

LEVINAS, EMMANUEL. *Entre nous; Thinking-of-the-Other*. translated from the French by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-231-07910-9.

Emmanuel Levinas is one of the most important figures of twentieth-century philosophy. Exerting a profound influence upon such thinkers as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Maurice Blanchot, and Luce Irigaray, Levinas's work is credited with having spurred a revitalized interest in ethics-based philosophy throughout Europe and America. Now, Columbia University Press offers the culmination of Levinas's philosophy: *Entre nous*. Published in France a few years before his death, this fascinating collection gathers his most important work and reveals the development of his thought over nearly forty years of committed inquiry. The essays and interviews published here engage issues of suffering, love, religion, culture, justice, human rights, and legal theory. Taken together, they constitute a key to Levinas's ideas on the ethical dimensions of otherness.

Working from the phenomenological method of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Levinas pushed beyond the limits of their framework to argue that it is ethics, not ontology, that orients philosophy, and that responsibility precedes reasoning. Ethics for Levinas means responsibility in relation to difference. Throughout his work, Levinas returns to the metaphor of the face of the other to discuss how and where responsibility enters our lives and makes philosophy necessary. For Levinas, ethics begins with our face to face interaction with another person--seeing that person not as a reflection of one's self, nor as a threat, but as different and greater than one's self. Levinas moves the reader to recognize the implications of this interaction in our abiding responsibility for the other, and our concern with the other's suffering and death.

The essays in *Entre nous* explore these questions with a fascinating inquiry into their philosophical, theological, and spiritual aspects. For instance, relating his concept of the other to murder in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Levinas writes, "At that very moment when my power to kill is realized, the other has escaped.... To be in relation with the other face to face--is unable to kill." In another essay, "Useless Suffering," Levinas gives suffering meaning by looking at it "in the interhuman perspective--that is, as meaningful in me, useless in the Other--thus restoring it to the dimensions of meaning outside of which the immanent and savage concreteness of evil in a consciousness is but an abstraction." Drawing on everything from Plato and the Bible to the work of fellow

philosophers and his own experience, Levinas offers a new way of looking at what it means to exist in community with other people. His urgent meditations upon the face of the other suggest a foundation upon which to grasp the nature of good and evil in the tangled skein of modern life.

Situated at the crossroads of several philosophical schools and approaches, Levinas' work indeed illuminates a host of critical issues and has struck resonances among students and scholars of literature, law, religion, and politics. *Entre nous* is at once the apotheosis of his work and an accessible introduction to it.

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## ANNONCES ET NOUVELLES

Congrès mondial sur la coexistence humaine dans un monde responsable et solidaire à l'aube du III<sup>e</sup> millénaire. Palais des Congrès de Montréal. Du 23 au 27 Juillet 2000. Pour plus d'information, consultez notre SITE WEB [<http://pages.infinet.net/coexiste>] Tél. & télécopieur 459 681-8114

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