

## LEVINAS: JUST WAR OR JUST WAR:

### PREFACE TO *TOTALITY and INFINITY*

The worst form of violence is war. In war humans kills one another, whether directly face-to-face or anonymously at a distance. Like too many men in the twentieth century, Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) experienced war firsthand. He experienced several wars. As a child in the Ukraine and Lithuania there was WWI, the Bolshevik Revolution and the civil war of Red against White Russians. As a French citizen he received military training in the early 1930s.<sup>1</sup> When WWII began in 1939 Levinas was drafted and mobilized as a military interpreter, and was quickly captured with the retreating French Tenth Army at Rennes. He spent the war years in a prisoner-of-war labor camp for Jews in Germany, near Hanover. Levinas's entire family -- his parents and his two younger brothers, Boris and Aminadav -- were murdered by the Nazis. After WWII, by virtue of citizenship he was close to France's war in Indo-China, the war of Algerian independence, and the long "cold war" between the Soviet bloc and the West. By virtue of religion he was close to Israel's 1948 war of independence, and its subsequent wars with its Arab neighbors.

Levinas's most extended discussion of war is quite prominent. It is a central topic of the nine page preface to his magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity* (1961).<sup>2</sup> Written after the book's completion, the preface continues the thoughts begun in its concluding section, entitled "Being as Goodness -- the I -- Pluralism -- Peace."<sup>3</sup> In those concluding pages Levinas characterizes the ethical relation, which is the primary topic of

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<sup>1</sup>A photograph of Levinas in military uniform -- with rifle and knapsack -- in 1932 can be found in Francois Poiric, *Emmanuel Levinas: Qui etes-vous* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1987), p. 57. With an amused smile, Levinas showed me the original of this photograph in his apartment in Paris in the mid-1980s.

<sup>2</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 21-30. (Henceforth *TL*).

<sup>3</sup>*TL*, pp. 304-307.

*Totality and Infinity*, the “face-to-face” relation between I and other where both terms retain their independence by relating across moral and juridical demands, he characterizes the pluralism the ethical relation as alone making peace possible. He writes: “The unity of plurality is peace, and not the coherence of the elements that constitute plurality. Peace therefore cannot be identified with the end of combats that cease for want of combatants, by the defeat of some and the victory of others, that is, with cemeteries or future universal empires. Peace must be my peace, in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the other, in desire and goodness, where the I both maintains itself and exists without egoism.”<sup>1</sup> It is this discussion of peace -- as a function of the plurality of persons made possible by ethics -- concluding *Totality and Infinity* that Levinas prefaces with a discussion of war at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity*. One way of understanding the very title of *Totality and Infinity*, then, is by reference to the difference between “War and Peace,” according to which reading the work performed in the body of *Totality and Infinity*, its philosophical labor, would be a journey from war to peace.

War is first mentioned in the second sentence of *Totality and Infinity*, directly following its more famous opening sentence, which reads: “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.” *Totality and Infinity* is one long argument that not only are we not duped by morality but precisely morality -- rather than epistemology and the ontology constructed under its strictures -- represents humanity’s only chance of not being duped. Ethics, in contrast to epistemology, does not merely “represent” the chance of not being duped. The radical sincerity of the moral relations ethics elucidates “accomplish” or “produce” the true. In contrast to the autonomous interests of knowledge, ethics is a wisdom, its “knowledge” is inseparable from virtue, bound to moral and juridical relations which lie at the origin of sense. The proper philosophical mode of ethics, then, is more akin to exegesis than to thematization, for it retains its enrootedness in a signification that exceed its very signs, a language which retains the traces -- the moral force -- of the saying which is the source of the significations said.

Levinas invokes war, however, as a “strong man” opponent to his argument. It represents the best evidence that humans are indeed duped by morality, that sincerity is itself a charade, an epi-phenomenon, merely a role or mask in a deeper more nefarious plot. Hence the rhetorical appearance of war immediately after the opening interrogative sentence of *Totality and Infinity*. That war belies morality comes as no surprise, perhaps, given Levinas’s own experiences of war. But the threat war represents does not depend on the peculiarities of Levinas’s life experiences. Its challenge is more serious, more constant, indeed, perennial.

Grammatically, war is introduced into *Totality and Infinity* with a question. A certain kind of questioning, philosophy as fundamental questioning, a questioning of fundamentals, as we shall see, introduces war. “Does not lucidity,” reads the second sentence, the first interrogative sentence of *Totality and Infinity*, “the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war?” The question appears strange at first glance. Surely war -- experienced and depicted in terms of brute force, bombs, bullets, explosions, devastation, death, wounds, heroism -- is a threat to morality, of this there can be little doubt. But is war then a *philosophical* issue turning on “the mind’s openness upon the true”? How is the mind’s recognition of truth, that is to say, science, surely one of humanity’s noblest enterprises, at the same time a “catching sight of the permanent possibility of war,” humanity’s most debased condition? To answer this perplexity, we turn directly to the next sentence: “The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives.” This is straightforward. The most unconditional of the unconditional imperatives, the most eternal, if one can say this, of the eternal obligations, is, of course, the command not to murder. Life is minimally the material condition of all human endeavors, whether morality, art, sport, religion, or science. Secular and religious agree on this point. Precisely the command not to murder, so goes the positive argument of *Totality and Infinity*, is what shines forth as the moral surplus, the ethical transcendence of the “face” of the other, bursting through its very manifestation with more than that

presence can contain, as the moral condition of all conditions. The face, and by extension the body of the other, the alterity of the other, introduces beyond its own sensuous presence, bursting through its own form, the command: "Thou shalt not murder." For Levinas the proper mode of transcendence occurs neither as some miraculous opening of the skies, nor, contesting Heidegger, as anxiety before an ever oncoming death or as the history which would exceed but give meaning to my finitude as its never to be fully appropriated context. Such meanings do indeed escape the immediate self-presence of consciousness, but they do so as oncoming horizons, as incomplete projects, as the "not yet" appropriated, rather than in the manner of the transcendence of the face of the other, whose alterity pierces subjectivity, challenges it, cuts into-to its deepest recesses. The proximity of the other person, ethical proximity, comes as the imposition of the unassumable, "contact" with alterity as such, the other as a command laid upon the self to rise to unassumable moral obligation, inverting the natural or rational for-itself to the radically insufficiency of a for-the-other, the self as subject to the other, as moral responsibility for the other and for all others, hence the self as moral expiation, as the very call to social justice, turning the self inside out. In the face of the genuine transcendence of morality and justice, subjectivity would emerge as an inversion of its natural *conatus*, subject as subjection to the other. These are the lines of thought pursued in *Totality and Infinity*. War would make a mockery of them.

Is not talk of the irreducible alterity of the other rendered naive and foolish by war, where the other becomes a corpse? And if not the other, then myself. Is not the pacific moral relation made possible by language, speech, expression, where a moral surplus signifies through a "saying" which is always more than what is said, is not this language rendered merely derisory, manipulative, strategic, by the cunning of war propaganda, not to mention the silencing and death effected by bullets, bombs, chemicals and biological weapons? And what of the related silences produced through sophisticated psychological and physiological techniques of torture, brainwashing, police interrogation? To be sure, morality is not ignorant of evil. It precisely opposes evil. Just as one person can suffer for another,

one person can refuse the other, turn away, remain indifferent. The humanity of ethics is not a steady state but a struggle against the inhumanity of evil. But war is different. There humans kill one another, not like humans but like starved animals. War in this sense is more than the opposite of morality, as evil is the opposite of good, it is rather, as Levinas has indicated, the very suspension of morality. If morality hinges on the absolute alterity of the other, hence the infinity of goodness, war would be absolute evil, if one can say this. Neither war nor peace, then, would be ultimately definable in terms of oppositions, because neither would depend on specifications of a more general genus. But war exceeds opposition by totalization, the elimination of otherness.

With these thoughts in mind, we can locate war within the hierarchic schema of Levinas's thought as follows: (1) absolute good orienting from above, manifest through the transcending moral height of the other, the other's absolute priority over the self; (2) the polar historical struggle of good versus evil: the other as needy, the self as the interiorization of for-the-other, as one-for-the-other, the struggle of compassion against hardness of the heart at the inter-personal moral level, the struggle for justice against injustice at the social, economic and political level; (3) absolute evil below, killing, war, the suspension of morality. The realm of the ethical, including both morality and justice, where "the humanity of the human" is constituted and institutionalized, arises in relation to the absolute good "manifest" through the absolute alterity of the face, irreducible moral transcendence. The ethical self charged by this transcendence, is ordained into a moral subjectivity as an insatiable desire for the most desirable, for "the good beyond being." Concrete ethical life, the struggle to perform moral actions and institute justice, takes place on the historical plane where relative goods and evils are judged closer or farther from the pure good that orients them absolutely. War would be the mockery of this entire ethical schematism, calling not only the good, but both good and evil into question, rendering them ontologically nugatory, sociologically and psychologically naive.

War is thus a mirror image of good. Just as the absolute good renders the concrete ethical realm possible, war would

reorient that same realm extra-morally, turning it into an amoral play of forces, interactions whose significance comes without reference to good and evil. Like the absolute good above, but from "the bottom," as it were, war would be incomparable, hence in truth not an absolute evil (such would be the perspective of ethics) but an alternative to both good and evil, the destruction of morality and justice as such. The image of a mirror image is a good one, if we recall Kant's paradox of "incongruent counterparts," where the hand reflected in the mirror is point for point the same hand as the one it reflects, but is nonetheless incongruent with it (the right hand becoming a left hand; the left hand becoming a right hand). The mirror image of the ethical, from the point of view of the ethical, is the unethical; but from its own point of view, the point of view of war, it is the extra-ethical, otherwise than ethics, a play of forces. Thus, what in peace is the "murder" of a human being, in war is "killing," "slaughter," "wasting" the enemy. The negativity of war would neither be evil nor nothingness, but indifference to morality, shameless shamelessness, guiltless guiltlessness. Nietzsche will call it "strength" or "health" or "mastery." War, then, is not only a violation of morality, it is absolute violence, violence absolutized, force against force.

But why is such an eventuality linked to because glimpsed by "the mind's openness upon the true"? The logic of epistemology balks at the idea of the transcendence. Relation, not transcendence, is its final word. Logic refuses to assign autonomous meaning to transcendence. The maximum alterity, if one can put the matter this way, that logic can validate, is not transcendence but the "transcendental," that is to say, extrapolation from the realm of the relative to its logically necessary and absolute condition. Kant called this logical requirement for completion, for finality, for wholeness, the "interest of reason," whether it could be satisfied (as Hegel thought, through he transformed the very notion of reason to accomplish its fulfillment) or not (as Kant thought). It explains philosophy has so long been at odds with the very possibility of the Creator God as conceived by revealed religion. The transcendent absolves itself from any relations, and hence, for philosophy, with its knowledge interests, can neither be

experienced nor known. Philosophy considers all efforts to introduce transcendence to be forms of nonphilosophy, labeling these efforts empty speculation, superstition, ignorance, error, madness, immaturity, delusion, slavery, willfulness, stubbornness, projection, tyranny, and the like. One need only read Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) to assemble an almost complete list of the many derogatory labels philosophy has used against the presumptions of absolute transcendence. Having fought long and hard on legitimate epistemological grounds to rise above opinion, mythology and poesis, philosophy is not prepared to submit to an ethics, such as Levinas's, built on the absolute transcendence of the good, and is indeed quite well armed against it. The issue for Levinas, however, is to show, despite philosophy's epistemological resistance, how ethics stands or falls in relation -- an "unrelating relation,"<sup>4</sup> to be sure -- to absolute good, the good beyond being, and thus to show that "we are not duped by morality."

The opening question of *Totality and Infinity*, whether or not we are duped by morality, has to do, then, with the significance of moral language and conduct, with their sincerity. If war is the ultimate ground of signification -- whether one prefers formulations such as Thrasymachus's "might makes right," Hobbes' "war of all against all," or Nietzsche's "mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms,"<sup>5</sup> -- to be moral, i.e., to be sincerely moral, i.e., to be sincere, is to be duped by morality. Recalling the extra-moral attitude of the pagan Greeks, Nietzsche cleverly sums up the anti-moral position in a nutshell: "Foolishness, *not sin!*"<sup>6</sup> Machiavelli and Spinoza, more circumspect than Nietzsche, would say: "prudence," use morality as a mask, be moral insincerely, i.e., don't *really* be moral but *appear* to be moral (either to save yourself or to manipulate the masses, or both, it does not matter). Levinas's question, then, is

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<sup>4</sup>TI, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne* [*Truth and Lie in an Ultra-Moral Sense*] (1973).

<sup>6</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1881), second essay, section 23.

not directed to the difficult moral cases, where a moral agent may be duped by an apparent good that turns out to be evil, or by an evil that turns out to be good, or by a partial good weighed against another partial good, moral agency torn between two goods or two evils. In all the cases the issue remains a moral one, the effort to find the good in difficult complex situations. Rather the issue raised is one of being duped by the entire struggle of good against evil. War, the blood and guts of real war, all out war, whatever reasons are given for its justification, would be the ultimate evidence for this claim. The mind's lucidity in its search for truth would apparently catch sight of this permanent possibility, even in times of apparent peace. Peace, it would come to suspect, is but a form of war, war modulated by the impositions of past victories and defeats. But why single out the mind in its lucidity, in its search for truth?

Is this not to see in the mind's lucidity an essential irony or cynicism? It would know better. It would be superior to all the moralists. Its figure is Raskalnokov, beyond good and evil, or at least he thought so for a time, and with terrible consequences. Or the Marquis de Sade, whose knowledge and model of nature authorized all behaviors. The life of the mind is for philosophy the life of questioning. All questions may be asked. Am I my brother's keeper? Levinas will say that even to ask this question, to raise doubts regarding one's obligations and responsibilities toward the neighbor, is already to have failed the neighbor and succumbed to evil. Philosophy is shocked by this point of view, insists on its rights, asks its questions. Thus nothing is authoritative until checked by reason. But does reason see the good? Is reason the proper correlative to goodness? Is morality rational? By what standards? Must morality be judged by the standards of truth? Of course, morality cannot be a stupidity, but that is not the issue. The issue is whether reason, holding to its own standards, can see the reason to be good.

In the body of Totality and Infinity Levinas will argue that the very temporality of morality, where the self is obligated by the other prior to its own syntheses of identification, deeper than its rational mediations, or its contractual negotiations with alterity, cutting these structures of the for-itself to the quick, introjecting the self more deeply, in a passivity more passive than

receptivity, in a suffering for the other's suffering, that this very temporality escapes the synthetic or ecstatic temporality of knowing. The mind's lucidity, its search for the true, is precisely a process of identification, identifying "this as that." But the good reaches the self prior to its capacities of identification. Knowing, then, will take the unsolicited shock of morality for ignorance, foolishness, naivete, slavery. But let us stick to the preface.

"Does not lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war?" Why does the mind, in its very lucidity, in its openness upon the true, end up always catching sight of the possibility of war? Levinas answers: "We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real."<sup>7</sup> What is the connection between the mind's lucidity, truth, reality, and war? Levinas's final answer is one word: totality. "The visage of being that shows itself in war," Levinas writes, "is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy."<sup>8</sup>

A final reformulation of our question: what is the connection, or what are the connections, between the mind's lucidity, truth, reality, war and totality? The answer is clear: the truth of reality revealed to the mind in its lucidity is always "fixed in the concept of totality." What does this mean? How or why is this so?

To know is to explain, to relate, to synthesize, to identify, to understand "x as y," to locate an individual within a context, the unknown within the known. "Individuals are reduced," Levinas writes, "to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible

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<sup>7</sup>TI, p. 21

<sup>8</sup>TI, p. 21. Franz Rosenzweig's influence -- "We were impressed by the opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig's *Stern der Erlösung*" (TI, p. 28) -- is admitted and evident. For more on this relation, see my *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

outside of this totality) is derived from the totality.”<sup>9</sup> For the mind in its lucidity meaning does not come from the individual qua individual. Thus an individual’s moral agency could not derive from itself, from some inner faculty, such was the error of all the moral sentimentalists, whether they saw the human as innately evil (e.g., the doctrine of “original sin”) or innately good (e.g., Shaftesbury). The sense of any individual, to the extent that it has meaning, derives from its context, structure, system, ultimately from a totality. Insofar as the mind’s lucidity sees the inter-relations between all individuals within one system -- the universe which is always one -- each individual is ultimately defined as a function of all others. The most distant star is linked to an ant’s antennae. Relations define terms, which are nothing outside those relations.

Lucidity, then, consists in grasping the “forces that command [individuals] unbeknown to themselves.” One recognizes this lucidity at work in the hard sciences, for certainly no one sees the atoms and force fields that are said to determine natural reality. But what disturbs Levinas is not knowledge per se, but rather its hegemonization, the imposition of this form of lucidity -- differential knowledge -- as if it were the only or the total form of lucidity, and hence the one and only form of lucidity appropriate to such “objects” as human beings. And yet the hegemonization of knowledge is not some accident but contained within the very nature or impetus of knowledge, whose “interest” is ultimately to elaborate the whole, the determinate whole, within which individuals make sense.

Of course there can be no doubt that humans can be studied objectively. Humans, like all material beings, have a certain chemical composition, are subject to certain physical forces. Humans also interact with other humans in predictable ways, ways uncovered by sociology, political science, economics. It must be emphasized that Levinas does not object to knowledge, and will argue that knowledge is required by justice. His objection, however, is that knowledge is not its own ground, is not the total account it pretends to be. Furthermore, his objection is that knowledge, when taken on its own, can never understand

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<sup>9</sup>*TI*, pp. 21-22.

morality, but instead glimpse the permanent possibility of war. Hence Levinas will not propose in *Totality and Infinity* a more refined epistemology. Rather, he will accentuate the imposition ethics makes on epistemology, from beyond its confines. He will insist that beyond epistemology all is not ignorance. Instead, he will argue that within epistemology lies the threat of ignorance, ignorance of right and wrong, good and evil.

The truth or reality of the human individual, according to knowledge, would consist not in the individuality of the individual in his or her moral integrity or singularity, as the subject of obligations and the bearer of responsibilities, but rather the individual's integration into a larger whole, its place in a totality, the "role," as we say today, one inevitably plays, whether consciously or not, within a larger scheme, whether our eyes are closed or open, awake or asleep. The Cartesians thought of the theater within which human individual are puppets as a mechanics ultimately reducible to a *mathesis*; Hegel considered it a dialectical Logic and called its hold over human individuals "the cunning of history"; Heidegger calls it the "ontological difference," or "language," the "house of being"; Derrida, will rename the ontological difference in the house of language "differance." In every case the same philosophical gesture prevails, the same epistemological impetus to reduce the individual to a differential node.

Knowledge would thus reduce moral freedom to an epiphenomenon, whether in the name of a logic of necessary or differential forces basically material (Hobbes, Spinoza, La Mettrie, Sade, Nietzsche), historical (Hegel, Spencer, Heidegger, Foucault), economic (Smith, Marx), psychological (Freud, Jung), or linguistic (Derrida). In every case, human freedom would not be itself, would not be free. Human action would no longer consist in beginning from oneself, from one's own initiative, however active or passive. The mind's lucidity sees through moral talk to the truth, where initiative conforms to a deeper hidden *order of things*, reality in its truth. Realism not morality would have the final say. The only "moral" dictum for philosophy would be that which enabled Spinoza to name his metaphysics an *Ethics*, the motivation behind all science: Be real. The only human option: to be or not to be. Freedom would thus

be necessity, recognition of an inevitable conformity to the way things are, accepting one's inevitable place, a cog within a larger totality. Even Sartre, the celebrated "philosopher of freedom," defined freedom in terms of existence, as negation of the real, hence as a matter of lucidity and only a matter of lucidity. Though one is rather less sanguine today about the completeness or finality of the mind's lucidity, lucidity still guides philosophical conceptions of freedom. Yet when all is said and done, neither skepticism nor irony nor cynicism -- the moral products of science -- can serve as substitutes for morality. They are rather symptoms of its loss. Science cannot pull itself up by its bootstraps, it may know the real, but it lacks a why and wherefore.

In this way Levinas shows the intimate relation between the interests of epistemology and an ontology of war, war as the ultimate vision of epistemology. War is fundamental when the reality to which an individual's understanding conforms, and from which an individual derives its entire sense, is nothing more and nothing other than a calculus of forces. In view of this vision, this "framing," as Heidegger called it, alternative meanings -- including all of morality -- would become a shadow play of second-order interpretations explained away as weakness, ignorance, infantilism, primitivism, class consciousness, etc.. "Concerning these things," Parmenides wrote, "the decision lies here: either it is, or it is not. But it has been decided, as was necessary, that the one way is unknowable and unnameable (for it is not true road) and that the other is real and true."<sup>10</sup> Heraclitus, despite his opposition to Parmenides, indeed because of his *op-position* to Parmenides, works within the same parameters, defined by being and non-being, though he sides with non-being. Thus he ends by expressing the same "truth" as Parmenides, but even more succinctly: "War is the father and king of all."<sup>11</sup> What sleepwalkers label "murder," for instance, would in truth be the natural or cultural product of a play of hidden involuntary forces, such as genetic coding, diet,

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<sup>10</sup>John Mansley Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1968), p. 113.

<sup>11</sup>Robinson, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 93.

family, glossed with an unreflective but merely cultural interpretation. "But," declares Nietzsche, "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed -- the deed is everything. ... [N]o wonder if the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred exploit this belief [of the doer behind the deed] more ardently than the belief that *the strong man is free* to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb -- for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey." The murderer is not a "murderer" *really* but a natural born killer. The moral language of "murder," "sin," "guilt," "punishment," would be semantic misunderstanding, unscientific gloss. What is really at work is *power*, will to power, the war of all against all.

If the mind's lucid vision of the truth of reality is ultimate and war fundamental, it follows that inter-human relations are also, in the final account, a matter of politics, diplomacy, rhetoric, success, a matter of strategy and tactic but not morality. The science of the real would be truth, morality would for ignoramuses. Thus Spinoza's book about religion and morality is ultimately a political manual, a *Theologico-Political Treatise*, written for those who see truth in order to protect themselves from those who do not see. Knowers want neither to be duped by morality nor to be harmed by the ignorance of "moralists." The language of morality would be a rhetorical strategy or tactic in a deeper game of politics, just as the world knew that the "Desert Storm" war was not about democracy in the Middle East or the political integrity of Kuwait, but rather about protecting the price and flow of inexpensive oil for America. "The art of foreseeing war," Levinas writes, "and of winning it by every means -- politics -- is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naivete." Hobbes, Spinoza and Nietzsche could hardly be more explicit agreeing with perspective, but it is no less at play in Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida.

But if we are not duped by morality, if epistemology does not have the last word, then politics can have an entirely different meaning. War itself would be judged. One would distinguish just from unjust wars. If we are not duped by morality, if sincerity and not totality is the ground of the true, then politics

too would serve or dis-serve the good. Rather than a disguised form of war, an indice of victories and defeats, politics would rather be another way of instituting goodness. Politics aiming for justice, politics in relation to ethical transcendence, would be "messianic." In an imperfect world whose imperfection would not consist simply in incomplete knowledge, but rather in the separation of the "ought" from the "is," the ultimate struggle would not be the sheer power of one force against other forces but the ethical effort to restrain evil and promote good, in moral judgements which would provide the ultimate meaning and measure of politics. Politics would have a transcendent dimension: to act for another future than one's own, to act for the future of humanity.

In this way peace would underlie struggle, even the struggles that break out in war. In contrast to the virile values of a warrior culture, war in this case would aim not only for victory but for a just peace. Peace, then, like war, has two radically different senses, one genuine and the other a disguised form of war, cold war. For peace, too, can be a form of war, the peace of Pax Romana, is at bottom war -- Pax in bello -- because it is not the peace that concludes war, but the temporary equilibrium established and maintained by the victories and defeats of war. In the peace that is at bottom war, peace is really only victory, the imposition of order, placing one's own idols in the other's temples, reducing the other to the same. Such ersatz peace violate's singularity -- the other's and one's own -- because it is enforced precisely to the extent that singularity is repressed. Its epistemological form is knowing the individuality of the individual not in its singularity but in its subsumption under the general, its placement within a calculus, its contextualization, as if this truth of the individual, and only this truth, were equivalent to the singularity of the individual.

These two senses of peace, like the two senses of war, depend on two very different approaches to the uniqueness of the individual: external and internal. Externally, it is an undeniable truth that all spacial-temporal entities are unique insofar as no two of them occupy the same space at the same time. Here individuality derives from position, location, context, differentials. Any resistance to this differential uniqueness would

not be fundamental, but would reflect only an indetermination that has *not yet* been grasped. Indetermination, which might seem to be the secret or mystery of the individual, is in reality but a delay or deferral -- even if never recuperable -- of determination in terms of a larger whole. What would resist knowledge in the individual would thus be essentially relative, provisional, the "not yet," but in no way an absolute resistance. "The peace of empires," Levinas writes, "issued from war rests on war."

But uniqueness can also mean singularity. Not a place within a system, but a starting point, a degree zero, an initiative, which orients -- and judges -- all differential contexts. This signification can make no sense from a purely cognitive point of view, which always contextualizes. Rather, its sense is from the first ethical. Here morality would not be a temporary ignorance, a naive gloss on reality, but rather the very source of meaning. Deeper than the distinctions between reality and appearance, truth and falsehood would depend on the distinction between sincerity and masquerade, suffering and indifference, for-the-other and for-oneself, good and evil. An individual alone, the knowing subject, would be all truth, to be sure, but it would also be all illusion -- it would lack the capacity of verification. All meanings would be possible, but none could be secured, none would be true or false. One thinks of Descartes's problem of solipsism, but no less of the delusions of Dr. Daniel Shreiber. Only the radical alterity of the other person has the force -- moral force -- to obligate and fix the self, the self subject as subjected to the other, as responsibility for the other. The radical alterity of the other person bursts through forms, historical or otherwise, and commands absolutely, i.e., commands ethically. "Thou shalt not murder" commands behind everything said. In the face of such a face the self is held to itself deeper than the confines of any context. "I am my brother's keeper," in the face of the other, prior to my own questions. That is to say, the I is itself insofar as it is its brother's keeper, the I *is* -- ethically exists -- in the mode of a brother's keeper. The self is itself ethically subject to the other, as for-the-other-before- itself. Only by means of this proximity, can one approach another in peace. Only in this proximity is the ultimate and ethical significance of

the world constituted. Here peace would not be a temporary or artificial order imposed by reducing the other to the same, or the same to the other, a victory or a defeat. Rather peace would come -- even in times of war<sup>12</sup> -- from the proximity of unique singularities whose significance comes from a breach in the totality, an ethical breach. Not to be, but to be better.

Genuine peace disrupts the totalization of war not by defeating it, but by transcending its reach. Moral power would not be stronger than the real, but better. Hence nothing is weaker and at the same time nothing is stronger than moral power, for it transcends yet commands the power of war. Philosophy, bound to the real, bound to the true, refuses to acknowledge the radical transcendence of ethics, for philosophy is always "first philosophy" as philosophy first. Yet the stringent requirements of ethics are not more stupid than philosophy, they are faster, as it were, deeper, more important. Shame, suffering, obligation, responsibility, justice are not insufficient knowledge, they are impositions, imposed before they can be known, imposed with priorities prior to knowledge. *Before* one knows the good one does the good. Inserting a non-cognitive moral dimension into philosophical discourse, speaking Hebrew in Greek, as it were, is the entire effort and effect of Levinas's writings. Peace would thus not be more naive than war but more trusting, more difficult.

Morality exerts more stringent requirements than the requirements of knowledge. It demands responsibility in a self prior to the "I think" which *subsequently* will know itself to be the ground of all knowledge. Knowledge comes first, to be sure, but already too late. Ethics also comes last. It makes demands on a self beyond its most ecstatic projections, obligations extending into a future not its own -- the future of humanity, justice -- beyond foreseeable horizons, but already imposed by the other who faces. It is prior to and beyond knowledge not as a transcendental *a priori*, i.e., as a condition of knowledge, but rather because the exigency of its demands, the obligation of its

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<sup>12</sup>One thinks of the German and English soldiers who in the midst of the horrors of WWI, on Christmas day, would walk forward from their respective trenches into "no man's land," to share a glass of wine and a holiday toast, then return and resume their bloody struggle.

beginning, an initiative called forth by the other. It undermines participatory submergence as well as reflective contextualization by the greater stringencies, the more intense demands, that emerge from taking responsibility. It transforms self and society from place holders, whether blind or seeing, to source points of personal and social obligations, responsibilities, and the call for justice. "Not with the voice that would surround the totality," Levinas writes, "and where one could, arbitrarily, think what one likès, and thus promote the claims of a subjectivity free as the wind. It is a relationship with a *surplus always exterior to the totality*." This surplus which bursts through myth and structure is precisely and nothing other than the commanding "face" of the other which obligates the self to its responsibility for the other and for all others.

Out of this initiate comes the peace of a genuine and not merely a differential difference. Moral proximity with the other is an expression neither of victory or defeat, nor is it a complacency, indifference or self-satisfaction confined within a closed or open system. Rather it is the difficult peace which comes from "non-in-difference" to the other. Here peace is not the result of reduction, whether pre-reflective submergence or reflective contextualization, but rather as the most sober sobriety, wakefulness itself, respect for difference as response to difference. Not the peace of identity, whether lost or found, but the peace of pluralism. Fission not fusion. The I and the other, and the I and others, are not reduced to the sameness of mythic participation or of intelligible identity, but rather are stimulated, provoked, disrupted, *oriented* toward and by the good. The I is thus neither a part nor a whole, but is rather the shattered initiative of an always insufficient ethical approach to the other, a moral proximity. In this fissuring of the self -- the egoity of the I *as* its brother's keeper, the I for-the-other -- subjectivity is *elected* to itself, to its singularity. Each self is singularly the unique bearer of obligations and responsibilities, a moral Atlas, bearing the whole world in its ethical incompleteness. Levinas is fond of quoting the words of the Priest Zossima's mortally ill elder brother Markel from Dostoyevsky's *The Brother's Karamozov*: "We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than others." Upon each self weigh obligations and

obligations, the responsibility of its responsibilities, are more important than knowledge, and as such give significance to knowledge, providing it the orientation -- the why and wherefore -- which knowledge essentially lacks. This point must be emphasized. Knowledge knows only difference, but cannot judge better or worse. The exigencies of morality and justice, in contrast, are not merely *different* than the requirement of knowledge, since knowledge comprehends nothing better than difference, they are at the same time more *important* than the priorities of philosophy, and for this reason provide *orientation* for knowledge as for all human endeavor. The beginning of wisdom cuts deeper than the origins of knowledge.

Philosophy is thus always already in the service of an ethics it can hardly acknowledge. First, the alterity of the other is an obligation before it is an object. Second, the responsibility of the self is a responsiveness before it is a cognition. Third, these obligations and responsibilities which emerge in the proximity of the face-to-face call beyond the horizons foreseeable by knowledge, for they are a call for an unforeseeable justice for all humankind. Desire, the self constituted as a desiring being, thus has at bottom a far greater and far more difficult destiny than that known by philosophy with its desire to be transfigured by the desire to know. More desirable still is the desire for goodness, where desire grows as it is satisfied, in an always insufficient responsibility for the other before oneself, suffering the other's suffering, aiming at what cannot be foreseen, predicted, grasped in a totality.

One must take pains when articulating an ethics to avoid interpreting morality in terms of knowledge. To be sure, knowledge and morality share a critique of myth. But they do so with different ends in view. Knowledge undermines the submergence of self and society in the arbitrary forces invoked through participatory myth by a relocation of self and society into a geometry of principles and proportions, into a differential calculus of ideas. Mythic submergence is transformed and raised to intelligible justification, to reasons and a giving of reasons. Morality, in contrast, is not simply a relocation of the subject from intoxication to reflection, but is rather a taking of responsibility, a taking on of obligations, beginning at the

responsibilities for each other and for all others. This weight, which human scales cannot measure, *is* the moral self. Singularity emerges as a nonsubstitutable responsibility, a moral burden upon which the reality of the whole world depends. Or else there is just war. But war cannot suppress this pacific relation to the other, this sincerity, this goodness.

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