and possessor of the world, the self now hesitates. Thus, as De Boer points out, "according to Levinas there would be no objectivity if it were not for the other watching me, for he troubles my naïve spontaneity and awakens critical attitude. This breach with natural dogmatism would not be possible without his presence. . . . You may think for example, of love for the truth in daily life, or for the ideal of objectivity in science and critical reflection in philosophy. It is because of an attitude of mind that is ethical in nature that all of this is possible."[29]

And it is precisely in this hesitation whereby the "breach with natural dogmatism" is performed that Levinas situates the genuine access to exteriority. For it is this hesitation which, according to Levinas, allows for an apprehension of being as such and not merely as the product of its own spontaneity: "But theory understood as a respect for exteriority delineates another structure essential for metaphysics. In its comprehension of being (or ontology) it is concerned with critique. It discovers the dogmatism and naive arbitrariness of its spontaneity, and calls into question the freedom in such a way as to turn back at every moment to the origin of the arbitrary dogmatism of this free exercise. . . . Its critical intention then leads it beyond theory and ontology: critique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same" (TI 43). Genuine knowledge—understood as "respect for exteriority"—can only come about when subjectivity has learned to hesitate before the world, that is, to be critical of itself and distrustful of itself.[30]

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Truth hence comes, in the words of Peperzak, only at the price of a subjectivity losing its own solid stance in the world, of an "uprooting," or "exodus"[31] of the self: "The search for truth is an uprooting brought about by the experience of absolute otherness which will not allow itself to be reduced—neither by a simple empiricist or rationalist logic nor by dialectic—to the world that is familiar to us."[32] But this self-criticism and mistrust, this self-induced interruption of its spontaneity is not innate to the self. It has to be taught by an other.

We now better understand how the journey toward truth is structured as an exile.[33] Over and against the Western conception of truth as grounded in a masterful self, we realize now that the quest for truth stems rather from a self open to being put into question by another, uprooted, even exiled by the face of the other. For only at such a price will the self, hereto entirely preoccupied with itself, come to a stance respectful of exteriority. Only as such is the object susceptible to being disclosed in its alterity and not simply as the result of the self's constructs and interests. In this sense, the other precedes the self in its epistemological quest and teaches it something it did not know before: the limitation of its spontaneity which is the beginning of respect. Exteriority reveals itself only at the price of such a contraction or exile on the part of the self, whereby the self experiences its limitations in the face of exteriority. But this contraction on the part of the self cannot emerge from the self's own innate capacities. It is brought about *by* the other. This is why for Levinas the beginning of justice lies in "recognizing in the Other my master" (TI 72). The initiation to exteriority is possible only at the price of a de-centering and exile of the self, whereby the other is recognized as "master" (TI 72) as the one who chastises the self, who interrupts its spontaneity, who teaches it the narrow way of justice. Only such a self is capable of respect, of apprehending being as such. Thus, according to Farley, "the foundation of knowledge is therefore ethics. It is ethics that permits the other to emerge out of the thickets of my concepts, desires, assumptions; it is ethics that jars the thinker out of herself or himself and allows the mystery and transcendence of the other person to be recognized . . . it is on the basis of this welcoming of otherness and of others that truth is founded and its relationship to practice maintained."[34]

Thus, far from obliterating diversity, the exilic journey toward truth as described by Levinas, serves in fact to protect it inasmuch as falsehood constitutes the very ground from which racism and discrimination are fostered. It is falsehood which gives rise to false or distorted perceptions of individuals or groups thereby giving rise to their discrimination or marginalization. This is why, according to Farley, "far from being other worldly forgetfulness or Gnostic

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hatred of the world, the exteriority of truth—its non-identity with power—is necessary to ethical resistance."[35] The absolute serving to orient truth must be protected and not obliterated for therein lies its ethical impact. Thus, the fight for truth, inasmuch as it does not lose its ethical sense and reference to the face of the other, coincides with the fight for justice. Likewise, the "night of truth," as articulated by Caputo, lies ever in danger of giving rise to a deeper night, the night of justice where falsehood overcomes truth, and injustice justice. We now better understand the Hebrew prophetic connection between truth and justice as expressed in Isaiah: "Justice is driven back and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter" (Isa. 59.14 NIV). The stumbling of truth can only give rise to the driving back of justice. To lose the desire for truth ultimately amounts to losing the desire for justice. This is why for Levinas the connection between justice and truth must ever be preserved, the journey toward truth ever maintain its exilic structure as an awakening to the face of an other.

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6

A Metaphysics of Exile

Introduction

A connection between spirituality and exile is not alien to the Western tradition. Already in the Greek gnostic spiritualities, of which Plotinus is the central intellectual figure, exile is understood as the soul's plight in this world, exiled from its origin, the One.[1] This exile is to be overcome through spiritual means and diverse spiritual techniques are developed to help the soul's migration back to its origin. In the Greek context, exile thus is seen as a negative concept, as a lesser stage needed to be overcome by a return to the origin. Although exile constitutes a central moment of the spiritual journey in Greek spirituality, it is in a purely negative sense, as an obstacle to spirituality, as a separation from God,[2] rather than as a way or orientation to Him. Thus, far from advocating exile as a means of approaching God, the Greeks advocate the return, the migration back to the soul's origin.

Levinas comments on this negative view of exile in Greek metaphysics: "Metaphysics would endeavor to suppress separation, to unite; the metaphysical being should absorb the being of the metaphysician. The de facto separation with which metaphysics beings would result from an illusion or a fault. As a stage the separated being traverses on the way of its return to its metaphysical source, a moment of history, that will be concluded by union, metaphysics would be an Odyssey, and its disquietude nostalgia. But the philosophy of unity has never been able to say whence came this accidental illusion and fall" (TI 102). The spiritual journey according to Greek metaphysics is structured as an Odyssey, within which the exile is a transitory and lesser stage that must be overcome by a return and union back with the metaphysical source or the One. For Greek metaphysics, exile is nothing but an "accidental illusion and fall."

It is this description of exile as an "accidental illusion and fall," that Levinas will critically engage and interrogate. Must exile be understood in the solely

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pejorative terms of "illusion" and "fall," as a lesser state and separation from God? Is not an alternative understanding of exile, a positive understanding, possible? One that sees in exile not a fallen act of separation, but, far to the contrary, precisely an orientation toward God, toward what Levinas terms the Infinite? This positive understanding of exile is not alien to the Hebrew mindset which perceived, behind the shame and suffering of exile, a redemptive orientation.[3] It is against such a background that Levinas' positive understanding of exile must be understood.

This chapter will endeavor to understand Levinas' concept of exile as it applies to spirituality. Far from obstructing spirituality, we shall attempt to show that, for Levinas, exile constitutes the way to God, to the Infinite. According to Levinas, "it is necessary to cease interpreting separation as pure and simply diminution of the Infinite, a degradation. Separation with regard to the Infinite, compatible with the Infinite, is not a simple 'fall' of the Infinite" (TI 103). Separation, or exile, is not necessarily, according to Levinas, a "diminution" or a "degradation." It is not necessarily incompatible with the Infinite, but can be, suprisingly "compatible" with a spiritual journey. We shall see that, according to Levinas, spirituality entails two moments of separation, or of exile: The exile of God and the entailing exile of the believer.

From the start, however, a number of questions arise. For Levinas, the exile of God is a central component of the believer's spiritual journey. This raises a number of questions and problems: if God is in exile, how then are we to access him? If God is absent, hidden, exiled from our world, what hope is there of a relationship with Him? This we shall see will be the essence of Derrida's objections to Levinas. And indeed, what kind of connection is possible with a God who chooses to remain in exile from the world? According to Levinas, the exiled God will be accessible in a very peculiar way: in the face of the exiled other. But this encounter with God through the face of the other raises a number of questions. How can the face of the exiled other, in its destitution and misery, possibly constitute the *lieu* of encounter with God? We shall see that for Levinas, God is present within the face of the exiled other not as a vision of power, but as a command to responsibility toward that other.

But this also raises a number of problems. Inasmuch as the locus of metaphysics seems to be, for Levinas, ethics, one might however wonder as to why it is so in Levinas. Can not the other by himself or herself awaken the self to responsibility? Why is the concept of God needed? Is this concept not, as Caputo would put it, "too much, too big and bombastic for ethics"?[4] Is it not

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superfluous? The answer to this question will necessitate that we rethink the nature of the height commanding me to the other. Is this command inherent to the other? Or is this command, as Caputo would have it, authored by the self?[5] The purpose of this chapter will be to show the problems associated with both possibilities outlined above and to argue for a necessary exile of the command from both the self and the other. Indeed, we shall argue that only as far as the height commanding me to the other is exiled from both the self and the other, can an ethics be possible and not a relationship structured as coercion or violence.

I The exile of God

The exile of God from the world is a painful reality that any genuine seeker of truth must face. The fact that God is absent, that he is not there, eclipsed from perception and understanding is a fact that anyone wanting to authentically engage with the spiritual realm must come to terms with. Levinas formulates this painful realization as follows: "Is it not folly to ascribe plenitude of being to God, who, always absent from perception, is no longer manifest in the moral conduct of the world, subject to violence, where peace is established only provisionally and at the price of blood tribute paid to some Minotaur, the price of compromises and politics—where, consequently, the divine 'presence' remains an uncertain memory or an indeterminate expectation? To endure the contradiction between the existence included in the essence of God and the scandalous absence of this God is to suffer an initiation trial into religious life which separates philosophers from believers. That is, unless the obstinate absence of God were one of those paradoxes that call to the highways" (EP 66–7). This "obstinate absence" is the fact that the believer must, at some point of his or her spiritual journey, come to terms with. God is not here. Not only does he remain inaccessible to perception, but he remains exiled from the grasp of cognition. According to Levinas, the relationship with God "is as distinct from objectification as from participation. To hear the divine word does not amount to knowing an object; it is to be in relation with a substance overflowing its own idea in me, overflowing what Descartes calls its 'objective existence'" (TI 77).

But we must further understand what Levinas means by this reference to Descartes' concept of a "substance overflowing its own idea." As his predecessors, Descartes believed in a possible intellectual access to God. But unlike his predecessors, who receded in various forms of negative theology—where the knowledge of God could only be an empty or negative knowledge—Descartes

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attempted a veritable phenomenology of God, or of the idea of the Infinite, as it revealed itself to the human mind. The Cartesian analyses go in much greater detail as to *how* the Infinite reveals itself *while* eclipsing itself from human cognition. It is these analyses—the pertinence and rigor of which were observed by Levinas[6]—which will constitute the starting point of Levinas' understanding of the structure of a relationship with God.

The Cartesian project constitutes, we must remember, an attempt to find proper evidence to all belief or truth. Having established the existence of a thinking subjectivity, Descartes then proceeds to establish our belief in God.[7] He does so by analyzing the content of subjective experience and finding there an idea exceeding all mental capacity and categories of subjectivity: the idea of Infinity. Levinas explains: "The relation with infinity cannot, to be sure, be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very *infinition* is produced precisely in this overflowing" (TI 25). This idea is striking to Descartes in that its content transcends, or overflows, the very nature of the subjectivity that thinks it. How indeed, could a finite being like myself come up with the extraordinary notion of infinity? According to Descartes, this idea can therefore not originate within subjectivity itself but must have been put there by an exterior being, it must originate from a being, or *ideatum*, which is itself infinite.[8] Thus, according to Descartes, is revealed the existence of God. God, or the Infinite, does not posit itself per se in front of subjectivity, but is signified to, alluded to, by this extraordinary idea which finds itself within the subjective experience, while overflowing it.

It is this capacity for the Infinite to manifest itself *while* remaining inaccessible to the intellectual grasp which fascinates Levinas in the Cartesian analyses. For the first time an attempt has been made to describe the mode of manifestation of the Infinite without simply finding a refuge in negative theology. Thus, according to Bernier, the Levinassian reflection has from its very first attempts attached itself to the project of thematizing that which cannot be spoken of, and as such, constitutes an indiscretion with regard to the unsayable which characterizes the very essence of philosophical thinking.[9] There is a possible phenomenology of the Infinite, or, as Bergo will put it, an inquiry as to whether the "God of the Bible [can] be discussed philosophically."[10] But this phenomenology is not structured as that of an object. Rather, it is a phenomenology of an entity which presents itself while remaining absent, which reveals itself while remaining inaccessible. The Infinite manifests itself within subjectivity *as* exiled—as uncontainable by subjectivity, as overflowing it: "The Cartesian notion of the idea of the Infinite designates a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect

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to him who thinks it. It designates the contact with the intangible, a contact that does not compromise the integrity of what is touched. To affirm the presence in us of the idea of infinity is to deem purely abstract and formal the contradiction the idea of metaphysics is said to harbor, which Plato brings up in the *Parmenides*—that the relation with the Absolute would render the Absolute relative. The absolute exteriority of the exterior being is not purely and simply lost as a result of its manifestation; it 'absolves' itself from the relation in which it presents itself" (TI 50). Therefore, according to Descartes, the Infinite presents itself as absent, occurs within subjective experience as exiled, as not containable within the scope of subjectivity. An encounter is possible with the Infinite only inasmuch as that Infinite is recognized as ungraspable, as absolute and absolving itself from the relationship.

But can such an experience be counted as a *relationship*? Indeed what kind of relationship is possible with a being that remains resolutely absent from the relationship? This might be Derrida's central objection to Levinas' thematization of otherness. According to Derrida, it is impossible to speak of a relationship with alterity without such an original moment of "violence" by which this alterity lets itself be encompassed within my world, "shows itself" to the self: "If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. . . . The philosopher . . . must speak and write within this war of light, a war in which he always already knows himself to be engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is by risking the worst violence."[11] There must be a presentation, a phenomenalization of the other in my world for a relationship to be possible. Indeed, what kind of proximity can one have with an Infinite which remains exterior and remote from all attempt at understanding and holding? Moreover, it is possible to cast doubt on the very exteriority of the idea of the Infinite.

Such objections were already made during Descartes' lifetime. It is possible to think of the idea of the Infinite as an idea constructed by subjectivity itself by means of magnification of its present condition.[12] Or even, it is possible to think of the idea of Infinity as simply the negation of the idea of the finite.[13] Faced with these objections, the limitations and fragility of the Cartesian argument are revealed. What was thought to have been established firmly now reveals itself to have but a fragile, precarious basis. *A posteriori,* the Cartesian edifice seems fragile, even artificial, and we remain uncertain that anything has been solidly demonstrated. In other words, it is impossible to eliminate doubt from the Cartesian system. Within the very attempt to do away with doubt[14]—by proving

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the existence of God—doubt reappears in force. The exiled and hidden God remains dissimulated behind a cloud of doubt that proofs and demonstrations cannot dissipate. There can be no evidence of the existence or of the nature of this hidden God. The "triumphant question" (EP 75) remains.

Faith in an exiled God, a hidden, exiled God can thus never escape the reality of doubt. For Bernier, this pertains to the essential discretion of the manifestation of God which, as such, may never be encapsulated in a proof or in a reasoning.[15] The believer must come to terms at some point of his or her spiritual journey, that his or her faith finds a solid foundation or basis neither in cognition nor in perception. Doubt is, as a result, ever present on the believer's journey. The question always lingers: Was this a dream? Is this an illusion? "A God was revealed on a mountain or in a burning bush, or was attested to in Scriptures. And what if it were a storm! And what if the Scriptures came to us from dreamers! Dismiss the illusory call from our minds! The insinuation itself invites us to do so" (EP 70). The believer can never be sure, can never be certain of his or her beliefs. Doubt can never be done away with. The believer can never escape this question, this lingering doubt that perhaps his or her beliefs are founded on nothing more than the product of human imagination and endeavor. The believer in an exiled God has nothing solid to base his or her belief on, nothing to stand on. He or she cannot share the reasons of his or her belief with others and finds himself or herself irrevocably thrown back into his or her solitude.

The believer in the exiled God is thus himself or herself in exile in the phenomenal world—the world accessible to perception and cognition. He or she has no certainties, no guarantees that what he or she has perceived to be true, it indeed true. He or she has no grounds for his or her belief. The believer becomes a stranger in the world,[16] hanging on to a truth, an experience which has no presence in the world. The believer has no stand in the world. Always plagued by doubt, never able to show with certainty why he or she believes in this exiled God. Such is the painful initiation to faith that the believer faced with the "obstinate absence of God" both from cognition and perception, must endure: "To endure the contradiction between the existence included in the essence of God and the scandalous absence of this God is to suffer an initiation trial into religious life which separates philosophers from believers" (EP 66–7). The true believer's stance in the world is hence not a comfortable, secure one as was often thought by the enemies of religion. The condition of the believer is not one of at-home-ness in the world, resting in a comfortable assumption and belief. It is a condition lived in the pain of a tension between one's spiritual experience and a constant negation of this experience in the phenomenal world of rationality and

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perception. Such is indeed the condition of the believer after the "death of God," or as Hans Jonas would put it, the death of the concept of God, brought about by the events of the twentieth century. Thus, according to Kosky, "we are led to conclude that after the death of God, God is given to us only in confusion or ambiguity."[17] But while Kosky sees this "confusion and ambiguity" as a problem, Levinas will come to see this "confusion and ambiguity" surrounding the concept of God as positive moments of his manifestation.

Indeed, while the believer's experiences along his or her spiritual journey are ever in danger of being assimilated to mirages or illusions, does the fact that this experience, this encounter with transcendence refute all attempts by rationality to grasp it mean that it is a delusion, or the product of a wild imagination? This is precisely Levinas' question: "Is a truly diachronic transcendence nothing more than something to delude gratuitous imagination, opinion, and positive religions?" (EP 67). The fact that the encounter with transcendence is diachronic—that is, refuses to be encapsulated in the presence of a given subjectivity's understanding—does not mean that this experience must be relegated to the dimension of the irrational. It does not mean, moreover, that there is no possible description of the encounter with transcendence. Indeed, it is possible, according to Levinas, to describe such an encounter, to do a phenomenology of such an experience.[18] There is something to be said about this twilight experience of transcendence, ever oscillating between the light of revelation and the darkness of doubt and questions. And as such, both the elements of light and of darkness are revelatory. The element of doubt is, according to Levinas, part of the experience of transcendence and must also be described. In the shadow that it casts on the believer's experience, it reveals, according to Levinas, an aspect of transcendence hereto ignored. There is a revelatory moment in doubt.

In fact, doubt is, according to Levinas, a fundamental moment of the encounter with transcendence. For Levinas, the doubting subjectivity, or atheist subjectivity, is closer to encountering the true God than a subjectivity that does not question or doubt. Levinas explains: "Atheism conditions a veritable relationship with a true God *kat auto*. But this relationship is as distinct from objectification as from participation. To hear the divine word does not amount to knowing an object; it is to be in relation with a substance overflowing its own idea in me, overflowing what Descartes calls its 'objective existence.' When simply known, thematized, the substance no longer is 'according to itself'" (TI 77). But one may wonder at how *atheism*, which constitutes the *negation* of God, could possibly allow for the emergence of the true God? What is the connection between this atheism and revelation? Is not atheism on the contrary the refusal to hear or see God, the negation of the very possibility of revelation?

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For Levinas, atheism must be understood differently, not as a subjectivity which has chosen to dogmatically assert the nonexistence of God, but as a subjectivity for whom the question and the doubt as to the existence of God refuses to disappear. It is to such a subjectivity—ever resonating with questions and interrogations—that the true God will, according to Levinas, reveal himself. But why? Why is the element of doubt and of question so essential to the revelation of the true God? According to Levinas, doubt is a fundamental moment of the revelatory process because doubt is what constantly frees God from the representations that human subjectivity cannot help but make. The activities of conceptualization and categorization are natural to human subjectivity and pertain to its intrinsic function. When in contact with such a subjectivity, the transcendent dimension of God is ever in danger of being crystallized in the categories of subjectivity. This is why the moment of doubt is so essential to the preservation of the transcendent character of God: doubt constantly breaks these categories, disturbs, questions them, and in so doing retrieves, as from husks, the "overflowing" essence of God. This is why atheism—which for Levinas names the ever-questioning mind—is a necessary stage to encountering a God who is *kat auto,* absolute and not relative to a subjectivity's constructions.

Far from obstructing the revelation of the true God, the lingering questions and doubts allow then for his continual manifestation as the true God, *kat auto,* and absolute from a given subjectivity's constitutive activity. And as such, doubt constitutes, in its very interruption of subjectivity's intellectual grasp, a mode of manifestation of God, reveals God as transcendent, as that which continually escapes all attempts to grasp and categorize. Levinas speaks of this mode of manifestation as "enigma": "This way the Other has of seeking my recognition while preserving his *incognito*, disdaining recourse to a wink-of-the-eye of understanding or complicity, this way of manifesting himself without manifesting himself, we call enigma—going back to the etymology of this Greek term, and contrasting it with the indiscreet and victorious appearing of a *phenomenon*" (EP 70). Contrary to the phenomenal object—which lends itself clearly to human perception and cognition, the enigma retains its hiddenness, its intrinsic mystery, ever escaping the grasp of subjectivity while nevertheless engaging it in an encounter. Far from obstructing the manifestation of God, doubt becomes the very protector of its intrinsic nature as transcendent to subjectivity and prevents its reduction to the ontological categories of the human world. Thus, according to Kosky, "the assumption that God must be in order to be witnessed treats God as if God were a being like other beings in the totality of the world."[19] The exile of subjectivity away from the certainties and comforts of organized religion opens up the narrow way toward the true God.[20]

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The exiled subjectivity is hence the guardian of the true, transcendent, exiled God. Only a subjectivity which is exiled, which has no ground for belief, which has no cognitive or perceptive basis to its belief, which comes across as a fool,[21] is capable of testifying to the true God. A subjectivity which has sunk into the comforts and consolations of organized religion, sure of its beliefs and certain of the way to go, will never encounter more than a God made to its measure. Only a subjectivity which has known hunger and thirst, which has acknowledged its intrinsic exile, its condition as a "stranger on the earth," its poverty, its destitution within the world of cognition and perception can come close to the true God.[22] For only such a subjectivity, because of its intrinsic poverty, is capable of receiving a revelation which "overflows" its boundaries and comfort zone.

The problem remains, however, as to whether a genuine relationship can take place between the believer and a God who offers no comfort and who escapes all attempts at understanding. While doubt and desire reveal a God beyond perception and beyond utility—thus revealing a God whose transcendence remains untainted by self-interest—the question remains as to whether a relationship, an encounter is possible with such a God. Indeed, doubt leaves us with an empty concept of God, while the thirst and hunger of metaphysical desire never interrupts the solitude and destitution of the believer leaving him or her empty-handed. What sort of encounter then is this? Behind the exile and hiddenness of God lurks a terrible emptiness. The connection between the believer and God remains here entirely negative. Subjectivity is left entirely alone, "despairing in the solitude in which this absolute humility leaves it" (EP 71). And yet, according to Levinas, "invisibility does not denote an absence of relation" (TI 34). The question is how? How does such an invisible God, inaccessible to the believer's thoughts and needs, *not* denote an absence of relation?

II The God of the exiled

Levinas himself acknowledges the abstract character of this exiled God: "We have spoken of a desire for the Good beyond being, a transcendence, without giving our attention to the way interestedness is excluded from the desire for the Infinite, and without showing how the transcendent Infinite deserves the name Good, when its very transcendence can, it seems, only mean indifference" (GP 139). Levinas is here interrogating his own descriptions of the "Good" and of the "Infinite," or God. Up to now, these concepts have been highly abstract and described in the solely negative terms of "beyond being," or "transcendent."

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But how then can this transcendence have anything to do with a subjectivity enrooted in being? How can this transcendence not mean "indifference"? What does subjectivity have to do with this Infinite? What kind of relationship is possible with such an exiled God? Where can he be found and encountered if he obstinately remains absent from the realm of being, of subjectivity?

According to Levinas, there is a place within the world where this exiled God can be encountered and where a relationship with him can be initiated. But this place is a most unusual one, it is not where one would expect to find God. According to Levinas, "The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face . . . His very epiphany consists in soliciting us by his destitution in the face of the Stranger, the widow, and the orphan" (TI 78). The Infinite remains exiled from cognition and perception, yet is manifest within the human face of the destitute other.[23] The abstract concept of Infinity is here deformalized by Levinas in the concrete face of another human being in need! While the exiled God can never be reached directly, he can, according to Levinas, be approached indirectly through an encounter with the destitute other, himself exiled from the world.

The connection between the Infinite and the destitute, exiled other must, however, be further explored. Although it is possible to understand how the Infinite other could lodge himself within the face of a *human* other—inasmuch as that human other contains a dimension which remains, like the Infinite, exiled and inaccessible to the subjective grasp—we do not yet fully understand the connection between the manifestation of the Infinite and the face of a *destitute* other. The destitute other seems to testify much more to the negation of the Infinite, to the absence of God than to his presence. Indeed, the destitute other seems the very antithesis of the Good, the very figure of one abandoned by God. Why then choose the destitute other as the very locus of metaphysics? How is this destitute other the "original form of transcendence?" (EP 71).

We need to better understand the mode of manifestation of the Infinite from within the face of the destitute other. Levinas describes this manifestation not as a *vision* of the Infinite, but as a solicitation or command from the Infinite: "A relation with the Transcendent free from all captivation by the Transcendent is a social relation. It is here that the Transcendent, infinitely other, solicits us and appeals to us" (TI 78). But what of this solicitation? To what are we solicited? What is it within the destitute other that solicits us? Levinas describes the nature of this solicitation as that which "arrests the 'negativity' of the I": "But Desire and goodness concretely presuppose a relationship in which the Desirable arrests the 'negativity' of the I that holds sway in the Same—puts an end to

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power and emprise. This is positively produced as the possession of a world I can bestow as a gift on the Other—that is, as a presence before a face" (TI 50). The "Desirable," that is, the other, brings about an interruption of the "negativity" of the I and "puts an end to power and emprise" of subjectivity. In other words, the destitute other solicits subjectivity in that it calls for the interruption of its power and emprise of the world. The destitute other solicits subjectivity by casting a shadow on its innocent possession of the world and calling it to a responsible sharing of the world. Such is the nature of the solicitation by the destitute other. But we still do not understand the connection between the interruption of subjectivity's emprise on the world and the manifestation of the Infinite? What is it in this interruption that allows for Infinity to be manifest within the world of being?

According to Levinas, the Infinite is manifest in this interruption of subjectivity because, for the first time, subjectivity finds its centrality in the world put into question and itself called to a destiny beyond its preoccupation with its own being and survival. It is this disturbance on the part of the destitute other that constitutes the first manifestation of transcendence within the world of subjectivity. Only the other is capable of operating this "conversion" of subjectivity to transcendence: "The conversion of the soul to exteriority, to the absolutely other, to Infinity, is not deducible from the very identity of the soul, for it is not commensurate with the soul. . . . The idea of Infinity is *revealed* in the strong sense of the term. There is no natural religion" (TI 61–2). Transcendence is thus "revealed" to subjectivity by the human other. For the first time, subjectivity is confronted with a concern beyond its own being and perseverance within being. For the first time, subjectivity is in touch with a being that is outside of its self-centered world: the destitute other, exiled from a world entirely revolving around the self. The encounter with the destitute other constitutes the first genuine experience of transcendence for a subjectivity hereto locked within its own pursuits and interests, and in so doing paves the way for an encounter with transcendence, or God.

Thus, we find, in the terms of Westphal that "God is defined not in cosmological terms but in ethical terms."[24] In other words, God is not defined according to Levinas as a substance, that is to say, as a Being or Cause at the origin of the world to which all beings are related in a causal relationship or, in Aristotelian terms, in a relationship of desire. Rather, the Levinassian God is a Verb, a command which, while remaining hidden and dissimulated within the face of the exiled other, nevertheless commands the self, solicits it to care for that other. According to Westphal, "Levinas promised to oppose the God

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of the Bible to the God of the philosophers and of rational theology, in this case, the beautiful itself of erotic Platonism. He has done so by contrasting the transcendence of the God who commands neighbor love to the immanence of the god who is the obscure object of indigent needy desire . . . God is 'high and lofty' not by being outside the world but by resisting my project of making the whole of being, including god into satisfaction of my needs, means to my ends."[25] Thus, the Levinassian God is not a Being to which the self turns to in dire need, but on the contrary, the Verb which turns the self to the other, interrupts it for the other and as such, opens up for the self the dimension of the Infinite, or God.

The question arises, however, as to whether this command necessarily comes from God. Indeed, one might wonder as to why this command to care for the other could not be inherent to that other herself. Does not the other contain enough transcendence and height to command the self? Why then bring in the concept of God? Westphal himself recognizes this problem: "If God is only 'the He in the depths of the you' does this mean that God is not a distinct personal being but rather the depth dimension of the human person?"[26] John Caputo reiterates this problem in his interrogation as to whether the concept of God is not altogether superfluous in the Levinassian case for ethics, and present only as a vestige of the philosopher's deep-rootedness in the Jewish tradition. Could ethics not function without God? "There is no need to say or think God who orders me to the stranger . . . The word God is too much, too big and bombastic for ethics; it crowds ethics out, draws too much attention to itself, interrupting and suffocating ethics."[27] Caputo goes so far as to situate the command to the other within the very self who hears that command, in a way reminiscent of the Heideggerian call to care, thereby doing away altogether with the heterogeneity of the command, whether it comes from God or from the other.[28]

And yet, one might respond back that if Levinas chooses to nevertheless use the concept of God in his description of ethics, there must be a reason—and a reason which goes beyond an unconscious allegiance on the part of our philosopher to the Jewish tradition. We would like to propose that Levinas uses the concept of God in order to signify the radical heteronomy of the command with regard to both the other and the self. There are deep ethical reasons for this. First, were the command situated in the self, as Caputo seems to imply, we would find ourselves again in the Husserlian context of a subjectivity at the origin of all meaning, including ethical meaning. This, however, would constitute a regression from the pioneering work of Levinas toward a genuine transcendence beyond the scope of the self. If we are to

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escape the inherent problem of solipsism of Husserlian philosophy—and which Husserl himself conceded about his own philosophy—we need to reclaim the concept of heterogeneity and, as Levinas is doing, come up with a convincing phenomenological description of this dimension. Second, were the command to be situated in the other, that is to say, were the other to exert an authority upon the self, ordering it to itself, would we not find ourselves in a context of coercion and violence of the self by the other? In both cases, it would seem that doing away with the radical heterogeneity of the command, that is to say, its exiled character from both the self and the other, leads one to a nonethical context of ontological violence and coercion.

For the above reasons it can be argued that the heterogeneity of the command, that is to say, its transcendent character, is the necessary condition for its ethical character. To lose the heterogeneity of the command amounts then to losing the ethical significance of that command and falling back into the ontological context of power games between the self and the other. We now better understand the significance of the concept of God in Levinas, inasmuch as the latter signifies precisely the necessary heterogeneous horizon from which the command is elicited. Only as such, as exiled from the ontological realm of the self and the other, does the command have any ethical value. Thus, we might agree here with Kosky that "ethics is not entirely an interpersonal affair."[29] A "Third" is necessary, in the Kierkegaardian sense, which makes possible a solicitation of the self by the other which does not stem from either dimensions, thereby preserving its ethical character.[30] Yet, there is no direct apprehension of this God who commands us to the other, no clear and distinct idea of the divine height from which the command originates.

And indeed, the height of the Infinite does not appear as a vision of light, but in the humble garb of a discrete solicitation, as a "trace." It is not seen but heard. It does not present itself to a consciousness but nudges it, disturbs it, profoundly disrupting its internal structure of self-interest.[31] And yet, this voice is no more than a "voice of the subtle silence," (EP 75) ready to depart like an "undesirable stranger" (EP 74) if not heeded. The disruption operated by the destitute, exiled other, is not a violent one, making claims on the world and forcing itself upon subjectivity. The solicitation of the destitute other is as fleeting as a whisper. I hear it in the "wink-of-an-eye," (EP 70) but then this voice, this solicitation, withdraws back into its silence, its eclipse, its exile as soon as uttered to the point where one wonders whether we even heard anything at all. And indeed, it is easy to disclaim the presence of such a solicitation and claim that one has never heard such a command, such a solicitation on the part of the other, that one's grasp on the world has never felt threatened by the presence of this destitute

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other. This is precisely Sonia Sikka's critique: "If they [Levinas' assertions] are phenomenological claims, do they mean to locate structures of experience which everyone, upon reflection, could recognize as their own? But this is simply not so . . . many will also claim that the height of God is not revealed to them only in the human face, or that it is not revealed to them anywhere at all."[32] And indeed, we more often than not pass by the exiled, estranged other without as much as a glance. Where then is the solicitation, the command? Where is the Infinite in this miserable face?

According to Levinas, this solicitation is never directly heard. It is structured as a trace which withdraws as quickly as it has entered the realm of subjective consciousness: "It enters in so subtle a way that unless we retain it, it has already withdrawn. It insinuates itself, withdraws before entering. It remains only for him who would like to take it up" (EP 70). How then does the trace of the Infinite come to signify as such from within the destitute other's face? What event holds back this "undesirable stranger?" (EP 74). What event allows for this "insinuation" of the Infinite to remain and not withdraw as quickly as it entered? According to Levinas, the Infinite comes to the fore as Infinite not directly, as a vision of light, but indirectly, through the response given by subjectivity: "It is up to us, or, more exactly, it is up to *me* to retain or to repel this God without boldness, exiled because allied with the conquered, hunted down and hence ab-solute, thus disarticulating the very moment in which he is presented and proclaimed, unrepresentable" (EP 70). The Infinite hidden within the destitute other's face can only be revealed through the manner that subjectivity chooses to respond to the disruption brought about by the destitute other.

It is as such that subjectivity rises to its destiny as "partner to the enigma": "Enigma concerns so particularly subjectivity, which alone can retain its insinuation, this insinuation is so quickly belied when one seeks to communicate it, that this exclusivity takes on the sense of an assignation first raising up such a being as a subjectivity. Summoned to appear, called to an inalienable responsibility—whereas the disclosure of Being occurs in the knowledge and sight of universality—subjectivity is enigma's partner, partner of the transcendence that disturbs being" (EP 74). The Infinite hidden and dissimulated within the face of the exiled, destitute other, can only be retained through a certain response on the part of subjectivity. The revelation of the exiled and hidden God thus rests on the response of subjectivity to this higher calling.[33] But what is to be the nature of this response?

According to Levinas, the self retains the Infinite paradoxically through an act of dispossession whereby it strips itself of its prerogative as sole possessor of the world and offers it to the destitute other. In other words, one approaches the

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Infinite God not by cleaving to it, or by fusing with its essence, but by releasing one's grasp on the world and offering it to another. This action Levinas calls generosity: "The response to the Enigma's summons is the generosity of sacrifice outside the known and the unknown, without calculation, for going on to infinity. . . . I approach the infinite insofar as I forget myself for my neighbor who looks at me; I forget myself only in breaking the undephasable simultaneity of representation, in existing beyond my death. I approach the infinite by sacrificing myself. Sacrifice is the norm and the criterion of the approach. And the truth of transcendence consists in concording of speech with acts" (EP 76). Thus, according to Claire Katz, "acting morally is not the *result* of the moral rules given from God. To act ethically is not the result of acting in response to a command from God. Rather to act ethically is already to be in contact with God."[34] According to Katz, God is not to be encountered outside of the ethical command. Rather, God is manifest precisely at the moment of ethics and not over and beyond ethics. Commenting on the Akedah, Katz shows that the moment of the religious occurs not, as Kierkegaard thought, in the divine injunction to go beyond ethics but, precisely "when Abraham sees in the face of his son the true meaning of the religious, puts down the knife and hears the angel."[35]

But ethics as the *lieu* of the encounter with the Infinite strikes us as difficult to understand. One would think that the essence of the religious consists precisely in offering oneself or one's best directly to the Infinite. Why deviate the self's generosity back onto the world, back onto another human being, back onto Isaac's face? This way of approaching the Infinite is radically opposed to the Greek understanding of transcendence. For the Greeks, the self must lose all attachments to the world, including the deepest attachments to other human beings, if it is to approach the Infinite.[36] Thus the Greek view of transcendence is, according to Katz, radically opposed to the Levinassian orientation inasmuch as it "promotes detachment from this world."[37] How does an act of generosity toward another human being possibly help the self approach the Infinite Other? Does such an act not deviate the self's love and resources *from* this Infinite Other? And, more importantly, why does Levinas connect generosity with sacrifice?[38] Why this aura of death around the whole concept of generosity?

According to Levinas, the generosity of subjectivity is to be understood in a much deeper sense than mere charity, where the self gives a part of itself to relieve the suffering of others. What Levinas means by generosity is something much more austere. What is asked of subjectivity is not that it shares part of a world of which it remains the centerpiece, but an expulsion of the self out of its central position in the world, a tearing of the world from the self's omnipotent

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grasp. The gift of generosity, in the Levinassian sense, necessarily goes against the self, against its survival, against its very perseverance in being. The gift of generosity is one that must be ready to risk the life of the self to be given to the other. As such, the gift of generosity culminates in sacrifice. But we still do not understand the connection between this quasi annihilation of the self before the destitute other and the approach of the Infinite? Why must the self give itself to an *other* before it can approach *God*?

Generosity toward a human other is the only way of approaching transcendence because it is the only action radical enough to destroy the self's immanent prison of selfishness. The self must *die,* literally or figuratively, before it can have any encounter with a realm beyond the scope of its self-interest. The self's immanent bubble must be burst for the self to encounter genuine otherness; the self must come undone before it can stand before the Infinite God.[39] Levinas speaks of this trauma in terms of a breakdown of the subjective structure: "The noncontained, which breaks the container or the forms of consciousness, thus *transcends* the essence or the 'move' of knowable being which carries on its being in presence; it transcends the inter*estedness* and simultaneity of a representable or historically reconstitutable temporality; it transcends immanence" (GP 142). Only at the price of a rupture of the "forms of consciousness" and of "interestedness" will the self ever come into proximity of the dimension of the Infinite. This is the meaning of the Cartesian "thought that understands more than it understands, more than its capacity" (EP 76). Only a subjectivity open to a complete rupture of its categories and structure is capable of receiving the Infinite. Only a subjectivity capable of undergoing exile is capable of receiving the exiled God.

The analyses of Descartes take, in the light of these descriptions, a whole new meaning. The abstract concept of "infinity overflowing the idea of infinity" takes on the concrete meaning of an overflow of subjectivity beyond its own selfish concerns toward the need of another: "Infinity overflowing the idea of infinity, puts the spontaneous freedom within us into question. It commands and judges it and brings it to its truth. The analyses of the idea of Infinity, to which we gain access only starting from an I, will be terminated with the surpassing of the subjective" (TI 51). The "surpassing of the subjective" is no longer conceptual, as in Cartesian philosophy, but ethical—subjectivity does not awaken to a formal idea which transcends subjective categories, but to the concrete need of an other which transcends and goes against all self-interest. Such is the nature, according to Levinas of a "thought thinking more than it thinks": "This trauma which cannot be assumed, inflicted by the Infinite on presence, or this affecting

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of presence by the Infinite—this affectivity—takes shape as a subjection to the neighbor. It is thought thinking more than it thinks, desire, the reference to the neighbor, the responsibility for another" (GP 142). Such a thought does not think more than it thinks on virtue of its transcending itself cognitively, but because it breaks the barriers of thought, breaks through the conceptual immanence of subjectivity and solicits an action on the part of subjectivity. The transcending does not occur conceptually, but ethically, not through the possession of an idea exceeding its *ideatum*, but through an embodied, concrete response to the need and cry on the part of an exiled other transcending all self-interest and subjective preoccupations. As such, "for Levinas, God is not a moral *a priori*, but is always encountered *a posteriori* and always at the juncture of our dealings with other people."[40]

The Infinite is thus revealed within being not through an extraordinary *idea*, as Descartes thought, but through an extraordinary *action*: "Disinter*estedness* in the radical sense of the term, ethics designates the improbable field where the Infinite is in relationship with the finite without contradicting itself by this relationship, where on the contrary it alone *comes to pass* as Infinity and as awakening. The Infinite transcends itself in the finite, it *passes* the finite, in that it directs the neighbor to me without exposing itself to me" (GP 146). Generosity toward a human other thus makes possible the phenomenalization of the Infinite within the realm of being. It is these actions of disinterestedness, by which subjectivity testifies to an order other than that of the perseverance in being, which reveal the Infinite within being. It is through the self-less act of generosity that the Infinite comes to pass, presents itself, is to be found, is *welcomed* within the realm of being. The glory of the Infinite thus does not shine in the light of an epiphany but in this generous gift to the destitute other: "The work of justice—the uprightness of the face to face—is necessary in order that the breach that leads to God be produced—and 'vision' here coincides with this work of justice. Hence metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted—in our relations with men. There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God" (TI 78). Thus, according to Kosky, "responsibility itself . . . is the revelation of God."[41] Justice testifies to the presence of God in the world, bears witness to his presence within the world. Without this justice, the Infinite recedes into darkness, into hiddenness and absence.

It is in this sense that the exiled subjectivity—the subjectivity that has been dispossessed of all its world—is partner to the Infinite. Far from being an outcast from the gods—as the Greeks thought—the exiled subjectivity is partner to the

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enigma: "Summoned to appear, called to an inalienable responsibility—whereas the disclosure of Being occurs in the knowledge and sight of universality—subjectivity is enigma's partner, partner of the transcendence that disturbs being" (EP 74). The exiled self, the self which has given up its perseverance in being for the sake of the other, is the only testimony of God's presence in the world. The exile of the self thus gives way to a hospitality of God within the world, "such that subjectivity, despairing in the solitude in which this absolute humility leaves it, becomes the very locus of truth" (EP 71). The exiled God can only find a haven in the humbled, exiled self—the self that has given up all quest for survival and which has given up all hope of finding a home in this world. Levinas reverses here the Greek signification of exile. Exile is not here seen in a negative light as the sign of a separation from God, but becomes the very locus of his presence. Exile does not imply a homecoming away from the world, as for the Greeks, but becomes an act of hospitality of God within the world! Exile is not, for Levinas, the sign of a remoteness from God, but the very condition of his welcoming within the world.

The spiritual journey toward the hidden and exiled God passes through the painful experience of exile. Thus was the spiritual journey of Abraham, the father of the three monotheistic religions.[42] His destiny and that of his descendants was to be one of exile. We now understand better, however, the spiritual wealth contained in the experience of exile. Far from constituting, as the Greeks thought, a spiritual impoverishment, a lesser state, exile constitutes the very structure of an approach to the Infinite God. Only a subjectivity capable of exile, of losing its grounds, its comfort zone, is capable of encountering a being beyond its own categorizations and conceptualizations. And only a subjectivity capable of losing its hold on the world, is capable of opening up to a need outside of itself, to a cry outside of its own preoccupations, thus hearing the solicitation of the Infinite. Finally, only such an exiled subjectivity is capable of welcoming the exiled God within the world. We now fully understand the Psalmist's plea: "I am a stranger in the world, do not hide from me my your commandments" (Ps. 119.19 NIV). There, in the humbled and exiled subjectivity, the hiddenness and silence of God become the light of a revelation, of a solicitation toward an otherwise than being.

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7

An Aesthetics of Exile

Introduction

In one of his lesser known works, Plato describes art as a way for human beings to lift themselves above the trivialities of everyday life and have a part in the divine. In the *Ion,* Plato speaks of the poet as an intermediary between humankind and the gods.[1] The poet is a "light thing, and winged and sacred"[2] who has a part in the divine; he is not of this world and lives within it as an eternal exiled whose role is to elevate human beings to the spiritual realm. Art for Plato can thus be understood as a journey to transcendence, allowing for humans to elevate themselves from the material realm of daily trivialities and concerns to the spiritual realm of the gods. Western thought has followed in Plato's footsteps in its views on art and Levinas' contemporary, Heidegger, will carry on the Platonic tradition of understanding art as a quasi spiritual, even prophetic calling.[3] We will see that for Heidegger, the poet is understood in terms very similar to Plato's as the "wine-bearer of the gods,"[4] as a bridge between humanity and the spiritual realm which often goes forgotten in the trivialities of daily existence.

Such a view of art came, however, under heavy critique in the aftermath of the two world wars. In the shadow of the Holocaust, the figure of the artist as the "wine-bearer of the gods" became intolerable. That the gods could allow for beauty to flourish and inspiration to flow among the millions of dead and dying seemed a cruel joke. Any attempt to elevate mankind above the harsh reality came to be seen as a form of escapism, of inauthenticity, as a way to shield oneself from the cruel reality of the war.[5] Levinas himself was a part of this critical movement of art and explains his reticence toward this exilic character of the poet and of his art in the following terms: "This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility. The poet exiles himself from the city . . . there is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague"

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(RS 142). In a way, the twentieth century marks the end of art, the end of beauty, and of the aesthetic categories of Western thought, as is observed by Françoise Armengaud in her essay on Levinassian aesthetics.[6]

But must we do away with art altogether? Must we not reiterate Heidegger's question: "What are poets for in destitute times?"[7] Is not art possible, even necessary in times of need and must all art fall into the pitfall of escapism? Is Adorno's statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,"[8] to be taken as the final judgment on art as an unwelcome and inappropriate form of *divertissement* oblivious to the tragedy of the human condition? And yet, this character of disengagement is intrinsic to the artistic endeavor as Levinas himself observes: "The completion, the indelible seal of artistic production by which the artwork remains essentially disengaged, is underestimated" (RS 131). The destiny of the artwork is precisely to elevate, to transcend the ordinary realm: "It bears witness to an accord with some destiny extrinsic to the course of things, which situates it outside the world, like the forever bygone past of ruins, like the elusive strangeness of the exotic" (RS 131). Art is necessarily "ex-otic," it is intrinsically alien and foreign to daily experiences. The question is, can art still retain its essential character of exoticism, of exile, without falling into deception and inauthenticity?

Responding to this question will necessitate a profound rethinking of Western aesthetic categories as to redefine, not the intrinsic exoticism of art, but the orientation that this exoticism is to take if art is to maintain its truth-content. In other words, can art still open up a transcendent dimension without being deceptive, evasive, or irresponsible? This is precisely Silva Benso's question. Commenting on Levinas' aesthetics she asks whether a possible ethical orientation of art is completely out of the question for the philosopher.[9] Have we not been too quick to condemn art to the realm of the unethical and inhuman?[10] Can art maintain its exilic, exotic character without becoming a form of escapism and inauthenticity? Such are the questions that Levinas will address regarding art and which will lead him to an in-depth study of modern art in contrast with classical art. We shall see that for Levinas, art must maintain its exilic character as a journey to transcendence but this transcendence will be no more, as in classical art, the realm of the gods, but the realm of the human other. Modern art, according to Levinas, takes its spectator on a whole new journey to transcendence, a journey which we will see, has an ethical orientation.

But we do not yet understand clearly the connection between modern art and ethics. Anyone familiar with modern aesthetic investigations will, far to the contrary, see a refutation of ethics, of Western morality, and of any meaning

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beyond the chaos of existence. How then can Levinas perceive in this art an ethical orientation? According to Chalier, the possibility of art opening up an ethical orientation is difficult to establish from the Levinassian canon. While Levinas concedes here and there to this possibility, his stance remains overwhelmingly suspicious of art.[11] And indeed, far from giving us an ethical orientation, this art is fragmentary, chaotic, and lacerates, as Levinas observes, "deep 'fissures' in being."[12] Such an art is the very expression of a general loss of orientation, of a deep rupture in the fiber of society. How can such an art give way to any type of ethics? Again, according to Chalier, this destruction of representation by art, although it constitutes a legitimate act of iconoclasm and a rupture of the fiber of being, does not necessarily open up to the ethical question of justice.[13]

Yet, it is possible to argue that, in the Levinassian corpus, it is precisely in this fragmentary and exilic character of modern art that an orientation to ethics can be apprehended. In line with David Gritz's interpretation, one can discern an evolution in Levinas' understanding of art from a rigid concept of art as representation and idolatry, to an understanding of the more fluid and iconoclastic forms of art as expressed through poetry. Such an art is anything but grounded in being but rather seeks a departure out of the ontological categories of being. And as such, according to Silva Benso, it opens up the possibility of "an ethical significance that enables to discover, within art itself, the presence of the transcendent, the trace of the other in her absolute alterity."[14] But this exilic character of art must be understood in a whole different way than an exile to the realm of the gods as it was in classical art. It is here that we depart from Benso whose interpretation remains, in our view, too close to the Heideggerian view of the poet's exile as testifying to a divine calling versus a genuine concern for the human face. And yet the two exiles are connected; one cannot understand the latter without a proper understanding of the former. We must therefore backtrack to the Western conception of art as exemplified by Heidegger's aesthetic philosophy, if we are to understand Levinas' ethical turn.

I The abode of the gods

Following in Plato's footsteps, Heidegger ascribes to art a quasi-divine quality when he writes in his commentary on Hölderlin's poetry: "The writing of poetry is the fundamental naming of the gods."[15] According to Heidegger, poetry is that which reveals the dimension of the gods within being. To name is to make

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appear, is to express. The naming of the gods by the poets amounts to a bringing to the fore, a making manifest of the gods within the realm of beings. Thus the divine dimension, still dormant within the realm of beings, is explicitly named, is rendered manifest, through art. This naming of the gods hence serves to awaken humankind to the divine dimension which is always present and implicit in the realm of beings but becomes explicit through the poetic naming. The role of art, according to Heidegger, is to elevate man to the hidden order of things, the *noesis* hidden behind the chaos of reality. In Heideggerian terms, the human endeavor of art elevates above the chaotic world of beings and brings out the metaphysical dimension of the gods. Art reminds human beings that they are called to much more than to care for the world around them; they are also to protect the metaphysical realm of the gods. Human beings, for Heidegger, have a metaphysical vocation: To be the guardians of the sacred dimension of the gods.

The poet, thus, has a metaphysical function; he or she elevates us above the realm of beings in which we live, and gives us a taste for that which is above and beyond.[16] Quoting Hölderlin, Heidegger writes: "Yet it behoves us, under the storms of God, yet poets! With uncovered head to stand, with your own hand to grasp the very lightning-flash paternal, and to pass, wrapped in song the divine gift to the people."[17] The role of the poet, according to Heidegger, is, thus, to pass on a "divine gift" to the people. This divine gift cannot be directly passed to the people because of its exceeding light and brilliance. It is a "lightning-flash" far too dangerous to be handled by the common mortal. Only the poet can perceive it as such and then, "wrapped in song," pass it over to the people. The divine gift or presence is inaccessible to the human eye, but it lets itself be wrapped and transmitted in the artist's work. Within the artwork hides the divine presence. The artwork allows for the incarnation of the divine, for the proximity of the divine to be made possible.

The poet, therefore, serves as an intermediary between the people and the gods. Quoting Hölderlin once more, Heidegger compares the poet to a priest: "I know not, and what use are poets in a time of need? But thou sayest, they are like the wine-god's holy priests, who go from land to land in the holy night."[18] The divine vocation of the poet is thus a very special one. Not everyone can be a poet. Not everyone can apprehend the divine lightning and transmit it. It is also a very hard vocation, for the one who accepts it, accepts, by the same token, an eternal exile in the world. The poet, according to Hölderlin, goes "from land to land." He is never able to settle complacently in the realm of beings. His mind is always elsewhere, his preoccupations are always beyond the daily toil of his

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contemporaries. Heidegger hence speaks of the poet as one who has been "cast-out": "The poet himself stands between the former—the gods, and the latter—the people. He is one who has been cast out—out into that *Between*, between gods and man."[19] The poet, because of his stance as "go-between" mankind and the gods, cannot belong to the realm of beings, is already, by his vocation, an outcast, for "how could this most dangerous work be carried on and preserved, if the poet were not 'cast out' from everyday life and protected *against it* by the apparent harmlessness of his occupation?"[20] The poet is thus, according to Heidegger, by essence and by vocation, an exiled in the world. Forever alienated and estranged from the realm of beings, he is so in virtue of a higher calling: That of being the guardian of the metaphysical realm of Being.

And yet, there is something disturbing in this lofty calling of the poet. Could the estrangement of the poet not become a perverse form of escapism? Does not the loftiness of the poet's calling deter him or her from the complexities and difficulties encountered in the realm of beings? The passage quoted above seems to hint already at this in speaking of the occupation of the poet as a protection "against" everyday life. The poet seems, in this passage, to have taken flight from the overwhelming difficulties of daily life and found a refuge in his or her poetry. Art would then seem to shield one against the realities and complexities of daily life. Is then the lofty calling of the poet nothing else but an unrecognized form of escapism on his or her part? Nothing else but veiled cowardice? Heidegger himself recognizes these objections to his analyses: "But when Hölderlin ventures to say that the dwelling of mortals is poetic, this statement, as soon as it is made, gives the impression that, on the contrary, 'poetic' dwelling snatches man away from the earth. For the 'poetic,' when it is taken as poetry, is supposed to belong to the realm of fantasy. Poetic dwelling flies fantastically above reality."[21]

Immediately after this quote he adds, however: "The poet counters this misgiving by saying expressly that poetic dwelling is a dwelling 'on this earth.' Hölderlin thus not only protects the poetic from a likely misinterpretation, but by adding the words 'on this earth' expressly points to the nature of poetry. Poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."[22] Quoting Hölderlin again, Heidegger adds: "Full of merit, yet poetically man dwells upon this earth."[23] The exile of the poet is then no true exile. It is an exile, which paradoxically brings him to dwell upon the earth. Poetry is what reveals to humankind its true place in the world. Not only is man or woman to inhabit the earth, to toil, work and acquire within the world, but also is he or she to dwell upon it, that is to safeguard, from within that

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world, the metaphysical dimension of the gods. Only when the realm of the gods has again become the sacred trust of mankind, will human beings again find their proper place, or dwelling, within the realm of beings. Quoting Hölderlin, Heidegger writes: "May, if life is sheer toil, a man lift his eyes and say: so I too wish to be? Yes."[24]

Heidegger explains: "Only in the realm of sheer toil does man toil for 'merits.' There he obtains them for himself in abundance. But at the same time, in this realm, man is allowed to look up, out of it, through it, toward the divinities. The upward glance passes aloft toward the sky, and yet it remains below on the earth. The upward glance spans the between of sky and earth. This between is measured out for the dwelling of man."[25] The exile of the poet is thus transitory and ultimately aims at recovering humankind's authentic place in the world: its place "between" the sky and earth. Art or poetry is what allows this "upward glance" which spans the between of sky and earth wherein man and woman's authentic dwelling lies. Art, for Heidegger, serves to orient mankind toward an authentic dwelling within the world by unveiling to it its dual citizenship to both the earth and sky. Far from advocating escapism, the poet brings humankind back to its earthly dwellings, to its earthliness. Yet, at the same time, through art, this dwelling is transfigured as the very abode of the gods. Far from "flying fantastically above reality," art calls mankind back to its forgotten responsibility, to a deep and sacred trust: that of protecting, within the realm of beings, the spiritual dimension of the gods.

This role of art as the guardian of a transcendent dimension will be, however, heavily criticized by Levinas. While Levinas himself acknowledges with Heidegger that authentic humanity is found in connection with transcendence, Levinas is clearly bothered with the Heideggerian definition of transcendence. The Heideggerian transcendence remains, according to Levinas, dangerously abstract and as such, occults a much more important transcendence: that of other human beings. In one of his essays on art, Levinas observes: "The orthodox Heideggerians admit of no other discrimination features between two thoughts than those involving the truth of being that governs them. But that *modus operandi* presupposes the primacy of the truth of being, which is still in question here. They have nothing but disdain for any reference to ethical certainties, which would indicate an inferior thinking, an insufficient thinking—opinion. The appeal to ethics runs contrary to the fundamental dogma of Heideggerian orthodoxy: priority of being in relation to beings. Yet ethics does not replace truth with falsehood, but situates man's first breath not in the light of being but in the relation to a being, prior to the thematization of that being" (MB 136–7).

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The Heideggerian preoccupation with the ancient realm of the gods which he elsewhere terms the realm of Being[26] is problematic for Levinas because it brings about a "disdain" for the realm of beings[27] of which human beings are a central part. Such a preoccupation with Being, with the realm of the gods, has no use or interest in the realm of beings, in ethics and in social relations. These are relegated to inferior, domestic, and mundane preoccupations, too trivial for the philosopher to regard as a priority. For Heidegger, the priority is always that of Being over beings and this is what constitutes for Levinas the central problem in the Heideggerian worldview and gives rise to the Levinassian "invitation to leave the Heideggerian world" (MB 135). Such a view cannot evade, according to Levinas, the pitfall of escapism. The Heideggerian view of art constitutes an escape from the responsibilities associated with the realm of beings, associated with the world of human beings, and this in spite of its careful attention to the earthliness of the human dwelling. Such a dwelling for Levinas might encompass heaven and earth but it forgets a central feature of dwelling: that of sheltering other human beings, of welcoming them and giving them hospitality.[28]

As a consequence, the Heideggerian conception of art does not escape the temptation of what Levinas will come to describe as the "essentially disengaged" character of artwork in general, and more specifically, of classical art: "The completion, the indelible seal of artistic production by which the artwork remains essentially disengaged, is underestimated—that supreme moment when the last brush stroke is done, when there is not another word to add to or to strike from the text, by virtue of which every artwork is classical . . . we might wonder if we should not recognize an element of art in the work of the craftsmen, in all human work, commercial and diplomatic, in the measure that, in addition to its perfect adaptation to its ends, it bears witness to an accord with some destiny extrinsic to the course of things, which situates it outside the world, like the forever bygone past of ruins, like the elusive strangeness of the exotic" (RS 131). The essential character of classical art lies, thus, according to Levinas, in this disengagement, this exile of art with regard to the daily lives and concerns of human beings. Such an exile of art is, for Levinas, profoundly problematic in that, far from being revelatory and opening up a dimension of transcendence, it diverts one's attention away from genuine transcendence: that of other human beings and their needs and concerns.

Levinas describes this lack of transcendence in classical art in terms of its incapacity for "dialogue": "The work is completed *in spite of* the social or material causes that interrupt it. It does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue" (RS 131). What Levinas means here by dialogue is the degree to which a work

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of art is inhabited or not by the concerns and problems of the world at large. A work of art which shows no concern whatsoever for the human issues surrounding it shows, according to Levinas, an incapacity for dialogue. It is a work completely locked within its own truth, it is a world completely isolated from the external world. The depiction of beauty when everything around it speaks of destruction and despair, is a work oblivious to its surroundings. Such an artwork is not impacted by the outside world, nor is it capable of reaching out or impacting that world. This art is encapsulated within itself, incapable of genuine transcendence. This character of self-enclosure of classical art within itself—without any reference to the outside world—is named by Levinas "idolatry." Just as the idol has no ears and no mouth,[29] classical art is not affected by reality and does not speak to reality. Levinas observes: "The insurmountable caricature in the most perfect image manifests itself in its stupidness as an idol. The image *qua* idol leads us to the ontological significance of its unreality" (RS 137).

As such, art constitutes for Levinas, a dimension of "evasion": "Art, essentially disengaged, constitutes, in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion" (RS 141). And it is this "dimension of evasion," of exile from the concerns and problems of daily existence, which constitutes, according to Levinas, the profoundly problematic character of classical art: "The world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility. The poet exiles himself from the city. For this point of view, the value of the beautiful is relative. There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague" (RS 142). Such an art is problematic because it diverts one from one's responsibilities in the world. Such an exile is not aesthetic for Levinas, but irresponsible. And the art it gives rise to is not beautiful but shameful as "feasting during a plague."

The Heideggerian poet is, hence, one who, in his attraction to the light of Being, of the gods, has remained deaf and blind to the human reality and to his responsibilities toward this reality. Such is the danger of any art seeking to reach the domain of the gods: an indifference to the destitution and neediness crying out in the human condition, an indifference to ethical concerns. The lofty spirituality of classical art hides a perverse indifference to the human plight. Such was, incidentally, the state of the arts in Nazi Germany where the highest forms of art coexisted with the deepest forms of cruelty and barbarism. This is why, for Levinas, there is a danger in situating our highest calling in the arts,

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in the revealing of the gods and of the metaphysical dimension of Being. For such a calling can come hand in hand with a callousness toward one's fellow human beings. It is "for this reason art is not the supreme value of civilization, and it is not forbidden to conceive a stage in which it will be reduced to a source of pleasure—which one cannot contest without being ridiculous—having its place, but only a place, in man's happiness. Is it presumptuous to denounce the hypertrophy of art in our times, when, for almost everyone, it is identified with spiritual life" (RS 142). To identify art—that is, the metaphysical quest for the abode of the gods—with the highest calling of humanity is, according to Levinas, dangerous. For Levinas, the "spiritual life" of the human condition lies altogether elsewhere and it will take a completely new artistic endeavor to reveal this other metaphysical dimension. Such will be the new aesthetic orientation adopted by what Levinas calls "modern art."[30]

II The exile of humanity

Up until now, transcendence had been defined in Platonic terms as a realm over and above reality. Transcendence corresponded from Plato to Heidegger to an abstract realm of ideas or of Being. The role of art, in this context, could only be understood as pertaining to an abstract realm of metaphysics. We have seen however that such an art poses the problem of a callous indifference to human reality. Such an art is, according to Levinas, "wicked," "egoistic," and "cowardly" (RS 142). Must then art abandon its quest for transcendence, its exilic character, if it is to avoid the pitfall of escapism? But is art still art if it does not take us elsewhere, beyond our daily preoccupations? Is this testimony to transcendence not the very essence of the artwork? Indeed, Levinas realizes this and it is why he does not speak of abandoning the transcending intention of art, but rather, of redefining transcendence. But what kind of transcendence exists outside of the spiritual and metaphysical realm of the gods? What kind of transcendence is Levinas attempting to describe?

In one of his earliest essays on modern art,[31] Levinas highlights the fact that the transcendence sought after by modern art is radically different from that sought after by classical art: "The painting then does not lead us beyond the given reality but somehow to the hither side of it. It is a symbol in reverse" (RS 136). Classical art has always aimed at a realm "beyond" daily reality; it has always sought after a more elevated, more idealistic, more divine realm. Art from Plato on to Heidegger reflects this preoccupation. For Plato, art constituted a window on the realm of the gods, whereas for Heidegger, art constitutes the

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guardian of the metaphysical realm of Being. Modern art, on the other hand, seems to have abandoned this quest for the "reverse" (RS 136). Modern art does not seek a "beyond" anymore, but a "hither" side of reality.[32] But are we at a loss to understand what Levinas means here by "hither" and, especially, how this "hither" can still count as a transcending realm? Is an art of the "hither" still art? Indeed, according to Petitdemange, the concept of the "hither" in Levinas has no ethical resonance, does not signify a transcendent realm but, far to the contrary, signifies a regression to the prison of the sensible.[33] Chalier will go so far as to interpret the orientation of the "hither" as a return to the undefined and undifferentiated dimension of the "il y a" constituting the very inversion of ethics.[34] Levinas does not expound in the essay cited above, but the concept of the "hither" comes back in a later essay found in *Existence and Existents*.

In this particular essay, Levinas does not speak explicitly of a "beyond" versus a "hither," but of an abandonment of perception over sensation. In speaking of the movement of modern art, Levinas observes that "the movement of art consists in leaving the level of perception so as to reinstate sensation, in detaching the quality from this object reference. Instead of arriving at the object, the intention gets lost in the sensation itself, and it is this wandering about in sensation, in *aisthesis,* that produces the aesthetic effect. Sensation is not the way that leads to an object but the obstacle that keeps one from it, but it is not of the subjective order either: it is not the material of perception. In art, sensation figures as a new element. Or better, it returns to the impersonality of *elements*" (EE 47). The movement is no more a classical one seeking to create beautiful forms, thus opening a window on the elevated realm of ideas, to an aesthetic "beyond," but a return to that which precedes the forging of forms, the "hither" of sensation.

In this way, Levinas comments on modern art's privileging of raw texture, color, matter over form. He speaks of contemporary painting as "a struggle with sight" (EE 50). In other words, the contemporary painting no longer seeks to represent an object or a form, but rather is interested in the material which preceded this form: The "naked elements" (EE 51), the "color" indifferent to its object (EE 47), "the materiality of the sound" (EE 47), the detachment of a "word" from within a poem (EE 48). This search for the "hither" of sensation behind the "beyond" of the form thus constitutes the main intention of modern art. There is no longer a concern in modern art for form, but rather a break with form in order to recover the lost and forgotten dimension of the sensible: "In contemporary painting, things no longer count as elements of a universal order which the look would give itself, as a perspective. On all sides fissures appear in the continuity of the universe. The particular stands out in the nakedness of

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its being. In the representation of matter by modern painting this deformation, that is, this laying bare, of the world is brought about in a particularly striking way" (EE 50–1).

Levinas speaks of a "revolt" (EE 51) of contemporary painting, of a rupture with the "beyond" of light, form, and beauty, with an ordered and harmonious world. Modern art has abandoned its Apollonian calling to express the realm of ideas and the hidden order of the cosmos.[35] Rather, modern art testifies to a "shattered world" (EE 49), to an "end of the world" (EE 50): "Such are them undifferential blocks from which Rodin's statues emerge. Reality is posited in them in its exotic nakedness as a worldless reality, arising from a shattered world. . . . The investigations of modern painting in their protest against realism come from this feeling of the end of the world and of the destruction of representation which it makes possible" (EE 49–50). Modern art constitutes itself as a revolt against the well-ordered and harmonious world depicted by classical art. It shatters all attempts at representation, at form, at "worldliness" and is left only with fragments of that world, the building blocks, the elements having constituted that world. Modern art can hence be understood as a departure, an exile, from the luminous and well-ordered world of classical art. Modern art shatters the world of classical art, expulses itself violently out of it.

Consequently, contrarily to the Heideggerian poet, the modern artist is no longer concerned with the realm of the "beyond" of a hidden meaning behind the chaos of reality. On the contrary, the modern artist capitalizes on this chaos, reveals it as that forgotten "hither" hereto occulted by the deceptions of classical art. The "hither" depicted by modern art thus defines an original chaos preceding and continually jeopardizing human attempts at meaning, form, mastery, and ordering. Levinas describes this original chaos as an "unnameable": "Despite the rationality and luminosity of these forms when taken in themselves, a painting makes them exist in themselves, brings about an absolute existence in the very fact there is something which is not in its turn an object or a name, which is unnameable and can only appear in poetry" (EE 51). The modern artist is intent on revealing the darkness ever present in all attempts at light and meaning: "The sensible is being insofar as it resembles itself, insofar, as outside of its triumphal work of being, it casts a shadow, emits that obscure and elusive essence, that phantom essence which cannot be identified with the essence revealed in truth" (RS 137). Behind all attempts at form, meaning, and light, there remains the "obscure and elusive essence" of a sensible reality which defies all attempts at meaning and form. And it is precisely this essence that modern art is seeking to express.

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Modern art thus testifies to a dimension of chaos and of primordial darkness which precedes and resists all attempts at form and meaning. As such, according to Levinas, modern art is a "space, that is, absolute exteriority: the exteriority of absolute exile. This is what Blanchot calls the 'second night,' that which in the first night, which is the normal ending and annihilation of day, becomes . . . presence of absence, fullness of emptiness" (MB 133). The sensible dimension that modern art seeks to reveal constitutes precisely such an exteriority. It is an absolute exteriority first of all in the sense that it is not an exteriority relative to the technical and formal ability of the artist. But it is an absolute exteriority also in the sense that it constitutes an exteriority which precedes the artist himself or herself. The artist is preceded by the sensible, he or she is affected by the sensible before any attempt at creation. To rediscover the forgotten realm of the sensible thus amounts to rediscovering a new form of exteriority: not the exteriority fabricated by the artist as in classical art, but an exteriority which remains ever outside of the formal and masterful gesture of the artist!

It is in this sense that modern art takes us on a journey of absolute exile. Exile of the artist but also exile of the spectator from the world of forms, of harmony, of order into the chaos which refuses all world, which remains resolutely "worldless" (EE 49). The exile here is no more the inauthentic exile tainted with escapism of classical art. The exile sought after by the modern artist is an exile seeking to recover the true reality behind the masks of beauty. It is an exile which takes one not to a fictional "beyond," but to the very heart of reality—to its intrinsic chaos, its fragmentation, disorder and in Blanchot's terms "madness" (MB 132). Thus, there is another transcendence possible other than that of the realm of the gods. There is another way for art to transcend. But the transcending intention of modern art does not take one to an abstract "beyond" distinct from everyday life, but rather to the core of life itself—to that which in life forever escapes human grasp and mastery, to the very temporality of life. The expulsion from the world of forms, the "shattering" (EE 49) of that world by the modern artist serves to bring the spectator to a renewed sense of transcendence: that of this "unnameable" chaos and disorder, this "obscure and elusive essence" (RS 137) which underlies all human endeavor.

There remains, however, a problem with this redefinition of transcendence. Indeed, one might wonder what kind of transcendence chaos and darkness can constitute? Can the dimension of chaos indeed count as a form of transcendence? For Chalier, although modern art's iconoclasm constitutes a gesture susceptible to paving the way to transcendence, it does not per se raise the question of ethics or of justice.[36] And indeed, is not the chaos of our existence precisely

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what constitutes the tragic immanence of our human condition, that in which we are already situated, that within which, as Heidegger puts it, we are always in effect "thrown?"[37] One wonders with Chalier how this return to immanence can possibly pave the way to an ethics of the transcendent other.[38] And what of darkness? Is not darkness that in which we always already find ourselves; is it not our natural state of being, as Plato so acutely intuited in his allegory of the cave? How can these two dimensions then constitute realms of transcendence? And what of art? What does a return to the sensible, to the "hither," to the chaos of the elemental, to this original disorder, or *tohu bohu*[39] have to do with art? Is not art precisely the refusal of chaos, of disorder, and of the elemental? Must not art, inasmuch as it is intrinsically creative, erect itself as the very antithesis of this *tohu bohu*?

We must, however, deepen our understanding of the sensible. For Levinas, the dimension of the sensible has a deeper significance that must be recovered if we are to understand the full significance of modern art. And indeed, commentators such as David Gritz have argued that inasmuch as modern art uncovers the dimension of the sensible—which in Levinas has clear ethical implications—it contains, arguably, an orientation toward the ethical. In his commentary on Levinassian aesthetics Gritz explains that the introduction of the thematic of the sensible in Levinas' commentaries on art constitutes a shift in the Levinassian understanding of art and opens up ethical possibilities for the aesthetic realm.[40] Art, inasmuch as it partakes in the sensible dimension, contains the possibility of an ethical orientation.[41] Indeed, the exile brought about by modern art, the shattering of the world, amounts to an act of iconoclasm through which the lifeless face of the idol is abandoned for an encounter with genuine transcendence.[42] We must now try to perceive beyond the shattering of the world, beyond the darkness, the original chaos that results from this act of iconoclasm, a "presence of absence" and a "fullness of emptiness" (MB 133).

According to Levinas, the dimension of the sensible which is rediscovered by modern art is an important dimension because it is precisely the dimension wherein the face of the other *qua* other will be encountered. In our first chapter we argued that, while the face of the other cannot be encountered as an other cognitively—through acts of representation or constitution on the part of subjectivity—he or she can be encountered on the sensible level: "The sensible is superficial only in its role being cognition. In the ethical relationship with the real, that is, in the relationship of proximity which the sensible establishes, the essential is committed" (RR 118). In other words, it is at the level of the sensible that the "relationship of proximity," that a genuine encounter is possible between

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the self and the other. But this can strike one as strange. Sensibility remains, as we have seen, the dimension of the "unnameable" (EE 51), the dimension of the elemental before all perception and form. How then can the dimension of the *face,* which is always bearer of a name and of an individuality, be found in the indeterminacy of the sensible realm? If the sensible constitutes the darkness and formless void preceding all cognition and artistry, how can the light of another human being's countenance be found at that level? It is difficult to understand why Levinas situates the encounter with the face at the sensible level.

In *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas elaborates extensively on the reasons why the sensible constitutes the *lieu* of encounter with the face. Levinas situates the encounter with the face on the sensible level because it is at that level that subjectivity defines itself as a sentient and physical being capable of pleasure and of pain, of hunger and of thirst. And it is on this very concrete physical level that, according to Levinas, the human encounter takes place at its deepest level. The true and genuine human encounter occurs, according to Levinas, not within a stabilized world where the self and the other happen upon each other at work or at play, but when subjectivity and the other find each other in a situation of profound insecurity and estrangement in the world. Only then, according to Levinas, will a genuine encounter take place, for only then, do the self and the other realize how profoundly they need each other in order to survive. It is in the midst of insecurity, in moments of crisis, where a world has been shattered, that the deep connection between the self and the other is revealed, where their deep inter-relatedness is made manifest. "The relation with the face is not an object-cognition. The transcendence of the face is at the same time its absence from this world into which it enters, the exiling of a being, his condition of being stranger, destitute, or proletarian. . . . The nakedness of the face is destituteness. To recognize the other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the other is to give" (TI 75).

Thus the sensible, in its naked vulnerability and exposition to hunger, thirst, hot and cold, constitutes the very *lieu* of an authentic encounter with the human other. Indeed, the dimension of the sensible constitutes the very dimension of our essential humanity, of our essential inter-connectedness. Beneath all the masks we wear, beneath all the figures of mastery and beauty, lies our vulnerable and destitute flesh, which, in spite of our proper appearance, hungers and thirsts for food, for companionship and love. We now see the significance of the quest for the sensible led by modern art: It is a desire to recover our forgotten humanity, that sensible part of us which is vulnerable, fragile, and exposed, but also that part of us which cries out for humanity, for the help or companionship of another

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human being. Art thus functions here as the disclosure of what Levinas calls in an interview with Françoise Armengaud, an original "wound" which, inasmuch as it calls for a human response, opens up the possibility of ethics.[43] As such, the sensible as exposed by modern art is far from mere brute matter but signifies beyond matter toward the secret of the face. This is incidentally also Chalier's interpretation and her only concession to a possible ethical orientation of art.[44]

Such is precisely the role of art according to Blanchot whom Levinas cites in his essay on modern art: "One might say: the more the world is affirmed as the future and the broad daylight of truth, where everything will have value, bear meaning, where the whole will be achieved under the mastery of man and for his use, the more it seems that art must descend toward that point where nothing has meaning yet, the more it matters that art maintain the movement, the insecurity and the grief of that which escapes every grasp and all ends. The artist and the poet seem to have received this mission: to call us obstinately back to error, to turn toward that space where everything we propose, everything we have acquired, everything we are, all that is disclosed on earth (and in heaven), returns to insignificance, and where what approaches is the nonserious and the nontrue, as if perhaps thence sprang the source of all authenticity" (PN 135). In other words, according to Blanchot, the role of art is to recover that dimension beneath all the masks we have forged ourselves in the world of forms, beneath "everything we have acquired," and "everything we are," and find there our true sensible, vulnerable, precarious, and destitute human condition! This call "back to error" is a deeper truth than the truth of the appearances we project all day long in the world of forms, for it reveals the intrinsic "insecurity" and "grief" of our human condition beneath all of our attempts at acquiring a stable place in the world.

The quest of modern art is thus to recover our essential condition of exile and nomadism beneath our attempts at finding a place in the world: "Art, according to Blanchot, far from elucidating the world, exposes the desolate, lightless substratum underlying it, restores to our sojourn its exotic essence—and, to the wonders of our architecture, their function of makeshift desert shelters" (PN 137). Modern art constitutes a recovery, beneath the stable world of forms within which we project our individual and independent selves, of the underlying "substratum" of our intrinsic estrangement and vulnerability in the world. Modern art thus unmasks our essential exile in the world, which we strive all our lives to dissimulate through the fashioning of a given persona and status within the world. We are all in a way classical artists, seeking to overcome the intrinsic precariousness of our human condition with the forging for ourselves

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of beautiful forms—be they the forms of status, or of class, or of wealth. But underneath this "truth" we seek to make ourselves into, lies the "nontrue" of our exposed and destitute human condition.

The quest of modern art for this "nontrue" beneath the world of forms constitutes a rediscovery of our essential humanity and, as such, reveals our intrinsic dependence on each other as human beings. In the world of forms, there can be no such inter-dependence, for each form finds itself juxtaposed to the other in a preordained space. But the entities in the deeper, nomadic world of the sensible, intermingle, blend, affect each other. The other is no more the one who keeps a designated place in the world next to me, but the one who, estranged and exiled, needs me, whom I bear, and to whom I give the bread that I myself hunger for. Thus, it is only in recovering our nomadic essence that a genuine human encounter is possible. Therein lies the deeper significance of modern art as Levinas observes: "For Blanchot, literature recalls the human essence of nomadism. Is nomadism not the source of a meaning appearing in a light cast by no marble, but by the face of man? If the authenticity Blanchot speaks of is to mean anything other than a consciousness of the lack of seriousness of edification, anything other than derision—the authenticity of art must herald an order of justice" (PN 137). In other words, modern art's rediscovery of our intrinsic nomadic condition heralds "an order of justice," an encounter with the other where the self is defined as intimately connected to the other and responsible for him or her. The significance of modern art hence lies in its ethical orientation. In its rediscovery of the exilic character of the human condition, modern art recovers the deep interdependence of the self and the other that lies at the heart of such an exile.

As a result, the sensible "hither" of modern art opens up upon the "beyond" of the human other, of the face. We are no longer in the classical context of idolatry where transcendence was congealed in form, where temporality was stopped into a fictional eternity. Instead of the "marble" form, modern art gives us the "face of man" (PN 137). It is in this sense that modern art offers a form of transcendence that is more authentic than that of classical art. Classical art offers an abstract, illusory transcendence which never reaches the status of genuine exteriority in that it always still emerges from the hand of the artist. Modern art, on the other hand, in its investigation of our nomadic and exilic condition, reveals a genuine transcendence: that of a human other. Contrarily to the idolatry of classical art, which remains blind and mute to reality, modern art emerges from a renewed sensibility to the "insecurity" and "grief" of the human condition. And it is as such that the work of art orients the self to the other *qua* other as Levinas

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observes in a commentary on Paul Celan's work: "The poem goes toward the other. It hopes to find him freed and vacant. The poet's solitary work of chiseling the precious matter of words is the act of 'driving a vis-à-vis out from behind his cover.' The poem 'becomes dialogue, is often an impassioned dialogue, . . . meetings, paths of a voice toward a vigilant Thou'—Buber's categories! Would they, then, be preferred to so much brilliant exegesis majestically descending from the mysterious *Schwarzwald* upon Hölderlin, Trakel and Rilke, portraying poetry as opening the world, the place between earth and sky?" (PN 41–2).

According to Levinas, the contribution of modern art is, contrarily to classical art, which remains closed upon itself, to orient toward a dialogue, toward an encounter with another human being. The disclosure of our nomadic essence reveals to us our vulnerability and therein, our inter-connectedness, our deep dependence on each other. Modern art, in its rediscovery of our nomadic, exilic essence, thus, paradoxically opens up the possibility of a hospitality of the other. This is Ciaramelli's view according to which the uprooting from the world brought about by a certain kind of poetry plunges us into a dimension of strangeness and alienation which accomplishes a movement of transcendence toward an other.[45] As such, for Ciaramelli, the uprooting brought about by modern art opens to the possibility of a human plurality irreducible to the immanence of totality.[46] Such is the significance of modern art according to Levinas. Far from the Heideggerian view of art as that which establishes a dwelling for humankind where the gods can find an abode, the Levinassian view sees art as that which expulses us back into our pre-dwelling nomadic state. For Levinas, art does not carve out a dwelling, but expulses us out of all attempt at dwelling and at finding a place in the world, reminding us of our essential exilic condition: "The literary space into which Blanchot . . . leads us has nothing in common with the Heideggerian world that art renders inhabitable. Art, according to Blanchot, far from elucidating the world, exposes the desolate, lightness substratum underlying it, and restores to our sojourn its exotic essence—and, to the wonders of our architecture, their function of makeshift desert shelters" (PN 137).

In this, the modern artist departs from the Heideggerian poet who glosses over the precariousness of our human condition, of the realm of beings, for the luminous and eternal realm of the gods or of Being: "Heidegger's world is a world of lords who have transcended the condition of needy, wretched human beings, or a world of servants whose only concern is for these lords. Action, there is heroism; dwelling, the prince's palace and the temple of the gods, which are seen as part of the landscape before being places of shelter"

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(PN 138). And it is precisely in this transcending of the "condition of needy, wretched human beings" that the Heideggerian poet falls into the pitfall of inauthenticity. His world is a "world of lords," oblivious to the deep truth of the human condition as precarious, vulnerable, and destitute. And in making us insensible to our essential destitution, the classical figure of the Heideggerian poet, closes our eyes and ears to the wretchedness of our peers: "Does a man as *a being*, as this man standing before me, exposed to hunger, thirst, and cold, truly accomplish, in his needs, the disclosure of being? Has he, already, as such, been the vigilant guardian of the light?" (PN 137–8). In his obsession with light, the Heideggerian poet turns away from the darkness and wretchedness that surrounds him. Such an art is profoundly deceptive, according to Levinas, in that it blinds one to the neediness of others around us, because it obliterates the essential dimension of being, of human reality, it "implies asserting the impossibility of human wretchedness" (PN 138). Classical art is deceptive in that, blinded by the forms of beauty, we do not have ears and eyes for the silent plea of the other which modern art uncovers. The artist as wine-bearer of the gods has been unmasked as fundamentally blind and mute. His higher lucidity hides a profound blindness and the light of his art hides a calloused insensitivity to the plight of others.

The exile of classical art which sought to elevate humankind to the domain of the gods must be replaced, according to Levinas, by a more authentic exile: The exile of the iconoclast who, like the Biblical figure of Abraham, refuses to be drawn into the luminous sphere of the idol and begins his or her journey to transcendence by a fundamental act of "shattering" of that world.[47] Such an exile refuses the plasticity of the image and of the forms of beauty which coincides with a "disdain" for the wretchedness and destitution of the human condition but rather seeks to recover the deep sensible texture of the human condition. From an orientation to the vertical and abstract transcendence of the gods, art can come to sensitize one to the essential nomadism of the human condition. Such is the endeavor of modern art which seeks no more the abode of the gods, but a return to that forgotten dimension of human precariousness and vulnerability. This new orientation brings us back to our essential human wretchedness. This is no longer the Heideggerian "world of lords," but the wilderness landscape where we find ourselves vulnerable and exposed, hungering and thirsting for love and companionship. In this wilderness, the artist is no longer the wine-bearer of the gods but the voice of the oppressed. The artist is no longer a forger of idols, but a witness to the Infinite hidden within the fragile and vulnerable face of the destitute other.

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Conclusion: The Wisdom of Exile

Upon arriving to the Promised Land, the Hebrews received a very strange commandment indeed. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, one of them, the tribe of Levi was not to receive an inheritance in the land. They were not to receive property but were commanded to dwell as exiles among their brothers. Upon their arrival at the gates of the Promised Land, the tribe of Levi is reminded that it would have no share in the inheritance of Israel: "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them" (Num. 18.20 NIV). And so, the Levites were to remain perpetually in exile within the land of Israel. Born in exile, the Levites were to carry the memory of this exile within the land of Israel. They were to testify to the perdurance of the dimension of exile within the very process of sedentarization. The question of course, is why? Why must the memory of exile be protected? And why this particular tribe, the tribe of Levi?

To understand this strange commandment, one must go back to the ancient times when it was uttered. Originally, this commandment was enunciated as a curse upon Levi (and his brother Simon) for killing Shechem and all of his household for the violation of their sister Dinah. This was an honor-killing, in retaliation for the disgrace that Shechem brought upon Dinah. When asked why he did it, Levi answers: "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" (Gen. 34. 31 NIV). Thus, it was in the name of tribal honor that this killing took place, in order to atone for the disgrace that the violation of Dinah brought upon the whole tribe. At the time, no curse is emitted. It is only upon his deathbed that Jacob remembers this vengeful act on the part of his son Levi and curses him: "Simon 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" (Gen. 49.5–7 NIV). Thus because of their tribal pride, because they privileged tribal honor over human life, they are now cursed to remaining "scattered" and "dispersed" among their brothers as eternal exiles.

However, the story doesn't end there. This curse was later changed into a blessing! Many centuries later, when the people of Israel were delivered

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from their bondage in Egypt and brought to the desert to be severely tested, the children of Levi distinguished themselves, not this time through acts of violence, as their father Levi had, but through their steadfast faithfulness to God. As the people ceded to idolatry during their trial in the desert, Levi was the only tribe that stood fast on the side of God and refused to bow before the idol of the golden calf. At that time, the Levites were blessed and "set apart" for God (Exod. 32.29 NIV). It is only later that this "setting apart" came to be understood as a calling to a life of exile. Alluding to the episode of the golden calf, the Scriptures explain: "This is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance" (Deut. 10.9 NIV). Consequently, the exile and dispersion of the Levites is no longer seen as a curse, but as a blessing, as a sign of election, as a sign of their special affiliation with God.

And indeed, this exilic destiny of the Levite was associated with a spiritual calling. In the midst of the land of Israel, the Levites were to testify to an order beyond the national borders of Israel, to a kingdom which was not of this world. Through his exile, the Levite was to guard the memory of a dimension which could 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 was 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.

As a result, one can observe a complete reversal in the destiny of the 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

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his exile has broadened his horizon to include not only fraternal and patriotic values, but 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. We learn from this story that the condition of exile is what orients an otherwise strictly immanent subjectivity, locked in nationalistic concerns, to the transcendent values of universal love and respect. Such is the calling of the exiled: the awakening to values beyond that of fraternity and patriotism. Thus the curse of exiled hides a blessing: That of a priestly calling to stand in connection with a higher order and to represent this higher order. The exiled finds herself brutally torn out of her land, only to realize that what constitutes our humanity is not our dwelling on a plot of land, but the capacity for human solidarity. That one's true homeland is found not in a piece of earth, but in human connection. Thus the exiled finds herself torn from the earth, from immanence, in order that spirit, transcendence, humanity might blow through her.

The curse of exile hides then an ethical treasure: An openness to people beyond borders, beyond nationalities, beyond a given plot of land. Hence exile is the beginning of the discipline of ethics. Beyond the narrow etymological meaning of ethics as *ethos,* that is, as a set of customs binding to a given community, the discipline of ethics must come to signify those principles binding to all people, to the human community at large. And this is precisely the lesson of exile. Before the awakening brought about by the exilic condition, there is only tribal solidarity, only fraternity and patriotism. Only the experience of exile can broaden the scope of this solidarity to include the greater humanity, thereby paving the way to an ethics. And it is incidentally precisely in the wake of this renewed sensitivity to the plight of the exiled in the aftermath of World War II, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was transcribed as a template for an ethics no more reduced to a given *ethos,* but universally binding, ascribing rights to not only the next of kin, but to the stranger as well. Thus, the universality of ethics is borne out of the experience of exile. There can be no universal ethics before one has had a taste of exile. It is the trauma of exile which develops in one a sensitivity to humanity at large, beyond mere fraternity, in so doing, awakens us to the realm of ethics.

And as such, exile constitutes, contrarily to the Western negative connotations of exile, the binding force of society and not, as was thought by liberal political theory, the interests of the self. Indeed, against the liberal model founded on the protection of the rights of the self, Levinas proposes an

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alternative political model founded on the self's responsibility for the exiled other. It is thus not the self that constitutes the locus of society, but precisely the other. Society is no longer born of the need to protect the self's place in the sun as in the Hobbesian model, but rather rises out of the self's capacity to welcome an other into its space thereby ushering in the "shared space" necessary for the opening of the political. A given society's strength lies then not in its catering to the self's rights, but rather in its capacity for hospitality. In a political climate increasingly wary of the stranger and of the exiled, Levinas reminds us that the very strength and essence of the social bond is structured as hospitality. To lose the sense of hospitality thus constitutes a much greater danger than any threat posed by illegal immigrants as this unravels the very locus of the social bond. To lose the respect of the stranger is to go against the very essence of society. Indeed, the presence of the exiled and vulnerable stranger among us ever reminds one of the origins of society as hospitality. The welcoming of that stranger within the realm of the self hence constitutes an almost liturgical gesture whereby the self reenacts the original moment of hospitality constitutive of the shared space ushering in the political.

It is the vulnerability of the exiled other which we find again in Levinas' descriptions of the erotic encounter. The woman is described by Levinas first and foremost as gentleness, opening up an exilic dimension of vulnerability in the otherwise harsh and hardened ontological realm of conquest. And it is as such that she constitutes the very embodiment of hospitality thereby opening up the possibility of ethics. This exile of woman from within the realm of being is, however, not overcome even in the self's attempt at exploration and encounter through the intentionality of the caress. And yet, woman may still be encountered, but only at the price of an inversion of the Levinassian conception of the caress as exploration stemming from the self's desire into a gift of the self unto the other. Only when the caress inverts itself into Irigaray's "gesture-word," whereby discourse is introduced in the erotic encounter, is the exiled essence of the woman genuinely encountered and welcomed by the self. Again, the structure of relationship takes the form of an act of hospitality toward an exiled and vulnerable other as though everything began in this presence, within ontology, of a fragility. As though without this vulnerability which is fundamental to our human condition—and of which we are reminded through the experience of exile—we would never relate to each other in a deep and loving way. For to love truly, one must recognize one's estrangement, lack, need in the world. This is not unlike Plato's definition of love as emerging from a sense of incompleteness, from a sense of lack. To love

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genuinely, one must realize that we are never truly home until we have found each other.

And it is also this very vulnerability intrinsic to our exilic condition in the world which fuels a deeper love still: the love of truth. It is only when one feels a lack, when one feels a thirst for truth that truth will reveal itself. Indeed, truth does not manifest itself to a self at home in the world, well grounded in their own certainties and preconceptions, as was worked out by Cartesian philosophy. Truth appears only to the self who is not at home in the worldview in which it finds itself. Only a self which has gone through a "conversion to exteriority" can genuinely engage in an epistemological endeavor which does not construct the other but rather apprehends it in a stance respectful of its exteriority. Thus, only an exiled mindset can access something beyond itself, and beyond the worldview from which it has emerged. Only a self capable of receiving the stranger, capable of receiving that which does not fit a certain paradigm or a certain agenda, will be able to apprehend truth. In this sense, there can be no rational discourse, no epistemological discourse without a sense of connection between the self and the other, without a proximity between the self and the other wherein the self allows itself to be jolted by another and of welcoming that other, in the uniqueness of her perspective and worldview. As such, one may argue that truth will only give itself to an inclusive discourse, to a discourse which gives voice to alternative approaches and perspectives. Justice must be done to these voices too often and too long ignored if exteriority is ever to be approached. It is in this sense also that, in the words of Elizabeth Minnich,[1] one must *work* for justice if one is to encounter truth.

It is again through the thematic of exile that one can understand the essence of Levinassian metaphysics, that is to say, his discourse on God. But this God is, like the face of the other, exiled from human perception and conceptualizations. Such a God can never be apprehended on the mode of certainty and from the foundationalist stance of a self seeking to grasp or understand the divine essence. When faced with the latter, doubt is inescapable. And yet, Levinas makes this stance of uncertainty and doubt the very path to God for only a self which has come "undone" in the words of the prophet Isaiah, can apprehend the transcendent God. Thus it is only an exiled and de-centered self, unsure of itself, forever plagued by doubt who can apprehend the exiled God. But while God can only be encountered negatively through doubt, He is manifest directly through the face of the vulnerable and exiled other. It is there, in the margins of history and of ontology, that the trace of the divine essence can be found. The way to the exiled and absent God is hence only possible through ethics, through

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the approach of the exiled and destitute face of the other. And indeed, it is only there that it can be found while still maintaining its exile. For the ways of God are the ways of hiddenness. Were the divine essence to be manifest in all that is desirable in the world, it would lose thereby its transcendent character. The *lieu* of transcendence can then only be found in the undesirable, in the fragile and precarious dimension of the destitute other, ever on the margins of the world, ever exiled. And as such, it is only upon welcoming this vulnerable other that the divine essence will find a welcome in the realm of ontology, that the presence of God can be acknowledged and experienced.

Finally, the Levinassian aesthetics testify to the centrality of exile. Over and against the attempts of classical art to create a well-ordered and harmonious reality, Levinas privileges the experimentation of modern art with chaos and exile from order and form. Taking the counterpart of the Heideggerian discussion of art as the abode of the gods, Levinas will come to describe art as that which undoes all attempts at dwelling and stability. This undoing of form by modern art is seen as pertinent inasmuch as it points us to an exilic dimension before order and harmony: the dimension of sensibility. Such a dimension is privileged by modern art inasmuch as it resists form and fragments it into its original chaos and *tohu bohu*. But the sensible dimension has yet another signification for Levinas: That of signifying the very fiber of our humanity, and this in all of its precariousness, messiness, and vulnerability. As such, the dimension of the sensible constitutes the very locus of the encounter with the human face of exiled and destitute other. The attempts of modern art must then be understood as much more than an undoing of form and a search for chaos, but as uncovering the very dimension and essence of our humanity too often dissimulated under the masks of power and self-sufficiency. In the modern context, the artist no longer comes to represent the voice of the gods as in Heideggerian aesthetics, but the voice of our original vulnerable and destitute condition as humans, thus paving the way, perhaps, to a beyond aesthetics, to an ethics.

We can now discern beyond the curse of exile, a wealth of hidden potentialities. There is indeed a wisdom of exile which understands the trauma of exile as a journey to our very humanity. Indeed, exile reminds us of our intrinsic fragility and precariousness in this world; it reminds us that we are but clay in this world of steel. But this fragility borne out of our experience of exile is a blessing in disguise: for it is this very fragility which propels us to love and care for one another. It is this fragility which fuels all forms of love, be it of human beings, of truth, and ultimately of God. Exile thus has a

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truly levitical function—that of reminding us that we are more than matter, we are also spirit. We are more than our possessions and acquisitions, we are also defined by our spiritual and human connections. Interestingly, in the Hebrew Scriptures, clay, the symbol of our fragility, is also the symbol of our spirituality. Clay in the Hebrew Scriptures indicates our intrinsic spirituality in that it associated with the ancient act of creation whereby God breathed his spirit into a form of clay thus giving birth to the first human being. Clay is thus indicative, in the Hebrew Scriptures, of the creature's dependence on God, of its intrinsic connection with the spiritual realm. The fragility of our humanity, to which the condition of exile continually bears witness, is hence intrinsically connected to our destiny as spiritual and relational beings. We are very far from the Heideggerian view of the poet as the wine-bearer of the gods—noble, solitary, and lofty calling. The exile that is described by Levinas discloses, on the contrary, our fragility, vulnerability, and exposition to outrage and humiliation. And yet, it is within this very fragility, in the clay, that one can find the spiritual wealth of a humanity no longer defined by its solitary song to the divinities, but by its capacity to hear the voice and plea of another in need.

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Notes

Introduction

1 In an issue dedicated to the problem of exile and immigration in Europe, Ignacio Ramonet describes the contemporary exilic scene as unique in Western European history. The sheer scale of the problem of exile in Europe today is, according to Ramonet's editorial, unprecedented. See Ramonet, "Voyages sans retour," 6–7.

2 In the same editorial, Ramonet describes a rising phenomenon of xenophobia not only in Europe but in other non-European regions such as Africa and Latin America. This xenophobia is coupled, according to Ramonet, with a disturbing resurgence in Europe of xenophobic political parties, which constitute their political agendas around the blaming of immigrants for all the nation's woes (see note 1 above). The United States is slowly following the European trend of distrust of the exiled, as has become evident in the increasing discomfort with Latin American immigration as well as with a visible Muslim presence within the American landscape (cf. recent *Time Magazine* articles: Thornburgh, "Border Crackdowns and the Battle for Arizona" or Ghosh, "Islamophobia: Does America Have a Muslim Problem?"

3 Historically, exile is associated in Europe with criminality as the work of Paul Tabori indicates. According to Tabori, exile was a common punishment for criminals both in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. In Greece, *ostracism* was practiced in order to pacify tribal wars: one of the tribes was exiled in order to avoid further shedding of blood. In Rome, *interdictio* was practiced against criminals who found themselves exiled to distant Roman islands. See Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile*, 45–53.

4 This problem has been observed by Finlayson in his reader and guide of contemporary political thought. In the general introduction to this reader, Finlayson observes the problem that contemporary societies, hereto accustomed to defining themselves as a homogenous entity—whether in tradition or spirit—have with the increasing diversity within their midst: "Political thought needs to be aware that its own traditions of thinking, from the Ancient Greeks to the Romantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the nationalists of the twentieth, have caused us to think of citizenship in terms of stable communities united around a unique tradition or spirit. . . . The movement of many peoples in and out of these communities makes such notions problematic. . . . Is it good that our societies are now so diverse? Should politics be concerned with shoring up and defending

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traditional ways of being and doing, or does this amount to advocating a kind of communal purity that can only be achieved at the expense of hard-won rights and that might, as it has done in the past, end in terror? The end of the Cold War has led to conflicts that have displaced many millions of people, and the globe is full of refugees seeking a place to settle or at least to be safe until they can return to their homes. Such massive population-movement has become a political problem across Europe and in Australasia because people appear to experience such immigration as some sort of threat. In the USA too (a nation founded by migrants), immigration, particularly from Latin America, has became a fraught and contentious issue. . . . Should governments accept that their populations just don't like new ethnic minorities coming to live with them, or is it their role to encourage and foster more tolerance?" See Finlayson, *Contemporary Political Thought, A Reader and Guide,* 15–16.

5 The Biblical conception of exile has a primordially negative view of exile as the result of a punishment by God: "To the Biblical prophets, exile was a symbol of divine retribution. As Isaiah makes clear (Isa. 49:9–20 New International Version) in worshiping other deities, the people of Israel revealed a lack of fidelity to their God and the covenant that God had established with them. Their punishment then was the destruction of their spiritual center, Jerusalem. . . . And the forced removal of many from the land that had been promised to them." See Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2922.

6 Such was the view that was developed predominantly in the Middle Ages by Jewish thinkers such as Saadia Gaon: "The tenth century philosopher Saadia Gaon in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* emphasized the importance of exile as a trial and as a means of purification, while according to an anonymous contemporary, exile, as a divine gift and a 'blessing of Abraham,' served as a mark of Israel's election. According to this view, exile was not a punishment from sin but an opportunity given by God to bring God's teaching to all humans," see Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2922. Incidentally, this understanding of exile as an opportunity for proselytism was already found in the Talmud: "God scattered Israel among the nations in order that proselytes should be numerous among them" (T.B. *Pesahim,* 87b). Thus from the Talmudic era to the Middle Ages, exile could be seen as containing both a redemptive signification—as a means of purification—and an ethical implication—as that which facilitates an encounter with the other.

7 We remember here the famous commandment given at the eve of the conquest of Canaan: "You are to love those who are aliens for you for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut. 10.19 NIV).

8 As pointed out in note 7 above, the Scriptures explicitly connect the Hebrew condition of exile to an ethical stance of welcoming the stranger: "And you are to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut. 10.19 NIV). But the passage never explicitly states the nature of that connection. Exile is

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here explicitly related to a stance of hospitality and welcoming, but the paradoxical nature of this connection is never explained or developed in the text.

9 Levinas' experience of exile is perceived by Srajek as playing a central role in his subsequent thinking and writing. Indeed, it is impossible, according to Srajek, to understand the thought of Levinas without referring back to his experiences of exile and persecution: "Their biographies [Levinas and Derrida] are marked by the fact of their Jewishness and the fear, persecution, hatred, and exile which they had to confront because of that heritage. In reading their texts we have to remind ourselves continually of the perennial societal ostracism to which the two thinkers were exposed in order to understand the connections with the philosophy they write which centers around absence, the no-place ('non-lieu'), exile, etc." See Srajek, *In the Margins of Deconstruction*, 16.

10 According to Chardel, the writing of Levinas is in itself an experience of exile serving to awaken the reader to a dimension of exteriority beyond the sphere of his or her own cognition. According to Chardel, the ethical dimension of exteriority and of encounter with transcendence can already be experienced on the level of Levinas' writing style. Instead of writing in a way that the reader can come to grasp the meaning of his words, Levinas intentionally writes in a way that necessitates a hermeneutical effort on the part of the reader, thus signifying to a depth of meaning always remaining beyond him or her. The writing of Levinas is hence, according to Chardel, experienced by the reader as an exile or in nomadism outside of his or her categories of thought. See Chardel, "Du Primat du visage aux richesses inattendues de l'écriture. Remarques sur l'herméneutique d'Emmanuel Levinas," 187.

11 The *Levinas Concordance* recounts 67 explicit mentions of the word "exile" and 46 mentions of the word "to exile" in the totality of the Levinassian corpus. See Cioran and Hansel, *Levinas Concordance,* 284–5. Other commentators have also conducted studies of concepts pertaining to the semantic field of exile in the philosophy of Levinas. We think here of Jean-Luc Thayse who studied the concept of "escape" in Levinas as to how it illuminates the themes of fecundity and otherwise than being in his philosophy. See Thayse, "Fécondité et Evasion chez Levinas," 624–59. Also significant is Ciaramelli's study of the concept of "exodus" in Levinas, which describes the ethical event of the expulsion of subjectivity outside of being in its encounter with the other. See Ciaramelli, "De l'évasion à l'exode. Subjectivité et existence chez le jeune Lévinas," 553–78. Also see Duval, "Exode et Altérité," 217–41.

Chapter 1

1 See Srajek, *In the Margins of Deconstruction,* 18.

2 Ibid.

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3 This is also the diagnostic of Horkheimer and Adorno. In their work, the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment,* the authors show that the Holocaust arose out of a mode of thinking reminiscent of the Enlightenment whereby unity must be striven for at all cost, even to the cost of the other: "For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion . . . For the enlightenment, only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or an event; its ideal is the system from which everything and anything follows . . . For the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry. Unity remains the watchword from Parmenides to Russell. All gods and qualities must be destroyed." See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, 3–5.

4 This is precisely the question that Fasching situates at the center of the ethical challenge posed by Auschwitz and Hiroshima to our contemporaries. Commenting on the ancient tale of Babel, Fasching observes that "the story of Babel is a tale for our times. It is a parable through which we might come to understand our situation. The citizens of Babel . . . we are told, sought to seize control of transcendence through the ideology of a single language and the common technological project of building a tower to heaven. God, however, upset their efforts by confusing their tongues . . . the popular interpretation of this story is that the confusion of tongues was a curse and a punishment for the human sin and pride. But I am convinced that this is a serious misunderstanding of its meaning. For this story must be interpreted within the tradition of stories that make up the canon of the Tanakh (Old Testament), where the command to welcome the stranger appears more often than any other commandment . . . The moral of the story as I read it is that utopian transcendence is to be found not in a 'finished world' of technological and ideological conformity but in an 'unfinished world' of diversity, a world that offers us the opportunity to welcome the stranger." See Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, 1–2.

5 This was also Bonhoeffer's struggle during times and circumstances very similar to Levinas'. In his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer comes to a very similar conclusion as Levinas in language strikingly similar to the latter: "The man with a conscience fights a lonely battle against the overwhelming forces of inescapable situations which demand decisions. But he is torn apart by the extent of the conflicts in which he has to make his choice with no other aid or counsel than that which his own innermost conscience can furnish. Evil comes upon him in countless respectable and seductive disguises so that his conscience becomes timid and unsure of itself, till in the end he is satisfied if instead of a clear conscience he has a salved one, and lies to his own conscience in order to avoid despair. A man whose only support is his conscience can never understand that a bad conscience may be healthier and stronger than a conscience which is deceived." See Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 68.

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6 This is also Bauman's conclusion in his diagnostic of modern ethics and his working out of a postmodern ethics. Distinguishing between a rule-based behavior and a genuine ethical stance, Bauman muses that "only rules can be universal. One may legislate universal rule-dictated duties, but moral responsibility exists solely in interpellating the individual and being carried individually. Duties tend to make humans like; responsibility is what makes them into individuals. Humanity is not capture in common denominators—it sinks and vanishes there. The morality of the moral subject does not, therefore have the character of a rule. One may say that the moral is what resists codification, formalization, socialization, universalization. The moral is what remains when the job of ethics, the job of *Gleichstaltung* has been done." See Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 54.

7 This was already Kierkegaard's intuition when he set the individual's faith as higher than the universal: "For faith is just this paradox, that the single individual is higher than the universal, though in such a way, be it noted, that the movement is repeated, that is, that, having been in the universal, the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular above the universal. If that is not faith, then Abraham is done for and faith has never existed in the world, just because it has always existed. For if the ethical life is the highest and nothing incommensurable is left over in man, except in the sense of what is evil, i.e. the single individual who is to be expressed in the universal, then one needs no other categories than those of the Greek philosophers, or whatever can be logically deduced from them." See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 84.

8 Peperzak, *To the Other*, 305.

9 Ibid.

10 This was the conclusion of Medieval masters such as Maimonides who, while maintaining the central role of reason in the approach of the Creator, acknowledged that there were things that were beyond reason's reach: "Know that for the human mind there are certain objects of perception which are within the scope of its nature and capacity; on the other hand, there are, amongst things which actually exist, certain objects which the mind can in no way and by no means grasp: the gates of perception are closed against it. Further, there are things of which the mind understands one part, but remains ignorant of the other; and when man is able to comprehend certain things, it does not follow that he must be able to comprehend everything." See Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 40.

11 Ephraim Meier incidentally comes up with the same definition of Judaism as a "non-affiliation," highlighting the ethical connotation of such a non-affiliation. Speaking of Levinas' Jewish writings, Meier observes that "in the entire corpus of Levinas' Jewish writings, Judaism appears as an exemplary non-belonging to any totality. It is a non-affiliation, because it is a belonging to every human being and to the entire world. This non-affiliation does not stem from a remoteness, it

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flows from a closeness to the concrete Other. In the twentieth century that saw totalitarianisms and the Holocaust, Levinas reinterprets Judaism as a rupture of totality, a profound solidarity with the excluded, an engagement to feed the hungry. In Jewish life, attested to in the Bible and the literature of the Sages, the psyche of the I is defined as 'the other in the same.' Judaism is suspicious of the ideological, nationalist and imperialist totalities that endanger the human being. It is togetherness with the innocent victim, proximity, to be 'persecuted' by the Other. Judaism in Levinas' eyes is far from exclusivism, fanaticism, authoritarianism or sectarianism. It is care for the life of the other." See Meier, *Levinas' Jewish Thought. Between Jerusalem and Athens*, 8–10.

12 Chalier, *L'inspiration du philosophe*, 10 (my translation).
13 Ibid., 12–13.
14 Lorenc, "Philosophical Premises of Levinas' Conception of Judaism," 157.
15 Bernasconi, "The Ethics of Suspicion," 9.
16 Chalier, *Sagesse des Sens*, 12 (my translation).
17 Srajek, *In the Margins of Deconstruction*, 1.
18 Heschel, *The Prophets, An Introduction*, 3.

Chapter 2

1 Bernasconi, "The Ethics of Suspicion," 8.
2 Haar, "The Obsession of the Other: Ethics as Traumatization," 96.
3 Therein lies, according to Bauman, the problem of modern ethics: "Ethics—a moral code, wishing to be the moral code, the one and only set of mutually coherent precepts that ought to be obeyed by any moral person—views the plurality of human ways and ideals as a challenge and the ambivalence of moral judgments as a morbid state of affairs yearning to be rectified. Throughout the modern era the efforts of moral philosophers were targeted on the reduction of pluralism and chasing away moral ambivalence. Like most men and women living under the conditions of modernity, modern ethics sought an exit from the predicament in which modern morality has been cast in the practice of everyday life." See Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 21.
4 Bernasconi, "The Ethics of Suspicion," 4.
5 Ibid., 8.
6 And as such, Levinas situates himself along the lines of the postmodern critique of modern ethics: "It is the disbelief in such a possibility that is postmodern—'post' not in the 'chronological' sense (not in the sense of displacing and replacing modernity, of being born only at the moment where modernity ends or fades away, of rendering the modern view impossible once it comes into its own), but in the

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sense of implying (in the form of conclusion, or mere premonition) that the long and earnest efforts of modernity have been misguided, undertaken under false pretences and bound to—sooner or later—run their course, that in other words, it is modernity itself that will demonstrate (if it has not demonstrated yet)—and demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt, its impossibility, the vanity of its hopes and the wastefulness of its works. The foolproof—universal and unshakably founded—ethical code will never be found; having singed our fingers once too often, we know now what we did not know then, when we embarked on this journey of exploration: that a non-aporetic, non-ambivalent morality, an ethics that is universal and objectively founded, is a practical impossibility; perhaps also an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms" (Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 10).

7 It is interesting to note how Levinas' concept of nudity as a symbol for exclusion from the world is similar to the Hebrew conception of nakedness as representing those people excluded from society, that is prisoners, slaves, prostitutes, madmen, and the cursed. See Haulotte, *Symbolique du vêtement*, 79.

8 This is precisely Drabinski's question: "The question of how to articulate transcendence outside the boundaries of the transcendental ego must first ask the question: How can alterity signify without the constitutional apparatus? How can appearance be thought without the structures of the subject to whom something appears?" See Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity*, 100.

9 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 131.

10 See also Bernasconi according to whom the Levinassian description of an "absolute" alterity makes no sense in the phenomenological context where alterity necessarily depends on the constitutive activity of a consciousness: "But can one make sense of an alterity that is not relative? This is one of the most powerful questions that Derrida poses to Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics.' He appeals to the full force of the Western tradition to say that the Other is other only as other than myself. The Other cannot be absolved of a relation to an ego from which it is other; it cannot be absolutely Other." Bernasconi, "The Alterity of the Stranger and the Experience of the Alien," 63.

11 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 188.

12 The sensible as the context of the encounter with the face has also been observed by Lingis: "There would then be two kinds of sensibility: A sensibility for the elements and the things of the world, a sensuality, which is appropriation and self-appropriation, and a sensibility for the face of another, which is expropriation and responsibility." Lingis, "The Sensuality and the Sensitivity," 227.

13 Ibid.

14 Levinas is here very close to Heidegger's understanding of a precognitive experience of the world as observed by Ziarek: "Levinas makes it perfectly clear that the way he understands enjoyment is akin to the Heideggerian analysis

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of the modes of Being of Dasein. Enjoyment is the primary mode of the ego's relating to the world. In this relation, the ego constitutes itself as ego through the fulfillment of its needs. This mode of annulling the alterity of the world however, is pre-reflexive and pre-representational. As Levinas repeatedly remarks, enjoyment and sensibility nourish representation. Representation does thematize what nourishes it, yet the very moment of nourishing is lost in it. In this sense, enjoyment precedes representation, in a manner somewhat similar to that in which Dasein's *Existenzialen* precede reflexive thinking." Ziarek, "Semantics of Proximity. Language and the Other in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas," 234.

15 This proto-ethical function of sensibility has also been observed by Drabinski: "Though Levinas has articulated the structure of manifestation adequate (in its radical non-adequation) to the transcendence of alterity, a question still remains: How may the subject be in relation with transcendence, without the analysis falling back into the logic of positionality? This is a signification issue, for the positionality of the subject anchors the logic that underpins thematization, the logic that is the very point of departure for idealism. The relationality of affective life is the clue to this nonpositional mode of relation. Specifically, the relations of enjoyment and desire provide Levinas with descriptive occasions to articulate the modality of relation proper to transcendence." Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity*, 107.

16 Levinas is very close here to the Sartrean analysis of the other as a "hole in the world," as observed by Strasser. According to Strasser, the face as nudity is an absence and Levinas is here echoing the Sartrean analyses of the alter ego as a "hole in the world." Indeed, the face as such has no place in the world, has no function in the horizon of the self's world; on the contrary, it disturbs the egocentric order of the world. See Strasser, "Le concept de 'phénomène' chez Lévinas et son importance pour la philosophie religieuse," 338.

17 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 341–2.

18 Ibid., 343.

19 This is precisely Jean-Louis Chrétien's observation. According to Chrétien, the very fact of my existence compromises peace inasmuch as the space taken by my existence necessarily takes over a space susceptible of being inhabited by another. Thus, my very existence expulses the other and takes his or her place. To live then is, according to Chrétien, to usurp. See Chrétien, "La dette et l'élection," 267.

20 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 233.

21 This is precisely Haar's objection to Levinas' understanding of the exile of subjectivity as having ethical implications. According to Haar, ethics necessitates by definition a common space in which both parties can dwell and encounter each other. Moreover, according to Haar, there can be no response, let alone an ethical response, on the part of a subjectivity that has experienced the trauma of exile, inasmuch as such a subjectivity finds itself without the necessary ground or stability to be able to respond. A subjectivity that is in the process of being expulsed

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and exiled cannot function as an ethical subject capable of responding to the needs of an other. It is itself in need of help, of an ethical response on the part of an *other*. Thus, according to Haar, a subjectivity entirely inhabited in spite of itself by an other, a subjectivity expulsed, does not have the means to genuinely encounter an other outside of itself inasmuch as it is already overwhelmed by otherness. See Haar, "L'obsession de l'autre," 451.

22 Haar, "The Obsession of the Other: Ethics as Traumatization," 105.

23 Ibid., 102.

24 Ibid., 96.

25 Bernasconi, "Justice without Ethics: Neither the Condition nor the Outcome of Ethics," 321.

26 This contraction of itself in favor of the other is very similar to the kabbalistic concept of *tsimtsoum* as observed by Catherine Chalier. According to Chalier, the notion of *tsimtsoum* describes the originary contraction of the divine to make room for another reality, a human reality. Levinas implicitly refers to such a contraction when he speaks of the necessity of an eclipse of God in order to make room for an ethical responsibility on the part of mankind. Furthermore, responsibility is itself structured, according to Chalier, as a *tsimtsoum*, inasmuch as only such a movement is capable of opening a space for the other in the hereto entirely self-centered world of the self. To the divine *tsimtsoum* which opens up a space for a responsible human being, there must respond a human *tsimtsoum*, itself capable of opening up a space for another than itself. See Chalier, "L'âme de la vie," 397.

27 In this we oppose Rudolf Bernet, for whom the gift to the other *presupposes* the presence of the other in an already constituted common world; the other thus cannot be approached as exiled from my world as he must necessarily belong to that world if a gift of that world to him is to be possible: "As to the ontological side, it must be stressed once more that the life I am giving away is and remains my life. It is not the life of a complete stranger, and it is not necessarily a gift addressed to a complete stranger. Turning all Others (including myself) into strangers is ontologically unacceptable and ethically unnecessary. I must have something in common with the life I am giving away, and I must have something in common with the Other to whom I offer the gift of my life." Bernet, "The Encounter with the Stranger: Two Interpretations of the Vulnerability of the Skin," 61.

Chapter 3

1 This is evident in Hobbes' *Leviathan* where the emphasis is heavily placed on reducing individual wills into the unity of a single will: "The only way to erect such a common power as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another . . . is to confer all their power and strength upon *one* man,

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or upon *one* assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices into *one* will . . . this is more than consent or concord; it is a real *unity* of them all, in *one* and the *same* person, made by covenant of every man with every man in such manner as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man or to this assembly of men on this condition that thou give up thy right to whom and authorize all his actions in like manner. This done, the multitude so *united* in *one* person is called commonwealth, in latin civitas. This is the generation of that great leviathan, or rather of that mortal god to which we owe under the immortal do our peace and defense" (Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 114).

2 This has been the classical definition of community as observed by Young: "The ideal of community submits to the logic of identity. It expresses an urge to unity." See Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 229. For Young, and, as we shall see, for Levinas, this classical definition is no more to date with the current change in the makeup of a social fiber that is increasingly diversified. Therefore, for Young, "the ideal of community . . . denies and represses social differences, the fact that the polity cannot be thought of as a unity in which all participants share a common experience and common values" (ibid., 226). This in turn gives way to the dangerous consequence that "it often operates to exclude or oppress those experienced as different. Commitment to an ideal of community tends to value and enforce homogeneity" (ibid., 234).

3 This is the view of many of our contemporaries as noted by Ignacio Ramonet, French editor of the journal *Manières de Voir*. Thus, Ramonet observes, in his editorial of a special issue consecrated to the problem of immigration, an exacerbation of the demonization of the stranger in contemporary societies, which is not limited to Western societies, but can also be found in non-Western societies such as Africa and Latin America. As a result, one can observe a mounting interest for nationalist and right-wing parties and in their agenda to blame the stranger or the immigrant for most of a given society's ills. See Ramonet, "Voyages sans retour," 6–7.

4 This was incidentally also Hannah Arendt's concern in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* as observed by Bernasconi: "Arendt, in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951 complained that the existence of stateless refugees had shown that the idea of the rights of man was worthless: The refugee was by definition stateless and, as such, without protection. Civil rights, the rights that belonged to citizens as such, proved to be the only rights worth having. As a mere human being who lacked citizenship there was nobody to turn to on whom one could rely" (Bernasconi, "Extra-Territoriality: Outside the Subject, Outside the State," 170). In other words, both Arendt's and Levinas' political writings are geared to address the problem of the stranger. In a society where rights are defined in connection to a given community, what of the stranger? It is this question of the stranger's rights that constitute the locus of both Arendt's and Levinas' political thought.

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5 For Bernasconi, the stranger in Levinas is more of a concept than a concrete reality the reason being that, were it to be a mere reality, Levinas' thought would be no more than a "rhetorical device to appeal to our sympathies beyond any philosophical argument" (Bernasconi, "Strangers and Slaves in the Land of Egypt: Levinas and the Politics of Otherness," 249). For Bernasconi, Levinas' mention of the orphan, widow, and stranger are rather metaphors accounting for alterity in general: "It is in the first instance the abstractness, not the concreteness of the widow, the orphan and the stranger that leads him to name them in his philosophical discourse. The widow, the poor and the stranger are involved by Levinas primarily not because these terms define the needy, but because they are terms used to designate in a general way those who have within a given society no recognized status" (ibid., 251).

6 Thus, according to Dussel, "the critical question comes up when we ask Levinas: 'How to feed the hungry, how to do justice to the widow, how to build an economic order for the poor, how to reconstruct the structure of the law in a political order that functions as a closed totality, so inhospitable to the stranger. Levinas' criticism of politics as the strategy of the state of war is accurate, courageous, and clairvoyant. However his critique does not avoid the difficulties involved in reconstructing the positive and critical emancipatory sense of the new politics" (Dussel, "The Politics by Levinas: Towards a Critical Political Philosophy," 80).

7 See note 6 above about Dussel, 78.

8 Ibid., 80.

9 Ibid.

10 Thus, according to Hobbes, "it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known . . . Therefore notwithstanding the laws of nature . . . if there be no power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against all other man" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85; 111).

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 114.

13 Ibid.

14 Simmons, *Anarchy and Justice: An Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas' Political Thought*, 80.

15 Ibid.

16 Abensour, "Le contre-Hobbes d'Emmanuel Lévinas," 259.

17 Simmons, *Anarchy and Justice: An Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas' Political Thought*, 105.

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18 Drabinski, "The Possibility of an Ethical Politics: From Peace to Liturgy," 57.
19 Bernasconi, "Extra-Territoriality: Outside the Subject, Outside the State," 175.
20 Dussel, "The Politics by Levinas," 79.
21 Ibid., 80.
22 Ibid.
23 Gauthier and Eubanks, "The Politics of the Homeless Spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling and Hospitality," 138.
24 Ibid., 140.
25 Dussel, "The Politics by Levinas," 79.
26 Such must be, for Derrida, the basis of a conditional hospitality implying integration and assimilation of the other in the political realm. Only then will conditional hospitality implemented by the political maintain its ethical orientation: "Conditional laws would cease to be laws of hospitality if they were not guided, given inspiration, given aspiration, required, even by the law of unconditional hospitality. These two regimes of law, of *the* law and the laws are thus both contradictory, antinomic, and inseparable. They both imply and exclude each other simultaneously." See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 45.
27 The risk taken by the welcoming of the other as a potential threat can be traced back to the very etymology of the word "hospitality" as alluded to by Derrida: "the foreigner (*hostis*) welcomed as guest or as enemy. Hospitality, hostility, *hospitality*." See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 45.
28 The idea that genuine society rests on the preservation of plurality is also present in Mouffe's work. Distinguishing between antagonism (the struggle between enemies) and agonism (the struggle between adversaries), Mouffe situates the origin of society in a conflict between adversaries: "Antagonism is a struggle between enemies, while agonism is a struggle between adversaries . . . One key thesis of agonistic pluralism is that, far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence. Modern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order." See Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," 16.
29 Bernasconi, "Extra-Territoriality: Outside the Subject, Outside the State," 177.
30 Gauthier/Eubanks, "The Politics of the Homeless Spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling and Hospitality," 14.
31 Hospitality as the criteria for judging a given society is present in both the Greek and Hebrew traditions as noted by Simmons: "both the Hebrew and the Greek traditions use hospitality as a gauge for judging societies. For example, Odysseus often asks 'what are the people whose land I have come to this time, and are they violent and savage, and without justice or inhospitable to strangers, with a godly mind' (*Odyssey* 6:119)" (Simmons, *Anarchy and Justice: An Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas' Political Thought*, 108).

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Chapter 4

1 See Plato, *Symposium*, 22–7.
2 The self must be here understood as a male self. The Levinassian philosophical stance being descriptive and phenomenological, his analyses on the question of love are necessarily situated in his own self and his own perspective as a male. This particular attempt by Levinas to give a description of woman from his own particular standpoint will give rise to a number of criticisms. For example, Sikka sees the effort on the part of Levinas to thematize woman as an act of violence whereby "far from leaving blank the space titled woman and inviting her to fill it in herself, Levinas writes all over this space, inscribing it with his desires, his needs, his mission." See Sikka, "The Delightful Other," 103. This attempt by Levinas remains nevertheless phenomenologically legitimate, and will come to constitute, as we shall see, an excellent starting point for later feminist attempts to articulate a description of woman.
3 Chalier, "The Exteriority of the Feminine," 174.
4 Perpich, "From Caress to the Word," 42–3.
5 Chanter, Introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas,* 16.
6 Katz, *Levinas, Judaism and the Feminine*, 63.
7 See Plato, *Symposium*, 22–7.
8 Irigaray, *To be Two*, 22.
9 See Buber, *I and Thou*.
10 The Talmud thus refers to woman as the "home" of the man (T.B. Tractate Joma, I, 1). In the Jewish tradition, the woman is seen as the guardian of this dimension of interiority all too often forgotten by man in his struggle against the elements of the external world. A Midrash comments on the story that Eve was taken from Adam's rib to mean that, like the rib, the woman is the guardian of man's inner organs, that is, of his heart and soul, too often neglected and forgotten by him in his struggle to survive in the world.
11 Chanter, Introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, 16.
12 Chalier, "The Exteriority of the Feminine," 173.
13 And as such, woman is never apprehended as an end, but always as a means to an end. She is never given her own essence, but only an essence relative to man and to his needs as observed by Sonia Sikka: "Far from maintaining her in her alterity in the sense of granting her the right to define herself, these portraits of woman define her as the other who is needed for oneself. She is needed for both the reproduction of oneself, as in Levinas' description of the erotic, and for the spiritual progress of man." See Sikka, "The Delightful Other," 103.
14 Ibid.
15 But does not this character of being for-the-other of woman constitute an ethical possibility for woman? Taking a view counter to Sikka's, Chalier sees in

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this being-for-the-other of woman precisely her ethical destiny. Commenting on Rebekkah, Chalier observes: "She does not hesitate to go and meet the man who will free her from the weight of an identity that was but a heritage and who will show her the way to a new identity: The identity of utopia, the identity for-the-other. But an identity without security and without guarantees. Such is the feminine as the disruption of being by goodness beyond maternity. . . . 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?" See Chalier, "Ethics and the Feminine," 128.

16 Chalier, "The Exteriority of the Feminine," 174.

17 The Jewish tradition sees in discretion the highest quality of woman and exhorts her to "be a woman who defines herself internally" (T.B. *Bereshit Rabbah,* 18.2). Woman even more than man is taught in the Jewish tradition to define herself internally, that is, to realize that her essence lies not merely in her physical beauty or charm, but rather in her soul. The practice of discretion thus has the first effect to remind woman of her specific role as the guardian of interiority (see note 10 above), but also to protect woman from being reduced to her mere physical attributes. Discretion is the practice that allows for woman to be perceived not just as a body but also as a soul and as such it protects the woman from being seen as a mere means for pleasure. Finally, discretion has the metaphysical role of protecting within woman a dimension of sacredness or enigma that mirrors God's own sacredness and enigma. As such, woman can also be seen as the guardian of the very dimension of sacredness too often ignored or violated in a civilization defined almost entirely by conquest and control. See Manolson, *Outside, Inside: A Fresh Look at Tzniut*.

18 As in rape where the rapist seeks to master, to control and possess the woman. To approach a woman in such a way misses her essential elusiveness and enigma and thus fails to encounter her as woman.

19 As in pornography where an attempt is made to disclose in woman what precisely is not meant to be disclosed but rather belongs to the realm of intimacy and interiority. To disclose in such a way amounts to missing the very essence of woman which pertains to the dimensions of interiority and discretion.

20 See Levinas, "Intentionality and Sensation," in *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, 145–9.

21 Ziarek, "The Ethical Passions of Emmanuel Levinas," 85.

22 Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine*, 63.

23 Perpich, "From the Caress to the Word," 43.

24 Irigaray, "The Fecundity of the Caress," 126, 138–9.

25 Perpich, "From the Caress to the Word," 42.

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26 Irigaray, *To be Two*, 26.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 25.
29 Ibid., 27.
30 Ibid., 26.
31 Ibid., 28.
32 Irigaray, "The Fecundity of the Caress," 122.

Chapter 5

1 See Diotema's speech in the *Symposium* where she evokes the love of human beings as a mere first stage which must be overcome for the love of wisdom. Plato, *Symposium*, 37–50.
2 See Plato's description of the divided line which illustrates the intellectual journey from mere suppositions and beliefs tied to the material world to the more abstract activities of understanding and pure reason. Plato, *The Republic*, 229–32.
3 See Westphal, "Levinas and the Logic of Solidarity," 299–300.
4 Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics, On Not Knowing Who We Are*, 24.
5 Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 226.
6 See Farley, "Ethics and Reality: Dialogue between Caputo and Levinas," 210.
7 For more on the connections between Levinas and Platonic philosophy as they apply to epistemology see Blum, "Overcoming Relativism: Levinas' Return to Platonism," 91–117.
8 Westphal, "Levinas and the Logic of Solidarity," 300.
9 In his *Discourse on Method,* Descartes explicitly situates the ego as the foundation of truth. The first principle which was to guide the quest for truth was indeed to "to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to do so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgments and to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it." See Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 13.
10 Ibid.
11 Heidegger mentions this difficult, even violent, wrenching of truth from being in his commentary on *Antigone:* "It is this breaking out and breaking up, capturing and subjugating that opens up the essent *as* sea, *as* earth, *as* animal. It happens only insofar as the powers of language, of understanding, of temperament, and of building are themselves mastered in violence. The violence of poetic speech, of thinking projection, of building configuration, of the action that creates states is not a function of faculties that man has, but a taming and ordering of powers by virtue

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of which the essent opens up as such when man moves into it." See Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 157.

12 Levinas understands "atheism" as the capacity of subjectivity to take a solitary stance against any heterogenous influence: "One can call atheism this separation so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated. . . . The soul, the dimension of the psychic, being an accomplishment of separation, is naturally atheist. By atheism we thus understand a position prior to both the negation and the affirmation of the divine, the breaking with participation by which the I posits itself as the same and as I." See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 58.

13 Jaggar identifies this tendency for mastery as constitutive of Western male-dominated scientific investigation: "It is claimed with increasing frequency that the modern Western conception of science, which identifies knowledge with power and views it as a weapon for dominating nature, reflects the imperialism, racism, and misogyny of the societies that created it. Several feminist theorists have argued that modern epistemology itself may be viewed as an expression of certain emotions alleged to be especially characteristic of males in certain periods, such as separation anxiety and paranoia or an obsession with control and fear of contamination." See Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," 163.

14 Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 38.

15 Farley, "Ethics and Reality: Dialogue between Caputo and Levinas," 217.

16 This was the essence of Horkheimer and Adorno's argument in their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.

17 Peperzak, *To the Other*, 52.

18 Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics, On Not Knowing Who We Are*, 2.

19 Farley, "Ethics and Reality: Dialogue between Caputo and Levinas," 210.

20 Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics, On Not Knowing Who We Are*, 17.

21 Such is the approach that Feyerabend proposes to the scientific method: "This book proposes a thesis and draws consequences from it. The thesis is: the events, procedures and results that constitute the sciences have no common structure. . . . Successful research does not obey general standards; it relies on one trick, now on another. . . . It also follows that 'non scientific procedures' cannot be pushed aside by argument. . . . A consequence which I did not develop in my book but which is closely connected with its basic thesis is that there can be many different kinds of science. People starting from different social backgrounds will approach the world in different ways and learn different things about it. . . . First world science is one science among many: by claiming to be more it ceases to be an instrument of research and turns into a political pressure group." See Feyerabend, Introduction to *Against Method*, 1–4.

22 Farley, "Ethics and Reality: Dialogue between Caputo and Levinas," 210.

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23 Farley quotes to this effect Arendt who in her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, shows that cynicism toward the truth is essential to totalitarian success: "Without the elite and its artificially induced inability to understand facts as facts, to distinguish between truth and falsehood, the movement could never move in the direction of realizing its fiction. The outstanding negative quality of the totalitarian elite is that it never stops to think about the world as it really is and never compares it with reality. Its most cherished virtue . . . is the leader, who, like a talisman, assures the ultimate victory of lies and fiction over truth and reality" (quoted in Farley, *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World*, 62).

24 Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 226.

25 Farley, *Eros for the Other, Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World*, 63.

26 Cf. Blum, "Overcoming Relativism: Levinas's Return to Platonism," 91–117.

27 Bacon speaks of four such preconceptions susceptible of tainting human knowledge which he terms idols: "There are four kinds of illusions which block men's minds. For instruction's sake we have given them the following names: The first kind are called idols of the tribe; the second, idols of the cave; the third, idols of the marketplace; the fourth, idols of the theater. . . . Idols of the tribe are founded in human nature itself and in the very tribe or race of mankind. . . . Idols of the cave are the illusions of the individual man. . . . There are also illusions which seem to arise by agreement and from men's association with one another, which we call idols of the marketplace. . . . Finally, there are the illusions which have made their homes in men's minds from the various dogmas of different philosophies, and even from mistaken rules of demonstration. These I call idols of the theater." See Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 40–2.

28 Levinas is here very close to Kuhn's descriptions of normal science as incapable of acknowledging anomalies which could, in fact, point to yet unknown truths about the world: "Normal science . . . is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like . . . normal science for example often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments . . . sometimes a normal problem, one that ought to be solvable by known rules and procedures, resists the reiterated onslaught of the ablest members of the group within whose competence it falls . . . revealing an anomaly that cannot despite repeated effort, be aligned with professional expectation. In these and other ways besides, normal science repeatedly goes astray. And when it does—when, that is, the profession can no longer evade anomalies that subvert the existing tradition of scientific practice—then begin the extraordinary investigations that lead the profession at last to a new set of commitments, a new basis for the practice of science. They are the tradition-shattering complements to the tradition-bound activity of normal science." See Kuhn, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," 162–3.

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29 De Boer, "An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy," 96.

30 This attitude of distrust was already acknowledged by Popper as essential to the scientific attitude in contrast with what he terms a mistaken attitude seeking to justify or prove a hypothesis: "The Greek's discovery of the critical method gave rise at first to the mistaken hope that it would lead to the solution of all the great old problems; that it would establish certainty; that it would help to prove our theories, to justify them. But this hope was a residue of the dogmatic way of thinking; in fact nothing can be justified or proved (outside of mathematics or logics). . . . Nevertheless the role of logical argument, or deductive logical reasoning, remains all important for the critical approach; not because it allows us to prove our theories, or to hinder them from observation statements, but because only by purely deductive reasoning is it possible for us to discover what our theories imply and thus to criticize them effectively. . . . there is no more rational procedure than the method of trial and error, of conjecture and refutation; of boldly proposing theories, of trying our best to show that these are erroneous, and of accepting them tentatively if our critical efforts are unsuccessful." See Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 51.

31 Peperzak, *To the Other*, 43.

32 Ibid.

33 Veblen also describes the alienated standpoint of the exiled self as an epistemological plus, in that it gives rise to what he calls "skeptical animus" invaluable in paving new ways in science: "The first requisite for constructive work in modern science and indeed for any work of inquiry that shall bring enduring results is a skeptical frame of mind. The enterprising skeptic alone can be counted on to further the increase of knowledge in any substantial fashion. This will be found true both in the modern sciences and in the field of scholarship at large. . . . This intellectual enterprise that goes forward presupposes a degree of exemption from hard and fast preconceptions, a skeptical animus, *Unbefangenheit*, release from the dead hand of conventional finality. [Such a man] is in a peculiarly fortunate position in respect of this requisite immunity from the inhibitions of intellectual quietism. . . . for him as for other men in the like case, the skepticism that goes to make him an effectual factor in the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men involves a loss of that peace of mind that is the birthright of the safe and sane quietist. He becomes a disturber of the intellectual peace, but only at the cost of becoming an intellectual wayfaring man, a wanderer in the intellectual no man's and, seeking another place to rest, farther along the road, somewhere over the horizon." See Veblen, *Essays in our Changing Order*, 226.

34 Farley, *Eros for the Other, Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World*, 65.

35 Ibid., 64.

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Chapter 6

1 Plotinus speaks of this exile in terms of a "desertion" of totality on the part of the soul: "The souls indeed are thus far in one place; but there comes a stage at which they descend from the universal to become partial and self-centered; in a weary desire of standing apart they find their way, each to a place of its very own. This state long maintained, the Soul is a deserter from the totality; its differentiation has severed it; its vision is no longer set on the intellectual . . . thus it has drifted away from the universal and, by an actual presence, it administers the particular; it is caught into contact now, and tends to the outer to which it has become present and into whose inner depths it henceforth sinks far." See Plotinus, *Enneads,* IV, tractate 8, no. 4, 360–1.

2 The exiled soul thus becomes for Plotinus "a partial thing, isolated, weakened, full of care, intent upon the fragment . . . with this comes what is known as the casting of the wings, the enchaining in body: the Soul has lost that innocency of conducting the higher which it knew when it stood with the All-Soul, that earlier state to which all its interest would bid it hasten back. It has fallen: it is at the chain: debarred from expressing itself now through its intellectual phase, it operates through sense; it is a captive; this is the burial, the encavernment, of the Soul." See Plotinus, *Enneads*, 360–1.

3 Although the Biblical perspective on exile is primordially a negative one pointing to divine retribution, Medieval Jewish philosophy introduced a novel way of thinking of exile not only as the symbol of divine discontent, but also as an opportunity for redemption. Saadia Gaon, for example, emphasizes in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* the importance of exile as a trial and as a means of purification: "What we believe, on the other hand, may God have mercy on thee, is that God has set two different limits to our state of subjection. One is the limitation produced by repentance whereas the other is that occasioned by the end." See Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 294. The Talmud goes even further and sees exile as an opportunity for proselytism: "God scattered Israel among the nations in order that proselytes should be numerous among them" (T.B. *Pesahim*, 87b).

4 Caputo, "Adieu—Sans Dieu: Derrida and Levinas," 303.

5 Ibid.

6 Levinas mentions this in an article entitled "God and Philosophy": "In his meditation on the idea of God, Descartes, with an unequaled rigor, has sketched out the extraordinary course of a thought that proceeds on to the breakup of the *I* think. Although he conceives of God as a being, he conceives of him as an eminent being or being that *is* eminently. Before this rapprochement between the idea of God and the idea of being, we do indeed have to ask whether the adjective *eminent* and the adverb *eminently* do not refer to the elevation of the sky above our heads, and whether they do not go beyond ontology." See Levinas, "God and Philosophy," 135.

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7 See Descartes, "Third Meditation," in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Veitch), 86–97.

8 The Cartesian argument is as follows: "There only remains, therefore, the idea of God, in which I must consider whether there is anything that cannot be supposed to originate with myself. By the name God, I understand a substance infinite, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created. But these properties are so great and excellent, that the more attentively I consider them the less I feel persuaded that the idea I have of them owes its origin to myself alone. And thus it is absolutely necessary to conclude, from all that I have before said, that God exists: for though the idea of substance be in my mind owing to this, that I myself am a substance I should not, however, have the idea of an infinite substance, seeing I am a finite being, unless it were given me by some substance in reality infinite." See Descartes, "Third Meditation," In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Veitch), 93.

9 Bernier, "Transcendence et manifestation. La place de Dieu dans la philosophie d'Emmanuel Levinas," 599.

10 Bergo, "The God of Abraham and the God of the Philosophers: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas' 'Dieu et la Philosophie,'" 115.

11 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 188.

12 The line of argument of this objection is as follows: "However, we can find simply within ourselves a sufficient basis for our ability to form the said idea, even supposing that the supreme being did not exist, or that we did not know that he exists and never thought about his existing. For surely I can see that, in so far as I think, I have some degree of perfection, and hence that others besides myself have a similar degree of perfection. And this gives me the basis for thinking of an indefinite number of degrees and thus positing higher and higher degrees of perfection up to infinity. Even if there were just one degree of heat or light, I could always imagine further degrees and continue the process of addition up to infinity. In the same way, I can surely take a given degree of being, which I perceive within myself, and add on a further degree, and thus construct the idea of a perfect being from all the degrees which are capable of being added on." See Descartes, "Objections and Replies," *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 82.

13 Descartes himself alludes to this possible objection in his third meditation: "and I must not think that, just as my conceptions of rest and darkness are arrived at by negating movement and light, so my perception of the infinite is arrived at not by means of a true idea but merely by negating the infinite." See Descartes, "Objections and Replies," *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 31.

14 Thus, the proof for the existence of God was supposed to dispel all doubt that reality was not the product of an illusion or fantasy. "How do I know that I am not also deceived each time I add together two and three, or number the sides of a square, or form some judgment still more simple, if more simple can indeed be

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imagined? But perhaps Deity has not been willing that I should be thus deceived, for He is said to be supremely good." See Descartes, "First Meditation," in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Veitch), 75–6.

15 Bernier, "Transcendence et manifestation. La place de Dieu dans la philosophie d'Emmanuel Levinas," 601.

16 We are reminded here of the Psalmist's complaint: "I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me" (Ps. 119.19 NIV).

17 Kosky, "After the Death of God: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethical Possibility of God," 258.

18 Levinas is here objecting to philosophers like Wittgenstein who, in the line of Kantian philosophy, carefully circumscribed philosophy to what has a denotation in the world, thereby delegitimizing any attempt at describing or philosophizing about the Invisible. Wittgenstein thus observes at the end of his *Tractatus* that "what we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence." See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 151.

19 Kosky, "After the Death of God: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethical Possibility of God," 76.

20 Levinas' thought is here similar to Kierkegaard's for whom faith traces the solitary path of the individual out of the universal: "But faith is just this paradox, that the single individual is higher than the universal, though in such a way, be it noted, that the movement is repeated, that is, that, having been in the universal, the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular above the universal. If that is not faith, then Abraham is done for and faith has never existed in the world, just because it has always existed." See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 84.

21 This "foolishness" of the believer has already been intuited by Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1.22 NIV).

22 This "poverty" of the believer is praised in the Beatitudes of Jesus as the only way to God: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5.3 NIV).

23 We are here reminded of a tale recounted in the Talmud which places the Messiah among the lepers of the city—a way of saying that God is to be found among the poor, the destitute and the oppressed: "Rabbi Joshua ben Levi met Elijah standing at the entrance of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai's tomb. . . . He then said to him, 'When will the Messiah come?' 'Go and ask him' was the reply. 'Where is he sitting?'—'At the entrance of the city.' And how shall I recognize him?—'He is sitting among the poor lepers, untying and rebandaging their wounds, while thinking, 'Should I be needed, I must not delay'" (B.T. *Sanhedrin* 98a).

24 Westhpal, "Commanded Love and Divine Transcendence in Levinas and Kierkegaard," 208.

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 216.
27 Caputo, "Adieu—Sans Dieu: Derrida and Levinas," 303.
28 Ibid.
29 Kosky, "After the Death of God: Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethical Possibility of God," 254.
30 Ibid., 252.
31 It is interesting that this is precisely the mode of manifestation of the God of the Hebrew Bible: The God of Sinai chose not to manifest himself in a visible figure, but as a command aimed at interrupting the essentially selfish demeanor of subjectivity (see Exod. 20 NIV).
32 Sikka, "Questioning the Sacred: Heidegger and Levinas on the Locus of Divinity," 313.
33 Levinas is here borrowing from Rosenzweig. In his *Star of Redemption,* Rosenzweig makes precisely this point that the revelation of God depends essentially on the response on the part of subjectivity. Unlike Levinas, however, the response of subjectivity to God lies not, for Rosenzweig, in ethical action, but in an act of faith: "By its trust, the faith of the soul attests the love of God and endows it with enduring being. If you testify to me, then I am God, and not otherwise—thus the master of the Kabbalah lets the God of love declare . . . Just so God now also attains reality on his part only here, in the testimony of the believing soul, a reality that is palatable and visible, that is on this side of his concealment, a reality which, on the other side of his concealment, he previously possessed in paganism in another fashion. The soul makes acknowledgment before God's countenance and thereby acknowledges and attests God's being; therewith God too, the manifest God, first attains being: 'If ye acknowledge me, then I am.'" See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 171, 182.
34 Katz, "The Voice of God and the Face of the Other," 21.
35 Ibid., 20.
36 Such was the essence of Diotema's speech in the *Symposium,* later criticized by Alcibiades who reproaches Socrates precisely this detachment and abstraction of the quest for love from concern for human beings. See Gill's introductory remarks to Plato, *Symposium*, xxxv–xxxix.
37 Katz, "Before the Face of God One Must not Go with Empty Hands: Transcendence and Levinas' Prophetic Consciousness," 59.
38 Interestingly this explicit connection between generosity and sacrifice is also found in the Hebrew Bible: "For I desire mercy not sacrifice" (Hos. 6.6 NIV). See also "Even though you bring me choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them . . . but let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5.24 NIV).
39 Such was the experience of the ancient prophets when solicited by God. For example Isaiah: "'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips,

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and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty'" (Isa. 6.5 NIV).

40 Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 52.

41 Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*, 189.

42 See Genesis 12 NIV.

Chapter 7

1 Plato speaks in the *Ion* of the poet as the "interpreters of the gods": "We ought to have no doubt about these beautiful poems, that they are not human nor made by man, but divine and proceeding from gods. Poets are nothing but the interpreters of the gods, possessed for the time by some deity or other." See Plato, *Ion*, 8.

2 Ibid., 7.

3 See Heidegger's work on the poetry of Hölderlin, "Hölderlin and the Essence of the Poet," in Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, 291–317.

4 Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of the Poet," 315.

5 We think here of Adorno's well-known statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." See Adorno, *Prisms*, 34. Adorno himself comments on this inescapable barbarism of art after Auschitz in his *Aesthetic Theory:* "In its disproportion to the horror that has transpired and threatens, it is condemned to cynicism; even where it directly faces the horror, it diverts attention from it. Its objectivation implies insensitivity to reality. This degrades art to an accomplice of the barbarism to which it succumbs no less when it renounces objectivation and directly plays along, even when this takes the form of polemical commitment." See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 234.

6 Armengaud, "Ethique et Esthétique: De l'ombre à l'oblitération," 499. "Que l'art constitue l'un des meilleurs témoins des valeurs spirituelles de civilisations . . . qu'après la faillite des clergés, des dogmes, et des systèmes, les artistes soient les véritables inspirés, les authentiques prophètes, derniers gardiens de l'espoir, ces truismes de la modernité qui vont de soi pour un lecteur de Nietzsche . . . c'est contre eux qu'Emmanuel Lévinas s'inscrit en faux dans un article rude et sévère paru dans les Temps Modernes et intitulé La réalité et son ombre" (Armengaud, "Ethique et Esthétique: De l'ombre à l'oblitération," 499–507).

7 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 87–141.

8 Adorno, *Prisms*, 34.

9 Benso, "Aesth-ethics: Levinas, Plato and Art," 163.

10 Ibid., 172.

11 Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 16.

12 Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 50.

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13 Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 16.
14 Benso, "Aesth-ethics: Levinas, Plato and Art," 163.
15 Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of the Poet," 311.
16 Heidegger's thoughts echo here Hegel's views on art as the manifestation of the Spirit: "Fine art is not real art until it is in this sense free, and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the divine nature, the deepest interests of humanity and the most comprehensive truths of the mind. . . . This is an attribute which art shares with religion and philosophy only in this peculiar mode, that it represents even the highest ideas in sensuous forms." See Hegel, *On Art, Religion and Philosophy: Introductory Lectures to the Realm of the Absolute Spirit*, 29.
17 Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of the Poet," 308–9.
18 Ibid., 325.
19 Ibid., 312.
20 Ibid., 309.
21 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 215.
22 Ibid., 215–16.
23 Ibid., 216.
24 Ibid., 218.
25 Ibid.
26 Heidegger identifies the two concepts in a short essay called "The Turning": "Whether the god lives or remains dead is not decided by the religiosity of men and even less by the theological aspirations of philosophy and natural science. Whether or not God is God comes disclosingly to pass from out of and within the constellation of Being." Heidegger, "The Turning," 49.
27 On the Heideggerian distinction between the ontological realm of Being and the ontical realm of beings see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21–32.
28 In *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas makes an explicit connection between the dwelling and hospitality toward a human other: "No human or inter-human relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. Recollection in a home open to the Other—hospitality—is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent." See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 172.
29 Such is the Biblical definition of the idol: "They know nothing, they understand nothing, their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand" (Isa. 44.18 NIV).
30 See Levinas, *Existence and Existents,* 47–51.
31 Ibid.
32 Levinas speaks here of a necessary reversal of art which is reminiscent of Adorno's own observations: "In the face of the abnormality into which reality is developing,

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art's inescapable affirmative essence has become insufferable. Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 2).

33 "L'art est regression, il ne mène pas au delà mais enlise dans l'en deçà" (Petitdemange, "L'art ombre de l'être ou voix vers l'autre," 82).

34 "Les artistes modernes sous l'emprise du sentiment de la fin du monde s'acharnent ainsi contre le realisme et désirent détruire la representation, ce qui accentue évidemment l'impression de dépossession et de malaise. Lévinas ne célèbre pas cette venue à soi, par l'art moderne d'un sentiment d'étrangeté face aux objets et au monde comme s'il s'agissait d'un premier pas vers la reconnaissance de leur irréductible altérité . . . un pas qui, somme toute, malgré le malaise ou l'effroi, s'avèrerrait bienvenu puisqu'il serait susceptible de mettre sur la voie de la rencontre de l'altérité . . . l'art ne proposerait pas tant un movement délibéré qu'un avant-gout angoissant ou—de façon plus pernicieuse—subtilement séduisant de l'il y a" (Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 14).

35 See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 33–6.

36 Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 16. "Dans la beauté triste qui selon Levinas caractérise l'art contemporain, des 'fissures lézardent de tous cotés la continuité de l'univers' et elles font donc ressortir de particulier 'dans sa nudité d'être' par delà les formes. La rencontre de l'étrangeté qui s'impose ici ne constitue pas toutefois un movement d'élévation qui parlerait àl'homme et qui l'obligerait à la bonté ou à la justice par exemple" (Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 16).

37 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 78–86.

38 Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 14. See note 35 above.

39 We are borrowing this expression from the book of Genesis (Gen. 1.1 NIV) where it describes the original void and chaos preceding the Creation of the world.

40 "Avec l'extension du thème de la sensibilité, il deviant possible de ne plus considerer l'image comme le point de depart de la réflexion sur l'art. Lévinas pense, en effet, l'art de plus en plus à partir du sensible, sur son registre . . . Pensé sous le registre du sensible, l'art se ferait parfois l'inspirateur du langage—il induirait une déstabilization constante de la fixation inévitable du langage—et par là, il atteindrait presque la proximité éthique, le Dire, qui s'insinuerait dans les failles sensibles de l'œuvre" (Gritz, *Lévinas face au Beau*, 87–91).

41 See note 40 above (Gritz, *Lévinas face au Beau*, 91).

42 Adorno comments on this quest for the original chaos in modern art as the only means for modern art to reclaim authenticity and approach again transcendence: "Scars of damage and disruption are the modern's seal of authenticity; by their means, art desperately negates the closed confines of the ever same" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 23).

43 In an interview on Sosno's art, Levinas comments on obliteration as the expression of a wound in the human condition, and as such as calling forth an ethical

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response: "S'il y a obliteration—par ouverture our par fermeture, c'est la même chose—il y a blessure. Or sa signification pour nous ne commence pas à cause du principe qu'elle déchire, mais dans l'homme ou elle est souffrance, et dans le pâtire ou elle suscite notre responsabilité" (Levinas, *De l'oblitération: entretien avec Françoise Armengaud à propos de l'œuvre de Sosno*, 26).

44 "La sensibilité n'est pas la matière brute, en effet, et l'insistance de Lévinas sur sa place éminement signifiante dans l'éthique doit inciter à se demander s'il est vraiment possible de dissocier sensibilité au beau . . . et sensibilité à l'appel issu du plus secret des visages soumis quant à eux à un secret de finitude" (Chalier, "Brêve estime du beau," 27).

45 "C'est précisément ce movement vers l'autre, par lequel la totalisation de l'être dans le discours s'avère impossible, qui est à la base de l'interprétation que le Dit poétique apelle à l'infini . . . en allant vers l'autre, le poème nous arrache à notre enracinement au monde, nous plonge dans une dimension d'étrangeté ou de dépaysement qui, à l'opposé de l'angoisse heideggerienne—ou le Dasein retrouve son être propre ou authentique dans la résolution solitaire d'exister à dessein de soi seul—accomplit la transcendence vers l'autre homme . . . Ce déracinement est une ouverture radicale à la pluralité humaine, irréductible à l'immanence de la totalité" (Ciaramelli, "L'appel infini à l'interprétation: remarques sur Lévinas et l'art," 50).

46 See note 40 above.

47 Such is the story related by a Midrash about the youth Abraham shattering all of his father's idols and then, in an ironic gesture, putting the ax on the biggest idol there in order to escape blame.

Conclusion

1 Elizabeth Minnich, "If you want truth, work for justice" (presentation, Elon University, NC, Fall 2008).

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