LÉVINAS, Emmanuel (January 12, 1906, Kovno [Kaunas] – December 25, 1995, Paris)

Emmanuel Lévinas was a French philosopher of Jewish-Lithuanian origins who drew strongly on German phenomenology in his investigations of intentionality, subjectivity, and ethics. An officer in the French army, he spent much of WWII a prisoner of war. His wife and daughter survived the war in hiding; the Nazis killed most of his family remaining in Lithuania. In the 1930s, Lévinas translated Edmund Husserl and helped introduce phenomenology into France. He is most recognized for his ethical philosophy, simultaneously an extension and critique of his teacher Martin Heidegger’s ontological analysis. Lévinas argued that the infinity of the “transcendent other” is exemplified by the face-to-face encounter: the “mundane” meaning of our historical, cultural worldview “is disturbed and jostled by another presence.” This other shatters the Cartesian finitude of the self, disclosing the priority of ethics over ontology and epistemology (a priority that is Nietzsche’s contribution to existentialism more broadly). Responsibility to the other founds the subject, rather than vice-versa. Via extensive Talmudic study, he came to believe that Judaism offered a privileged access to this secular truth. His two major works are *Totality and Infinity: An Essay in Exteriority* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974).

Bibliography: Duyndam, Joachim *et. al.* (eds.). *The Levinas Online Bibliography*. The Dutch-Flemish Levinas Society, 20 Mar. 2011. Web. 11 Sept. 2012 <http://oud.uvh.nl/levinas/default2.asp>

Noah Aaron Rosenblum

Columbia University