# The Ethical ‘Pataphysics of the Anarchism:

# A guide for exceptional guttersnipes

*Traité du savoir-vivre à l'usage des guttersnipes exceptionelles,*

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Table of Contents: CHAPTERS

## Chapter One: Identity and Responsibility

* 1. Discusses my identity, the concept of identity itself, and contrasts this with conceiving identity as a type of responsiveness. Nagarjuna is used to illustrate the idea that there is no-self being, that individuality arises from a flux of time. The model of philosophy as critique is criticized. Use Nancy Hartsock on military metaphors to critique Arendt’s model of the “agora” as a site of struggle. We choose to approach the study as a series of conversations. We illustrate the everydayness of this by exploring the existential phenomenology and temporality of electronic communication: you are obligated to respond, even if you don’t Simon Critchley is discovered as our first interlocutor

## Chapter Two: Violence and Metaphorics

* 1. We are doing a metaphorical analysis of Levinas. Why is such an approach valid
  2. Discuss the “army of metaphors” described by Nietzsche.
  3. Bring in Hartsock on military metaphors
  4. Talk about perspectivism and word root transformations in Levinas’s work
  5. A lot of this is already in Levinas, Perverter

## Chapter Three: The family scene

* 1. Note to self: (can also do “drama” and Greek tragedy here)
  2. Why read Levinas for his familial metaphors?
  3. See Levinas, Perverter

## Chapter Four: Oikonomos

* 1. Priority of human needs in the OIKOS
  2. Political Economy chapter
  3. Take heavily from “Self and Property”
  4. Nancy Folbre on the “Invisible Heart” == I wrote about this for Nancy Fraser but lost the paper
  5. Italian writers: James and Dalla Costa, Federici
  6. Vampirism and Marx
  7. I have written a lot about consumption
  8. Breathing, eating, etc

## Chapter Four: Ethical Pataphysics

* 1. “Are we lied to by morality”
  2. Against a moralist reading of Emmanuel Levinas (Richard Cohen)
  3. Against Heractitean tradition that understands Becoming as POLEMOS
     1. Nietzsche
     2. Deleuze on Nietzsche
     3. Foucault’s field of forces
     4. Heidegger in Introduction to Metaphysics – I wrote about this for Simon but lost the paper

## Chapter Five: Levinas, Perverter (On the Perversion of Ethics and the Ethics of Perversion)

* 1. See appendix for document.

## Chapter Six: Anarchism of the Other Person

* 1. See appendix for document

## Chapter Seven: Anarchism as a Practice of Care

* 1. See appendix for document

## Chapter Eight: Politics of Care

* 1. Deva Woodly,
  2. Leah Lakshmi
  3. Queer/Crip theory

## Chapter Nine: Re-ligare (To walk in the way of the Juggalo)

* 1. Explores family as involuntary obligation
  2. Refer to Critchley / West. Read Critchley book.
  3. Radical Faeries and Juggalos as examples of re-ligare
  4. Critique the idea of “voluntary” family – family precisely is not voluntary
  5. Critique families for being the site of abuse
  6. Discuss Greek tragedy and Hebrew Bible as documents of familiarity as presocial, prepolitical dysfunction
  7. Becoming-Juggalo is joining the Juggalo Sangha: THE FAM!!!
  8. “Cultural appropriation” is not even the issue because it is you who are the property of Juggalo culture now
  9. “Possessed” rather than “Property Owner”
  10. Talk about religious “incarnation”. In the flesh. When you wear Juggalo paint, you are incarnated as a Juggalo

## Chapter Ten: A guide for exceptional guttersnipes:

Here we can explore “exception” in Pataphysical and Levinasian terms

Also explore De L’evasion (Levinas) and Crimethinc EVASION

Politics of Drop Out Gutterpunkism

Quote Mark Laskey: Why the hell are we out here getting arrested? For the kids, man, for the kids.

Include Levinas: FOR THE KIDS!!!

See Appendix

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START FIRST CHAPTER: IDENTITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

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1. SECTION: Identity and Responsibility
   1. Address my own identity
      1. My right and responsibility to speak as a cis het straight white male
      2. How does the positionality of the speaker affect their capacity to speak to a text
   2. Reading and Authority
      1. What constitutes ones “authority” to speak on a text or the text’s authority over oneself
         1. Gadamer, hermeneutics, etc
         2. Nor only are the grounds of reading weighed down by the historical existence of Dasein, as in Gadamer and Heidegger, but a thoroughgoing otherness
   3. Positionality/Perspectivism/Standpoint33
      1. The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism by Nancy Hartsock
         1. Check whether Hartsock cites Nietzsche or Foucault
         2. Pretty sure this is class-analysis/Marxist standpoint
         3. See metaphorics of “perspectivism” below
2. SECTION: Identity qua identity
   1. The problem of self Identity
      1. Question of self-identity through time – Locke, Kant, a classic philosophical riddle
      2. Find my paper from Dmitri’s Locke class. Check in CPR for Kant – maybe already wrote about it?
   2. Hegelian
      1. Phenomenology of Spirit (B)(IV)(A) True Nature of Self-Certainty: Independence and dependence of self-consciousness
      2. Identity as violence – internal and external violence
      3. Hegel: identity isn’t something that you are born with. It is a complex process of violence
   3. Another tradition: Heraclitus
      1. Becoming shatters identity but not in the Niezschean way
3. SECTION: Agora and Polemos -- Relation to past thought. Conversation not critique
   * 1. End of critique
     2. Hartsock “Barracks Myth Hartsock, N. (1982) ‘The barracks community in western political thought: prolegomena to a feminist critique of war and politics’, Women’s Studies International Forum, 5:3/4.
        1. ”Before we consider the importance of the feminist critique, let us begin by asking what are the aims and aspirations of anarchism. Anarchism is sometimes defined simply as the refusal of the state. However, anarchism must strive towards a much more profound goal than this. The long history of authoritarian domination has penetrated our ways of thinking and acting so deeply that an anarchist critique must re-evaluate the very roots of political philosophy, of the thinking that considers communality in terms of political association. The feminist scholar Nancy Hartsock argues that Western political thinking has been shaped by the way that the Greek polis (city-state) emerged out of what she terms the ‘barracks community’ (Hartsock, 1982, p. 283). Within this military encampment, the paradigmatic virtues were defined as courage, heroism, glory and the striving for immortality; human relationships were conceived as being fundamentally antagonistic and competitive, as struggles for power and domination. Hartsock claims that war and the masculine role of the warrior-hero have been central to our conception of politics ever since: for example, the warrior’s dominance on the physical battlefield has been transformed into the citizen’s dominance on the battlefield of rhetoric and into the businessman’s dominance on the field of commerce (Hartsock, 1982, pp. 285–6).
     3. Heraclitus/Heidegger/POLEMOS as originary opening of being or whatever nonsense
        1. I wrote about this for Simon. Do I still have the paper?
     4. Thought as constituted as an agora, a field of struggle to be right as a macho paradigm
        1. AGORA, Greek history, military transition to political<https://classics.stanford.edu/publications/origins-democracy-ancient-greece>
        2. Arendt
     5. We will encounter our disagreements with others in different manner than critique
        1. For example above we recognized a question and held it open without answering it
        2. Unanswerability (Levinas) . not exactly “unanswerable” but more it’s always an infinite conversation without terminus or conclusion.
        3. Maybe explore the idea of “responsibility” as “responding” to someone else in a conversation, and what it means when one is unable to respond
        4. also Buddhist notions of remaining within the problem rather than trying to answer it.
           1. Pema Chodron on “shenpa” for example
     6. Derrida/Levinas on infinite conversation –
        1. EL has a practically Talmudic description of community of discourse in T&I. Find it
        2. That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche, Or Heidegger-and philosophy should still wander toward the meaning of its death-or that it has always lived knowing itself to be dying (as is silently confessed in the shadow of the very discourse which declared philosophia perennis); that philosophy died one day, within history, or that it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and wellspring; that beyond the death, or dying nature, of philosophy, perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future, or even, as is said today, is still entirely to come because of what philosophy has held in store; or, more strangely still, that the future itself has a future all these are unanswerable questions. By right of birth, and for one time at least, these are problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve.
        3. It may even be that these questions are not philosophical, are not philosophy's questions. Nevertheless, these should be the only questions today capable of founding the community, within the world, of those who are still called philosophers; and called such in remembrance, at very least, of the fact that these questions must be examined unrelentingly, despite the diaspora of institutes and languages, despite the publications and techniques that follow on each other, procreating and accumulating by themselves, like capital or poverty. A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A community of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community. A community of the question about the possibility of the question. This is very little-almost nothing-but within it, today, is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision. An unbreathable responsibility. Why unbreachable? Because the injunction is announced: the question must be maintained. As a question. The liberty of the question (double genitive)' must be stated and protected. A founded dwelling, a realized tradition of the question remaining a question. If this commandment has an ethical meaning, it is not in that it belongs to the domain of the ethical, but in that it ultimately authorizes every ethical law in general. There is no stated law, no commandment, that is not addressed to a freedom of speech. There is therefore neither law nor commandment which does not confirm and enclose-that is, does not dissimulate by presupposing it the possibility of the question. Thus, the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the hermetism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question. The purity of the question can only be indicated or recalled through the difference of a hermeneutical effort.
     7. NU FONE --- WHO DIS? ethical phenomenology of electronic communication as responsibility
        1. The ethical phenomenology of electronic communication, that you are always "responsible", obligated to respond even if you don't
        2. Derrida has a quote of EL’s phenomenological richness. Not this one, but like it: The ego is the same. The alterity or negativity interior to the ego, the interior difference, is but an appearance: an illusion, a "play of the Same," the "mode of identification" of an ego whose essential moments are called body, possession, home, economy, etc. Levinas devotes some splendid descriptions to them.
        3. The ethical phenomenology of electronic communication, that you are always "responsible", obligated to respond even if you don't
        4. Lazlo, vampire in “What We do in the Shadows” What is this clarion call? As Guillermo is calling to save his life. Metaphorics of vampirism below. Season 2, episode 4 I think
     + Nandor: I have asked Guillermo to bring me his computing machine so I can see if I have received any electronic letters-in the past decade.…
     + Nandor: Next message. "This is not a joke. You are now cursed. Forward this message to ten people and unforeseen riches will be yours. "If you don't, you will be killed. Bloody Mary knows who you are and where you live. She will find you and hang your corpse for all to see. You have until sunrise tomorrow. No send-backs. This is not a joke."
     + Nadja!
     + Laszlo: "Warning. If you've read this far, it's too late."
     + Nadja: You stupid bloody donkey. Why did you let me read this far?
     + Lazlo: -Well Says here some girl called Arianna disobeyed Bloody Mary, and now she's dead. They ripped her guts out-and dropped them on the front doorstep of her parents.
     + Nadja-Oh!
     + Lazlo: I'd say we're fucked. This light box has cursed us. Do you think it could maybe be something from the neighborhood imp, having a cheeky little joke?
     + Nadja: This is not a joke. It says it in many places. Here, here, and here.�
     + Nadja: Don't look, my sweet darling. It's too dangerous.
     + (PHONE RINGS)
     + Laszlo... -Whoa! What clarion call is that? The clanging chimes of doom?
     + Shh. Where is it coming from?
     + This way.
     + NANDOR: I will answer it.
     + LASZLO: No, you won't. If that curse can travel through the Internet, it'll sure as shit travel through that telephone.
     + GUILLERMO on recording machine: We're not in right now, but if you'd like to leave a message for Nandor,-Nadja or Laszlo,COLIN: And Colin Robinson!
     + GUILLEMO answering machine please do so at the tone.
     + GUILLERMO calling to warn them about murder: You need to get out of the house right now. You need to get out or you're gonna die. Get out now! You're gonna die. This is not a joke.
     + NADJUA-Shit. How did Bloody Mary get our bloody phone number?
     + LAZLO Her power knows no bounds. Did I tell you about the time when Arianna's guts were ripped out of...
     + NADJA:-Yes, we just read the e-mail!
     + LAZLO-Yeah.
     + NADJA: We need more addresses.
     + LASZLO: Well, then, you need to make one up.
     + NANDOR: It is very hard to come up with names when everyone is shouting
     + NADJA: What is a good name? I know one we could try. Bloody fucking Mary! That little piss snake thinks she can send a curse to us? Well, let's see how she likes it when I send an e-mail to [bloodyfuckingmary@aol.com](mailto:bloodyfuckingmary@aol.com).
     + (INCOMING Email sound
     + LAZLO-Did she reply?
     + NADJA: No. It is from "mailer-daemon."
     + ALL: Demon!
       1. What is that tone?
          1. When you get a new phone and you have not yet learned to differentiate the different tones for texting and emailing and the multiple ways of messaging
          2. The ringing of the telephone as something that cannot be ignored
          3. Alarming sound of a Facebook telephone from Honduras Elvis, whose whole family I got over the us-México border, calling on that horrible soft drill of Facebook messenger, calling me over and over to ask for a hundred dollars
          4. The other as needy is ethical but not in the sense that you always have to decide x or y.
          5. Maybe: also Levinas’s stuff on Palestine. Whatever he is saying here, he is pointing to the ethical substructure and evading the question of a specific response
       2. Periodicity, iterability. It repeats but when? The anxious relationship to time.
       3. Existential phenomenology of electronic conversation
          1. Dating Apps

Swiping right as if your life depended on it, desperate for a connection

When will she write me back

Periodicity of neurotic checking

Pressure of how to reply

Emotions of anxiety and depression, etc

* + - * 1. Hw annoying it is to meet up with your anarchist immigration lawyer leprechaun in the park because of the way the two of you negotiate your own temporal and spatial responsibilities and they are always on a call or forget to check their phone
        2. Friend request – the most basic form of connection
        3. Mathematical tying together of two nodes

Already we are in a binary relationship of Self and Other

Mediated by the totality of connections in the network of communicative nodes

A mathematical Connection

* + - * 1. Turing Test – how do I know that the person on the other line is actually a human: by their capacity to respond  
           <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turing_test>

1. SECTION: “Respect for the Diversity of Tactics”
   * 1. Intellectual discourse is too often conceived as a fight -- Can my Hegel beat up your Heidegger; can my Russell beat up your Hegel; etc.
     2. The aim being to assert the superiority of my tradition of thinking over yours
     3. We are capable as thinkers and actors to accept a diversity of tactics; to explore one’s own avenue of subversion while respecting or at least attending to another avenue.
     4. one of the best traits of Hegel is his generosity in thinking; his belief that there must be an element of Truth in every thought for it to exist
     5. Explore alternatives to Hegel
        1. Explore Levinas, conversation, inheritance of thought
        2. Maybe also Nagarjuna’s critique of “svabha” self-existent entities
        3. would be cool to get madhyahamika / Nagarjuna in here too  [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C5%ABlamadhyamakak%C4%81rik%C4%81](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)
           1. Neither from itself nor from another. Nor from both. Nor without a cause, Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mūlamadhyamakakārikā#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGarfield19953-8)
           2. If intrinsic nature (svabhava) does not exist, of what will there be alteration? If intrinsic nature does exist, of what will there be alteration?
           3. Although (the term) "[self](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atman_(Buddhism))" is caused to be known (of, about), and although (a doctrine or teaching of) "[no self](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatta)" is taught. No "self" or any "nonself" whatsoever has been taught by the [Buddhas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhahood)
           4. This is probably a footnote
        4. The already-Othering of the Same
        5. Maybe somewhere in Derrida too.
   1. Passage in Levinas Totality and Infinity about community of inherited conversation
   2. No political change through emotional violence
      1. White fragility and white tears -- shaming people for their weakness, vulnerability, neediness
      2. Ressentiment Nietzsche (Aragorn, post@)
      3. “Are we fooled by morality” --Levinas
      4. Nietzsche Moral thought is violence. it is actually a will to power
2. SECTION: This is a conversation with Simon Critchley
   1. Maybe use “parricide” trope from Derrida on Levinas, Plato on presocratics  
        
      END FIRST CHAPTER

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END FIRST CHAPTER: IDENTITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

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START SECOND CHAPTER: VIOLENCE AND METAPHORICS

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1. SECTION: What is a metaphorical reading?
   1. Why is a metaphorical reading interesting or important?
   2. “Metaphors We Live By”, George Lakoff
      1. Use “Metaphors we live by” to demonstrate the existential/phenomenological nature of metaphors
      2. Zed must know about an interesting philosophical commentary or I can just stick with the cogsci. I know it from undergrad.
      3. Maybe I can try to say something about Austin and speech acts. “words do things” I don’t know this stuff. Ask Zed.
   3. Derrida, John Llewelyn, Simon Critchley on Levinas and Metaphors
      1. Borges is correct: "Perhaps universal history is but the history of several metaphors." Light is only one example of these "several" fundamental "metaphors," but what an example! Who will ever dominate it, who will ever pronounce its meaning without first being pronounced by it? -- Jacques Derrida on Emmanuel Levinas
      2. See “Viewing Power”, <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/thesis.htm>
      3. Llewelyn/Critchley: trope of “drama” is actually also trope of familiarity – drama = Greek tragedy = re-ligare, yoked to each other
   4. Find the quote by Levinas in the 40s about the preposition in Heidegger’s Being (being-with, Being-in, etc)
2. SECTION: Metaphorics in From Levinas, Perverter:
   1. Now that we have proposed an immanent hermeneutical strategy, we are bold enough to ask the broader interpretive question:  what are Levinas’s books about?  What storyline runs through his work? When we pay close attention to the etymological and the semantic networks immanent to his sentences, we notice that the same motifs crop up again and again under new transformations.[[9]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn9" \o ")  Derrida gives us an insight into how metaphors develop through Levinas’s work: “*Totality and Infinity* … proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach:  return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself” (*WD* 312, n7). That is, Levinas’s writing, both across the span of his works and within a single text, can be understood as a process of reiterative rewriting.  Despite the fact that *Totality and Infinity* is broken up into a certain number of sections, chapters and subsections; and that *Otherwise than Being* was published 12 years after *Totality and Infinity*; and that Levinas’s religious work must be distinguished from his philosophical writings, I would argue that Levinas discusses one and only one thing again and again: I confront you; or, put dialogically, I converse with the Other; you say some thing to me and I listen, and then I say some thing to you and you listen.
   2. What animates Levinas’s corpus is that each new analysis gives us a new perspective on this singular situation.  I would in fact argue that the notion of “perspectivism” is as important for understanding Levinas’s work as it is for Nietzsche’s.[[10]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn10" \o ")   Although the dialogical relation of speech surmounts the theoretical stance of vision, Levinas still retains the notion of perspective, explaining that “ethics itself is an optics” (*TI* 23).  He does not abandon visuality, but instead warps it, perverts it.[[11]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn11" \o ")  “The differences between the Other and me … are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being ‘starting from oneself’ towards ‘the Other.’  The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which cannot arise without this orientation) summarizes the theses of the present work” (*TI* 215).[[12]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn12" \o ")
   3. Once we understand the way that Levinas’s perspectives bend, we can begin to reflect upon the metaphorical networks that illuminate his work.  Most frequently, Levinas indicates the double-sidedness of a phenomenological event by reversing a perspective.  For example, to claim only that the Other is situated in an elevated state as the “Most High” is to miss the full dynamic mobilization of this metaphor.  The “height” of the other is the hyperbolic correlate and the perspectival reversal of the “the upsurge of the self (*le surgisment de soi*) … One becomes a subject of being … [by] an exaltation, an ‘above being’” (*TI* 119, *TeI*123).  Keeping in mind that the French root “*sur*” means “over,” we can then understand why Levinas insists that we experience history as a “SURvivor” (*TI* 57), why infinity “SURpasses itself” (*TI* 103), and why fecund temporality is a “reSURrection” (*TI* 56).  Through a different perspectival reversal, this height of separation can also be expressed as “an abyss within enjoyment itself” (*TI* 141), which becomes articulated as my “hypostasis” (*TO* 54-55) and the Other’s “destitution” (*TI* 78).
3. SECTION: Perspectivism
   * + 1. Here speak about perspectivism from a Levinasian POV, as distinct from our common perspectivism (Levinas/Nietzsche)
       2. See Levinas, Perverter  
          <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm>
       3. Nietzsche: “There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective “knowing.””[[4](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/DescartesAndNietzsche.htm#_ftn42)
       4. Levinas claims, “The difference between the Other and me do not depend upon different properties. ... They are due to the I-Other conjunction, to the inevitable orientation of being “starting from oneself” towards “the Other.” The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which can not arise without this orientation) summarizes the theses of the present work.”[[6](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn6)

Now that we have a preliminary understanding of Levinas’s particular usage of tropes, we can better investigate why he seems so attached to what Derrida calls “the family schema” (*PF* viii). Already a doubling reversal is expressed through this trope: the “familiar” already hyperbolically inverts the Other’s existence as an alien, as “not resting on any prior kinship” (*TI* 34).  For Levinas, the notion of “family” connotes the way an individuated, separated multiplicity of entities are already related to each other, through social temporalities and moral obligations that preexist the political order.  Contrasting his analysis with a philosophical tradition stretching from Plato to Hegel, he asserts “the family does not only result from a rational arrangement of animality; it does not simply mark a step towards the anonymous universality of the State.  It identifies itself outside of the State, even if the State reserves a framework for it” (*TI*306).

Filiality does not emerge simply as a social construction, but rather constitutes a responsibility for other human beings independently of unifying structures such as Hegelian Spirit or Heideggerean Being.  Writing from within the phenomenological tradition, Levinas most pointedly questions the reductive universalization of Husserl’s *genus* (*TI* 194-96), a term derived from the Indo-European GEN, signifying “birth.”[[13]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn13" \o ")  For Levinas, the generative family demonstrates that, rather than merely issuing from an origin, existence is a continuous creation: “the discontinuity of Cartesian time, which requires a continuous creation, indicates the very dispersion and plurality of created being” (*TI* 58).[[14]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn14" \o ")

There is a sense in which *Totality and Infinity* may be read as if were the first Book of Moses, Genesis or בְּרֵאשִׁית,[[15]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn15" \o ") the story of the engendering of generations.  It tells a story of life stage development, from birth through mature home ownership, through old age, through sex and death, to rebirth.  Levinas employs the terminology of birth repeatedly to describe a variety of interconnected phenomenological events such as the “latent birth” of the subject (*OTB* 139), the “birth of love” in Eros (*TI* 277), and the “birth of thought, consciousness, justice, and philosophy … of a meaning” through the third party (*OTB* 128).

In the life-stage narrative of *Totality and Infinity*, the event of birth is explored through the opening section on enjoyment, “the very production of a being that is born, that breaks the tranquil eternity of its seminal or uterine existence to enclose itself in a person” (*TI*147).[[16]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn16" \o ")  The motifs Levinas employs in this original section are connected to other metaphorical networks throughout his work.  In addition to being a member of the biblical triad of destitution along with the stranger and the widow (*TI* 77), the “orphan” describes a particular aspect of this production of being, “an orphan by birth” (*OTB* 105).  This orphan event occurs because the child is born separated, after the erotic death of the mother and the father, “having absolved oneself from relations” (*TI* 195), separated from all relatives, constantly menaced by neediness.  One reversal of this concept--this conception--of the orphan is the concept of the work, which Levinas describes as “always in a certain sense an *abortive*action” (*TI* 228, my italics), a doubling of birth and death.

As mentioned above, this continuous GENesis must be understood as a creative enGENdering, and thus gender informs all phenomenological matters.  As with the family, gender is essential for overcoming a unifying totality.  Levinas asserts, “The difference between the sexes is a formal structure, but one that carves up reality in another sense and conditions the very possibility of reality as multiple, against the unity of being proclaimed by Parmenides” (*TO* 44).  For Levinas, gender is essential for breaking with “the neuter (the sole gender formal logic knows)” (*TI* 256), and with the neutral, Heideggerean Being that Blanchot criticizes (*TI* 298).  Unlike German and English which do have neuter cases, the French language gives all proper nouns a masculine or feminine gender.  For example, “*le sujet*” is masculine in French, just as human subjectivity and political citizenship have traditionally been figured as masculine by male philosophers.

1. SECTION: Violence and Metaphorics
   1. Army of Metaphors: Against Heraclitus
      1. “Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions.” Nietzsche
         1. Definition is already metaphorical
         2. Army” discourse as militarism
      2. Nancy Hartsock: the barracks community. The all pervasiveness of military thought and language
         1. Before we consider the importance of the feminist critique, let us begin by asking what are the aims and aspirations of anarchism. Anarchism is sometimes defined simply as the refusal of the state. However, anarchism must strive towards a much more profound goal than this. The long history of authoritarian domination has penetrated our ways of thinking and acting so deeply that an anarchist critique must re-evaluate the very roots of political philosophy, of the thinking that considers communality in terms of political association. The feminist scholar Nancy Hartsock argues that Western political thinking has been shaped by the way that the Greek polis (city-state) emerged out of what she terms the ‘barracks community’ (Hartsock, 1982, p. 283). Within this military encampment, the paradigmatic virtues were defined as courage, heroism, glory and the striving for immortality; human relationships were conceived as being fundamentally antagonistic and competitive, as struggles for power and domination. Hartsock claims that war and the masculine role of the warrior-hero have been central to our conception of politics ever since: for example, the warrior’s dominance on the physical battlefield has been transformed into the citizen’s dominance on the battlefield of rhetoric and into the businessman’s dominance on the field of commerce (Hartsock, 1982, pp. 285–6).

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END SECOND CHAPTER: VIOLENCE AND METAPHORICS

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START THIRD CHAPTER: METAPHORICS OF FAMILIARITY

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* 1. Metaphorics of Maternity
     1. “Maternity and "materiality" -- look at John Drabinski “Sensibility” book. First chapter

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END THIRD CHAPTER: METAPHORICS OF FAMILIARITY

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START FOURTH CHAPTER: ETHICAL `PATAPHYSICS

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END FOURTH CHAPTER: ETHICAL `PATAPHYSICS

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START FOURTH CHAPTER: Levinas, Perverter: Perversion of Ethics and Ethics of Perversion

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See Appendix

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END FOURTH CHAPTER: ETHICAL `PATAPHYSICS

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START FIFTH CHAPTER: Anarchism of the Other Person

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Entire Paper (See Appendix)

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END FIFTH CHAPTER: Anarchism of the Other Person

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START SIXTH CHAPTER: Anarchism as a Practice of Care

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Entire Paper (See Appendix)

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END SIXTH CHAPTER: Anarchism as a Practice of Care

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END SEVENTH CHAPTER: Religion: To walk in the way of the Juggalo,

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Join the Juggalo Sangha

Juggalo “Family” as re-ligare, community of those who have nothing in common

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END SEVENTH CHAPTER: To walk in the way of the Juggalo

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1. SECTION: Levinas and Nagarjuna
   * 1. Levinasian interpretation
        1. Identity of the speaker is always already a response and a responsibility
        2. Starts with Cratylus, not Heraclitus
           1. Cratylus contra Heraclitus[[1]](#footnote-1) the resistance to every integration expressed by the image of the river, in which, according to Heraclitus, one does not bathe twice, and according to Cratylus, not even once.
           2. Becoming/Temporality shatters identity but precisely in a non-violent way
        3. Similar to Nagarjuna rather than any Western thinker
           1. Non-Western

Derrida Greeks etc

Also Jay Garfield has written against only-Western philosophy

* + - * 1. Nagarjuna/Levinas

But the Other also disrupts my being/existence/becoming in such a way towards a groundlessness, and impossible identity held only for the moment of reaction

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C5%ABlamadhyamakak%C4%81rik%C4%81>

Find old paper on Nagarjuna

Talk to John Clark, <http://cas.loyno.edu/philosophy/bios/john-p-clark#:~:text=His%20interests%20include%20dialectical%20thought,of%20humanity%20and%20the%20Earth.>

Read Jay Garfield maybe? <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay_L._Garfield>

Dependant co-arising (Pratītyasamutpāda)  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prat%C4%ABtyasamutp%C4%81da#:~:text=is%20called%20death.%22-,Causal%20chain,give%20rise%20to%20other%20conditions.>

All things are empty of self-being  
Emptiness/svabhava

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nagarjuna/#EmptSvab>

* + - * 1. Flow of Breath paper:

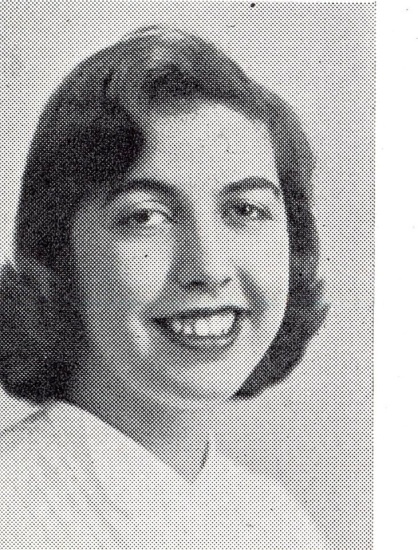
During whatever moment and within whatever situation we find ourselves, we are always breathing. Beneath our consciousness, automatically, autonomically, air flows in and out of our bodies. Rarely are we aware of this fundamental part of our existence, yet we could not survive without it. What does the mundane fact of breathing mean? What could we learn by contemplating it? The everyday process of breathing has an ethical profundity. During the time span of a breath, our egos are disrupted and we are opened to that which is other than ourselves. This can already be appreciated with a straightforward observation: 63 percent of my body is oxygen. Oxygen is not something that I merely use; it is something that I am; something that constitutes my substance. The oxygen that enters into me through my breathing becomes me, transforming from a part of the atmosphere into the person who I am. Not only was it once part of the ambient, this oxygen that is me in the present was other beings in the past, and will be others in the future. Through my breath, otherness invades and constitutes my very self. The fact that all conditions rely on each other displays another, deeper truth of Buddhism. Even more vigorously than Levinas, many schools of Buddhism stress that all things are empty of own-being (svabhava). As mentioned above, early Buddhism opposed the Vedic notion that there is a supreme Self (Atman) behind all phenomenon. In response, various Buddhist traditions developed not only the idea of nonselfhood (annata) but also of emptiness (sunnata).19 All phenomena exist only by virtue of their conditioned relationships with each other, and they are therefore empty of any substantial nature. The ground for any sort of becoming whatsoever relies on the fact that all things are at bottom empty. Only because all dhammas are empty of any self-subsistent nature can there be any dependent co-origination, the dynamic transformation of one phenomenon into another. By becoming aware of the annata and sunnata of all dhammas, and of the absence of one's own self-nature, the practitioner learns to transcend personal selfishness. The practitioner begins to under- stand that there is no separate, self-subsistent entity named I, and that the world cannot be reduced to a relationship with my own self, to being mine. In a passage strikingly similar to Levinas's account of the self 's "living from" the elements, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explains, "Throughout our lives we have been thieves. We have been stealing things that exist naturally" in and belonging to nature -- namely, the conditions (sa?khara). We have plundered them and taken them to be our selves and our possessions." 20 The Buddhist practice of mindful breathing is thus an ethical practice aimed at dispossessing the self of these stolen goods. Through the mindful observation of the arising and passing of phenomena, I resist the temptation to reduce everything to my own perspective, to think that I am the person who is breathing and that the sensations feelings and thoughts that arise belong to me, that they are mine. I must be able to acknowledge the real presence of these states existing in a place called me, identifying myself as those experiences, while also not claiming that a separated self has ownership of them. By releasing from such attachment to one's own self, one starts toward liberation from suffering. Beyond one's own liberation from suffering, this detachment has a wider ethical purpose. Just as uncontrolled emotions can wreak havoc, so can unregulated selfishness. By overcoming this egoism, one can impact society in a meaningful way. Santikaro Bhikkhu explains that, by allowing us to understand and detach ourselves from the need to find ourselves in everything, anapanasati helps us to let go of the selfishness that is destroying our lives and our worlds."21 So much conflict and violence is born out of selfishness; detachment from self- hood ultimately intends to bring about peace. 13

For this reason, anapanasati meditation is often practiced alongside loving-kindness (metta) meditation, in a prayer for the wellbeing of all breathing beings (sabbe pana): Whatsoever breathing beings there are — trembling, firm, or any other. . . . / those who are seen, and those who are unseen, those who live far away, those who are near, those who are born, and those who still seek birth — may all beings in their hearts be happy! . . . In the same way as a mother would protect her child, her only child, with her life, so toward all beings [the practitioner] should develop the measureless thought. Towards the whole wide world he should develop the measureless thought of lovingkindness, above, below, and across, without barriers, hate, or enemy.

IV. Conclusion By opening up the meditations by Levinas on la respiration and by Buddhism on mindful breathing to each other, we have taken note of similarities in how they consider this everyday activity. For both Levinas and Buddhism, a focus on breathing demonstrates deeper truths about the temporality of dynamic becoming. Time empties all entities of their self-identity, detaching them from their selves. It renders all selfhood radically open to an invasion by what is other than self. Through the course of time, otherness becomes transformed into an empty, vanishing point of selfhood. When one focuses on breathing and becomes aware of its deeper significance, one can thus effect an ethical transformation, a change that turns the self inside out and opens it to the other. Beyond observing these important similarities between Levinas and Buddhism, what else can this extended meditation on breathing teach us? What other responsibilities does it engender? Now that we understand that we are connected to each other through our breathing, what responsibilities do we take on for each other's breathing and for the air that we share with each other? At the very least, this meditation on breathing should help us to apply both Buddhism and Levinas to environmental ethics. Thich Nhat Hanh explains that the Buddhist insight into the interrelatedness of all things already makes it the oldest tradition of deep ecology.23

In Otherwise than Being, Levinas similarly indicates that, even before 20 any confrontation with the other, the self already becomes ethically responsible through its submergence in the elemental milieu. In his book, Terror from the Air, Peter Sloterdijk explains that the twentieth century witnessed the invention of gas warfare, a technique that turned people's everyday practice of breathing against them, by turning their means to life into a "breathing-unto-death." 24 Not only has this constituted a way of attacking others, it is also part of the violence that we are committing against ourselves. Toward the end of his book, Sloterdijk quotes a solemn speech by Elias Canetti: "To nothing is man so open as to air. . . . Air is the last common property. It belongs to all people collectively. It is not doled out in advance. Even the poorest may partake of it. And this last thing which has belonged to all of us collectively shall poison all of us collectively."25 Can we avoid this terrifying fate? The air that surrounds us constitutes the substance of our selves and of infinite others; taking care of our atmosphere enacts our responsibility both toward nature and toward humanity. Reflecting on breathing through Levinas and Buddhism can therefore remind us that taking care of the environment is one of the most profound ways in which we can take responsibility for the other. We can thus learn to hearken to the "Prayer to Future Beings" invoked by environmental activist and Buddhist teacher Joanna Macy:

You live inside us, beings of the future. In the spiral ribbons of our cells, you are here. In our rage for the burning forests, the poisoned fields, the oil-drowned seals, you are here. You beat in our hearts through late-night meetings. You accompany us to clear-cuts and toxic dumps and the halls of the lawmakers. It is you who drive our dogged labors to save what is left. O you who will walk this Earth when we are gone, stir us awake. Behold through our eyes the beauty of this world. Let us feel your breath in our lungs, your cry in our throat. Let us see you in the poor, the homeless, the sick. Haunt us with your hunger, hound us with your claims, that we may honor the life that links us. You have as yet no faces we can see, no names we can say. But we need only hold you in our mind, and you teach us patience. You attune us to measures of time where healing can happen, where soil and souls 13 can mend. You reveal courage within us we had not suspected, love we 20 had not owned. O you who come after, help us remember: we are your ancestors. Fill us with gladness for the work that must be done.26

1. SECTION: Totality and Infinity Temporality
   1. Totality and Infinity is like “I is an Other” (Rimbaud): how the evanescent momentary self already dissipates into the infinity of the other
   2. Levinas Identity is a momentary state in the dynamic of self and other.
   3. Always something that is responsive, so not entirely appropriate to say that one “has” an identity.
   4. Identity is absolutely not possession, but rather dispossession.
   5. A mode of responding to the other
2. SECTION: Random – maybe these are all about “arche”?
   1. Yeah. What is identity anyways?
   2. Names and titles: Critique of Academia
      1. same with titles. professional titles. professors “endowed chair of so and so and such and such”
      2. Academia = anxious careerism
      3. Professional Managerial Class
      4. professionalization of thought
      5. respectability politics: degrees, PhD, dissertation, etc
   3. Indigeneity
      1. This is a bad term : indi (within) + gen (born)
      2. I really hate the ideas of "property" and "ownership" altogether. this whole nonsense about "original occupants" comes from a horrible argument in English common law/john Locke. I doubt very much that the indigenous inhabitants considered themselves "owner" of a land or that this land was their "property", or even that they constituted a singular "people" with a single name
      3. Esto es ya más que suficiente para una revolución social de carácter económico y antiautoritario; pero hay más. En México viven unos cuatro millones de indios, que hasta hace veinte o veinticinco años vivían en comunidades, poseyendo en común las tierras, las aguas y los bosques. El apoyo mutuo era la regla en esas comunidades, en las que la Autoridad sólo era sentida cuando el agente de la recaudación de rentas hacía su aparición periódica o cuando los rurales llegaban en busca de varones para hacerlos ingresar por la fuerza al Ejército. En estas comunidades no había jueces, ni alcaldes, ni carceleros, ni ninguna polilla de esa clase. Todos tenían derecho a la tierra, al agua para los regadíos, al bosque para la leña y a la madera para construir los jacales. Los arados andaban de mano en mano, así como las yuntas de bueyes. Cada familia labraba la extensión de terreno que calculaba ser suficiente para producir lo necesario, y el trabajo de escarda y de levantar las cosechas se hacía en común, reuniéndose toda la comunidad, hoy, para levantar la cosecha de Pedro, mañana para levantar la de Juan y así sucesivamente. Para fabricar un jacal, ponían manos a la obra todos los miembros de la comunidad.
      4. Same in Lacan, who I have not read but there is plenty of secondary literature
3. SECTION: Heraclitus
   1. Levinas quotes
      1. 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. In war reality rends the words and images that dissimulate it, to obtrude in its nudity and in its harshness. Harsh reality (this sounds like a pleonasm!), harsh object-lesson, at the very moment of its figuration when the drapings of illusion burn war is produced as the pure experience of pure being. The ontological event that takes form in this black light is a casting into movement of beings hitherto anchored in their identity, a mobilization of absolutes, by an objective order from which there is no escape. The trial by force is the test of the real. But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. Not only modern war but every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them. It establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance; nothing henceforth is exterior. War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same.
      2. The psychism will be specified as sensibility, the element of enjoyment, as egoism. In the egoism of enjoyment dawns the ego, source of the will. It is the psychism and not matter that provides a principle of individuation. The particularity of the rode n does not prevent the singular beings from being integrated into a whole, from existing in function of the totality, in which this singularity vanishes. Individuals belonging to the extension of a concept are one through this concept; concepts, in their turn, are one in their hierarchy; their multiplicity forms a whole. If the individuals of the extension of the concept owe their individuality to an accidental or an essential attribute, this attribute nowise opposes the unity latent in their multiplicity. This unity will be actualized in the knowing of an impersonal reason, which integrates the particularities of the individuals in becoming their idea or in totalizing them by history. The absolute interval of separation cannot be obtained by distinguishing the terms of the multiplicity by some qualitative specification that would be ultimate, as in Leibniz’s Monadology, where a difference, without which one monad would remain indistinguishable from an “other,” is inherent in the terms. As qualities the differences still refer to the community of a genus. The monads, echos of the divine substance, form a totality within its thought. The plurality required for conversation results from the interiority with which each term is “endowed,” the psychism, its egoist and sensible self-reference. Sensibility constitutes the very egoism of the I, which is sentient and not something sensed. Man as measure of all things, that is, measured by nothing, comparing all things but incomparable, is affirmed in the sensing of sensation. Sensation breaks up every system; Hegel places at the origin of his dialectic the sensed, and not the unity of sensing and sensed in sensation. It is not by chance that in the Theaetetus\* Protagoras’s and Heraclitus’s theses are brought together, as though the singularity of the sentient would be required for Parmedidean being to be able to be pulverized into becoming and to unfold otherwise than as an objective flux of things. A multiplicity of sentients would be the very mode in which a becoming is possible—a becoming in which thought would not simply find again, now in movement, a being subject to a universal law, producing unity. Only in this way does becoming acquire the value of an idea radically opposed to the idea of being, does it designate the resistance to every integration expressed by the image of the river, in which, according to Heraclitus, one does not bathe twice, and according to Cratylus, not even once. A notion of becoming destructive of Parmenidean monism is acquired only through the singularity of sensation.
   2. Heraclitus : violence is fundamental to matter, to dynamis
   3. Critique of temporality as Becoming, going back to Heraclitus
   4. Temporality as polemos, a clash of opposites
   5. Early Empiricism
   6. Nietzsche/Deleuze/Foucault/Heidegger
   7. I wrote a paper for Critchley on Heidegger’s macho bullshit. Hope I still have it. Can probably reconstruct form “Introduction to Metaphysics”
   8. Look at Bergson in Levinas and Deleuze
   9. Copula is copulation:
   10. the entire ontological lexicon of being, temporality, etc – occurs through the human intimacy and not as reactions to anonymous forces
   11. Materialism of empiricism –
       1. Hobbes starts with this dynamic violence and winds up in war.
       2. Locke too
   12. Deleuze
       1. Empiricism and Subjectivity
       2. Maybe the Bergson book?
       3. Nietzsche essay in The New Nietzsche
       4. War Machine
       5. Uncategorized
          1. Deferral of response
          2. This a good and valid question and one that should remain open
          3. Deferral and conversational responsibility
          4. Did Critchley write about this in “Ethics of Deconstruction?
          5. HERE BRING OUT “IDENTITY IS A RESPONSE” “EXISTENCE IS A CONVERSATION, AND THE COPULA OF COPULATION, CONTINOUS FISSURE OF IDENTITY
          6. FIRST INTERLOCUTOR HAS TO BE SIMON
          7. Maybe introduce “conversation as a motif throughout the work
          8. Metaphorics of “responsibility” as responding in a conversation
          9. Make the phenomenological example clear before abstraction The temporality and ethics of texting
          10. Urgent phone call you are viscerally summoned by the ringing of your phone or the chiming of a text message
          11. Why haven’t they written back yet?
          12. How am I supposed to reply?
          13. Periodicity of checking to see if they wrote back – Heraclitus
          14. Maybe continue this below in discussion of Metaphorics
          15. Derrida/Levinas on infinite conversation T&I W&D
   13. Heraclitus and Temporality
       1. “Continuous Creation” not “genealogy”
       2. Contra Deleuze/Heidegger/Nietzsche
       3. Levinas’s statement on Heraclitus “can not even step into a river once”
       4. “I is an other”
       5. the fissure of time is a continuous creation of Other into Self
       6. continuous creation -- a gendered generation, like biblical idea, maybe Spinoza too?
       7. Fundamental break up of matter vs. continuous creation
       8. Meditation as deferral of response
       9. Meditation as deferral of response
       10. Derrida deferral
       11. Futurity not as anticipation e.g. Heidegger
       12. Reminder to revisit the question
       13. Juggalo outreach
           1. Start out with Heraclitus and temporality futurity and responsibility
           2. Anarche and mother originary responsibility before time
           3. Phenomenal existential experience
           4. Admit ignorance and experiment. What does this word mean
           5. Levinas admits response. For mistakes. Magonista Kropotkin
       14. Also Derrida Deferral
       15. Futurity not as Heideggerean anticipation,
       16. As a reminder to revisit the question, an admission that I do not have either the first principle nor the final answer
       17. futurity as responsibility,
       18. Meditation as the deferral of one’s response to an impulse --- impulse encountered in sensibility, where we first encounter the other
       19. Hans Jonas: Heidegger is a Gnostic. Relevant here?
       20. Continuous Creation vs. Genealogy
           1. Viewing Power<https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm>
           2. Levinas’ analysis of light and his opposition to Heidegger can be understood through a comparison of the Jewish and the Christian accounts of creation. Following Nietzsche, Heidegger explicitly critiques Christianity as a popularization of the Platonic reduction of the logos (logoV.) Heidegger contends that the logos originally referred to Dasein as the gathering-place for the strife (polemoV) of Being. Christianity obscures this notion of logos-as-gathering by interpreting Christ as the logos. Following the Alexandrian-Jewish[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn1) philosopher Philo, the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the phenomenon which mediates man’s relationship with the divine. Furthermore, John 1:9 explains Christ as the source of divine light as it is revealed to men, “That was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world.” Therefore, this book collapses the concept of the logos as light with the notion of a publicly accessible Word which subsists outside of man’s existence. Against this, Heidegger forwards an almost Gnostic idea[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn2) that each Dasein, as an individual, can potentially exist as its own true light, lighting itself as it comes into the world. In contrast to both John’s and Heidegger’s accounts of revelation, the Book of Genesis introduces God’s first act of creation in the following manner: “And God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light.” Contrary to the implicit claims of both John and Philo, this verse does not merely imply that revelation occurs through a substantive word, through the nominal. Rather, it describes the light of phenomena as preceded by and issuing forth from God’s exercise of speech.[[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn3)
           3. Levinas describes the light of truth and of representation as something which becomes manifested between speaking interlocutors. In his book Totality and Infinity, he carefully describes the phenomenological transformations of this discussion. Levinas describes me as I posit myself in a “Now,” in a present moment in which I speak to the Other, am heard by her, and receive a reply from him.[[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn4) As with Heidegger, Levinas employs the resources of Husserl’s phenomenology to follow the course of this discussion. Although Levinas, like Heidegger, opposes Husserl’s model of intentionality for implicitly positing a spectatorial subject which merely looks at an object, he finds metaphysical notions within Husserl which subvert the apparent ontological interpretations. He claims that Husserl’s major insight was that “notions under the direct gaze of thought that defines them are nevertheless, unbeknown to this naive thought revealed to be implanted in horizons unsuspected by this thought ... The break-up of the formal structure of thought (the noema of a noesis) into events which this structure dissimulates, but which sustain it and restore its concrete significance, constitutes a deduction — necessary and yet non-analytical.”[[5]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn5) Levinas demonstrates that the intentional relationship which separates consciousness from its objects is not foundational, but rather is itself produced through certain genealogical developments of the relationship between the Other and me.
           4. Levinas claims, “The difference between the Other and me do not depend upon different properties. ... They are due to the I-Other conjunction, to the inevitable orientation of being “starting from oneself” towards “the Other.” The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which can not arise without this orientation) summarizes the theses of the present work.”[[6]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn6) Levinas description of Being is as radically perspectival as Nietzsche’s.[[7]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn7) However, whereas Nietzsche describes the experiences of a subject whose being and whose perspectives are determined by its will to power, Levinas describes my experiences in having my being and my perspectives be determined by my ethical position as the interlocutor of the Other. Derrida’s analysis of the structure of Levinas’ writing illuminates his intricate perspectivism. “In Totality and Infinity the thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself.”[[8]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn8) As Heidegger might say, Levinas’ writing repeatedly presents the same “factical situation,” yet, each time, it thematizes this situation from a new perspective. By varying perspectives, Levinas does not merely give the reader a “better view” of the same event. Rather, these different perspectives constitute each situation as a new and different ontological, phenomenological, and metaphysical event. These perspectives are produced as and through my intercourse with the Other. The evolution and transformation of our discussion produces intentional relationships which connect us and which orient me metaphysically. I speak to the Other who responds to me. As will be shown in this paper, each event within this complex intercourse reveals its own intentional horizons.
           5. To fully understand Levinas’ conception of vision and power, one must trace how these capacities evolve and transform throughout each stage of my ethical development. Against Heidegger’s description of Dasein as a dynamic temporalization, Levinas analyzes the time of discourse as a series of discrete, separated moments in which I am born, die and am reborn. In Time and the Other, he describes the birth of an individuated ego as his power to posit his identity, thereby escaping from the there is, an impersonal and eternal realm of undifferentiated existence. Totality and Infinity no longer refers to this event of separation as a power, but rather as the capacity to resist totalization. Levinas states, “The separation of the Same is produced in the form of an inner life, as psychism ... It is already a way of being, resistance to this totality. ... The dimension of the psychism opens under the force of the resistance a being opposes to its totalization.”[[9]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/TotalityAndInfinity.htm#_ftn9) In direct opposition to Heidegger’s assertion that Dasein’s power develops from its futural appropriation of its heritage, Levinas explains that my capacity to resist the weight of the past in a present moment constitutes my force of resistance. Previous to this moment of separation, this separation in and as a moment, I had effectively perished when my works and my statements were alienated from myself by the impersonal institutions and public interpretations which subsumed them. I break with the domination of the totality by shedding my former manifestation and founding myself in a new moment in which I have an opportunity to make a new statement. Not only does this psychism separate me temporally, it also separates me ontologically. Against Heidegger who sees Dasein’s Being as always embedded within the impersonal dominance of Being, Levinas reappropriates the Cartesian distinction between an internal mental sphere and an external reality. According to Levinas, I resist being absorbed by the tyranny of Being by establishing the limit of my identity and creating an interior psychical realm which can not be violated by any external force or person.
       21. ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF GENDER HERE : continuous transformation of masculine/feminine in process of continuous creation<http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm>
           1. Throughout his work, most evidently in Totality and Infinity, Levinas employs motifs of kinship to describe my connection with alterity. When he describes the world as being "familiar to us" (TI 33), Levinas implies that experience is constituted as family members. Through each perspective of the ethical "relationship" (TI 39) opened at each instant of the ethical genealogy, the Other figures as a different relative: the father of futural fecundity (TI 274-277), the wife of the economic home (TI 154-156), the brother of political fraternity (TI 278-280), the sister soul of incestuous Eros (TI 254), and so on. The prevalence of these gendered family tropes has led many commentators to criticize Levinas for having a sexist and heteronormative bias. Over half a century ago in the foundational work of modern French feminism, The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir accused Levinas's figuration of woman as Other to be "an assertion of masculine privilege” (xvi n3). More recently, this protest has been expressed more angrily, with a recent article claiming that Levinas’s work articulates a “demonization of femininity and erasure of maternity” (Walsh 97).
           2. For anyone who admires the work of Levinas, such anger is alarming. Rather than reacting against this feminist standpoint, however, it is precisely our responsibility as Levinas scholars to be awakened by this alarm and to respond sincerely to this anger. As Andrea Juno and V. Vale explain, “[Women’s] anger can spark and re-invigorate; it can bring hope and energy back into our lives and mobilize politically against the status quo” (5). Only by rendering Levinas vulnerable, by exposing him to feminist critique, can we begin to answer for the problems in his thought and perhaps even to use these problems to develop new insights into gender and sexuality.
           3. On the one hand, the feminist objection to Levinas’s language seems to be exactly correct. Without a doubt, Levinas uses gendered motifs throughout his philosophy, deploying familial structures inherited from both the Judaic and the Greek legacies of patriarchy.[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn1) At all moments of our reading, this should indeed trouble us. We should always refrain from masquerading his gendered language by replacing masculine pronouns with feminine ones, neutral ones, or even the hermaphroditic “he or she”; perhaps we should cease altogether to use “it” in our translations. We must keep in mind that Levinas articulates Humanisme de l’autre Homme, “Humanism of the Other Man,” and not, as a recent translation would have it, “Humanism of the Other.” On the other hand, only to claim that Levinas “privileges” the masculine over the feminine overlooks the more essential question: what does “privileging” mean and should we necessarily privilege the privileged over the secondary?
           4. Derrida astutely poses this methodological problem, “We will attempt to ask several questions. If they succeed in approaching the heart of this explication, they will be nothing less than objections but rather the questions put to us by Levinas” (WD 84). Perhaps the words that have caused so much controversy in Levinas’s work are the very terms that he himself opens up for discussion? Perhaps Levinas’s usage of filial tropes is not merely one of the “problems” in his view of politics (Critchley 174) but rather a problematic which must be deepened?
           5. More than any other thinker in the history of Western philosophy, Levinas stands accused in the very body of his texts, texts that “call for the critique exercised by another philosopher” (OTB 20), texts radically open to critical readings, texts that constantly require justification. Exactly because he employs binary gendered concepts, we can use Levinas’s texts to protest for justice not just in his work but in philosophy and in Western culture itself. Levinas has inherited sexist language and patriarchal logic from a long tradition of canonical Western thought--most of which has been written by white males[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn2)--that has typically figured subjectivity as virility and citizenship as fraternity. Whereas many sensible, egalitarian thinkers try to masquerade this legacy by using gender-neutral language, Levinas deliberately foregrounds the problematic of gender. Therefore, perhaps a careful and critical reading of his texts can begin to think through the history of thought as masculine and to respond to the anger of our sisters.
4. SECTION: “It’s all Relative” (METAPHORICS OF FAMILIARITY):
   1. Critique of Levinas. Critchley, “Five Problems of Levinas”. Maybe his new book too.
   2. Levinas as mystical heteronormativity, nuclear family, heterosexual intercourse and breeding. With all the stuff on father, son, mother, daughter, etc, sounds like mystical heteronormative family
   3. We propose an ethical perversity: a perversion of ethics and an ethics of perversion
   4. Would be great to have a Lingis quote here
   5. An Ethical ‘Pataphysics
      1. Pataphysics is the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics, whether within or beyond the latter's limitations, extending as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics. ... 'Pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. 'Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one.[3]
      2. The ex-ception, each person is exceptional in their own way, ex-cendence, etc
   6. Levinas, Perverter
      1. Throughout his work, most evidently in Totality and Infinity, Levinas employs motifs of kinship to describe my connection with alterity.   When he describes the world as being "familiar to us" (TI 33), Levinas implies that experience is constituted as family members.  Through each perspective of the ethical "relationship" (TI 39) opened at each instant of the ethical genealogy, the Other figures as a different relative: the father of futural fecundity (TI 274-277), the wife of the economic home (TI 154-156), the brother of political fraternity (TI 278-280), the sister soul of incestuous Eros (TI 254), and so on.   The prevalence of these gendered family tropes has led many commentators to criticize Levinas for having a sexist and heteronormative bias.  Over half a century ago in the foundational work of modern French feminism, The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir accused Levinas's figuration of woman as Other to be "an assertion of masculine privilege” (xvi n3).  More recently, this protest has been expressed more angrily, with a recent article claiming that Levinas’s work articulates a “demonization of femininity and erasure of maternity” (Walsh 97).
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      3. Alongside the violence of critical protest yet against the violence of rhetorical orthodoxy, we can still embrace the subversive potential of violent speech by interpreting Levinas blasphemously.[[6]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn6)  In contrast to Cohen’s hierarchical and orthodox moralism, our subversive and radical reading will attempt to reveal the immanent roots, the poetic dimension within Levinas’s hyperbolic, transcendental prose.[[7]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn7)  Such a reading will show that, although Levinas deliberately uses filial tropes throughout his work, this would only constitute a "problem" if it were read in a hermeneutically "straight" manner.  Beneath the apparent hetero-normative veneer of Levinas's prose lurk traces of queerness.  The ethical relationship is directed not simply from masculine Self to feminine Other, but is everywhere perverted.
      4. See Levinas, Perverter: <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm>
5. SECTION: Re-ligion (Community of Those Who have nothing in common)
   1. Re-ligare: yoked to each other, tied to each other, bound together
   2. Mention Critchley and Cornel West on “religion”
   3. Communities of Queers and Freaks
   4. Black and Black and Red Mothers
      1. Sasha Luci
      2. Black Motherhood
         1. Alexis Pauline Gumbs
         2. bell hooks
         3. Deva New School
         4. Indigenous Motherhood
            1. possibly Maria Llopis' 'Maternidades Subversivas'
            2. Talk to Avi Rojas about being a doula
      3. Radical Faeries
         1. I used to consider myself a queer at various times,
            1. and was welcomed by great folks like The Murrmonster, Nedula, Liz, Rhani and Danny and Morty into the queer family, and myself
            2. Became a waitress with the 60s acid-head drag queens “The Cockettes”
            3. I became a waitress with the Cockettes free meal, No Penny Opera
            4. 
            5. Weird how I am a dead ringer for my dead mother. Kind of like Norman Bates but also kind of different.  
               
         2. That said, I no longer call myself “queer”
            1. because I don’t understand the political commitments of claiming that label
            2. for the sake of simplicity, an attempt to create an identity that covers over all the internal and external variance
            3. I am a basically straight cishet white male
            4. I am according to some standards an effeminate male, perhaps even a “male hysteric”. At this point I am almost fifty so I no longer care about any criticism of my masculinity. Like it or lump it
            5. Besides this, “masculinity” is kind of a pain in the ass

Sure I have been called a “faggot” – even suffered a concussion after being smacked down the pavement for looking like one

But every masculine-defined body has gone through this form of abuse as enforced masculinity

How much is our culture inundated by various forms of male self-hatred.

Talk sympathetically about incels: men who aren’t masculine enough

* + - 1. Radical Faerie Commune in Tennessee:

Fales Library at NYU

“Go to Tennessee and find out for yourself” --Tobaron Waxman

* + 1. Juggalos
       1. Critchley on Clowns in “Infinite Conversation”
       2. My own being-a-clown
          1. I myself have been possessed by the spirit of many tricksters
          2. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trickster](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trickster?fbclid=IwAR3iFwZSMgjs6bXi1x9Y_xhMmnyG0WCK38-6OW74UeNfiP5IrCO-ZfCm3R8)
          3. I have been incarnated as:

Looney Toones Roadrunner (also Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, each with their own insanity)

Romantic hermaphrodite Krazykat (footnote to paper on Krazykat’s indeterminate gender)

Sun Wu Kong (description of Monkey King)

Hanuman eating the sun because he thought it was a big mango

I am a Puerto Rican colonial. This is my position in its history: my father was a chemistry professor at La Universidad Interamericana de San German and my mother, along with other expats and native Puerto Ricans, founded a school, named, appropriately enough “The School”

We had a mango tree in the backyard and used to play tic-tac-toe in the mangoes when we sliced them open

In Oaxaca, 2005, after working with indigenous communities and writing about their struggles (link to Barbarous Oaxaca article), I found myself staying with someone on the coast. One day I walked down the street and all the mangoes had fallen and I ate so many

Can probably link this to chapter about Eating, Consumption, OIKONOMOS

* + - 1. The Juggalo Sangha (spiritual community)
         1. Question of cultural appropriation.

Out of admiration shown by the MAD FAYGO LOVE shown by Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope and all the Juggalos and Juggalettes

FUCK YOUR REBEL FLAG  
<https://consequenceofsound.net/2020/06/insane-clown-posse-selling-fuck-your-rebel-flag-t-shirt/>

March in DC  
<https://www.npr.org/2017/09/15/550724673/who-are-the-juggalos-and-why-are-they-marching-in-washington-d-c?fbclid=IwAR3TpAV-uQDXxKDtuy42gEVSwknAvTQh3baH5ohyhFdWIk75XXgFsq6fC1g>

Care and Love during COVID  
<https://twitter.com/icp/status/1253103845644828675?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1253103845644828675%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rollingstone.com%2Fmusic%2Fmusic-news%2F2020-gathering-of-the-juggalos-canceled-covid-19-988696%2F>

I am getting a Juggalo shirt. I am going to commit to the Juggalo lifestyle. I don't just want to appropriate their culture. so I have to start wearing face paint

I am going to become a member of the Juggalo FAM. I am understanding it as a spiritual conversion, like joining their Sangha. I must learn to walk in the way of the Juggalo

* + - 1. American Juggalo quotes
         1. It takes a village to raise a child, and our village is Juggalos, says the elder of the group smoking women
      2. PROBLEMS (I): The “intentional family”
         1. This is what is wrong with the idea of the “intentional family”
         2. The family is pre-intentional, pre-voluntary, previous to society and politics
         3. Against voluntarism in anarchism generally
         4. <https://thegavoice.com/community/features/radical-faeries-and-unintended-family/>
         5. Religare as a connection that is pre-social and pre-political
         6. example:

brother fighting with step-father after mother’s death and myself fighting with brothers

* + - * 1. because family is precisely a bond that is not voluntary, relations we are obligated to whether or not we like them, whether or not they love us or we love them, whether or not they have traumatized them or they have traumatized us.
        2. almost every interesting story from the bible or Greek tragedy or Vedic literature the ancient bible and Greek tragedies are meditations on these sorts of religions
      1. Family is also the site of abuse
         1. <https://fireweedcollective.org/our-history/?fbclid=IwAR3slt9MDrgKTMNWusCHsND8Eiqye5Lg9XSgCrWdnWrtw2Np1e7KDLoJj3Y>  
            Past leadership included many white cisgender men that didn’t fully understand how deeply mental health struggles are interlocked with many forms of oppression. The result was an oppressive organizational culture that harmed people of color, women and femmes, LGBTQIA+ and other marginalized folks. White cis men, particularly those affiliated with The Icarus Project’s New York City chapter, were the folks most often named in these grievances, that also included unwanted sexual advances and systematic abuse of power. We attempted to develop internal accountability processes, however, white folks that sat firmly by people accused of causing harm disrupted and derailed the process and the women, femmes, and/or people of color spearheading these efforts experienced intense backlash and retaliation. It became clear that in order to stop and heal these harms, we had to transition away from white cis men leadership. The first step was to end the relationship with local groups as we were not able to guarantee the safety of these spaces.

END OF OUTLINE

* + 1. Not in the empiricist sense

##### Random

##### Paul Lafolley: Phenomenology of Revalation as pataphysicial

##### Advanced Magick for Beginners – Chaos Magick

### Whatever language allowed one person to talk to another about salmon

### In Levinas:

#### Why?

## SECTION TWO: Metaphorics

#### Why is a metaphorical analysis important of interesting

### Metaphorics of militarism

### Metaphorics of familiarity



1. Marx
   1. Genesis of Matter is death of Other (Marx)
   2. Vampirism in Marx
2. IDENTITY
3. Levinas Perverter’s reading of gender and my understanding of my own positionality. namely the Self and Other transition between different states of masculinity/femininity in their interaction
   1. Start out with gender and Critchley.
      1. “Can never view oneself from the outside and the asymmetry of ethical space” = Levinasian perspectivism (see Viewing Power)
      2. Also why the idea of intellectual property ownership of ideas is ridiculous we are in a conversation
4. Methodological questions
5. Start with Critchley/gender/temporality
6. Then with critique/polemos == how do we enter into discussion into people we do not agree with
7. contrast this with Cohen on Derrida https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter\_20\_1.htm
   * 1. Elevations and Subversion
     2. As distressing as it can be when anger is directed against a thinker one admires, it seems even worse when someone defends his thought with hostility and even employs it as a weapon of attack. As writers who have taken responsibility for the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, we have already committed to responding to the protest that his writings have engendered. For this reason, it seems inappropriate for Richard A. Cohen to dismiss the feminist analysis of Tina Chanter’s “Antigone’s Dilemma” with so much brutality and condescension in his first book Elevations, characterizing her thoughtful and temperate article as “a hatchet job. Levinas is once more made to play the tired role of the male fall guy … So why even bother with Levinas, one wonders, that sophisticated intellectual male chauvinist pig?” (EHG 196) It is hard for me to understand how a scholar of Levinas--a philosopher of politeness if nothing else--could be so rude and patronizing to one of our sisters. However, Cohen dismisses Levinas’s critical questioners--feminist and otherwise--as “attackers” (EHG 195) none of whom is given the individuated respect for separated Otherness, but who are instead defined collectively as enemies who “demonstrate loyalty to a party or school.” (EHG 196)
     3. Elevations opens upon an ominous note. Cohen recounts, “I remember distinctly to this day the impression Levinas made on me. 'This is true', I thought, in contrast to all the philosophers and philosophies which are fascinating or provocative” (EHG xi). Although anyone who has read Levinas can certainly appreciate Cohen’s “naïve” (EHG xi) sense of wonder, Cohen makes the dangerous move of proclaiming Levinas’s thought to be “true,” momentarily overlooking Levinas’s crucial “elevation” of the Good over the True. Practically canonizing Levinas as a saint or prophet, such an orthodox interpretation verges on dogmatism. We can already hear in Cohen’s contempt for thinkers who are merely “fascinating or provocative” an effort to reduce the ethical height of Levinas’s phenomenological ethics to a belligerent morality of ressentiment.
     4. Although Cohen is an astute phenomenologist, he makes the mistake of placing the normative over the phenomenological without fully appreciating how Levinas’s phenomenology is already ethics. Cohen states that “the central claim in Levinas is that the face of the other is manifested in and manifests a moral height” (EHG 183). Nevertheless, he reduces Levinas’s thought to a set of moral platitudes: “It is quite simple: it is better to be good than anything else. It is better to help others than to help ourselves” (EEP 11). Contrary to Cohen’s interpretation, however, Levinas does not issue prescriptive commands, but instead demonstrates how the prescriptive is already embedded in the existential. Levinas’s project is closely akin to Husserl’s quest to determine the eidetic essences that structure experience (Ideas 7-8), and even more similar to Heidegger’s demonstration that our “everydayness” actually reflects a more fundamental ontology (BT 380-82). That is, Levinas demonstrates how all of our experiences, even the most “commonplace” (TI 53), are already bent eccentrically by our moral orientation towards the Other, already penetrated from the rear by obligation. For example, Levinas does not simply argue that “violence is bad,” but rather demonstrates that, thanks to the ethical relationship, our wills and our bodies are always exposed to violence (TI 229) yet this violence is always postponed (TI 236).
     5. Cohen equates Levinas’s motif of height with a “moral force” that justifies hierarchical judgments of “better” and “worse” (EEP 140). Without properly articulating what the terms “good” and “evil” mean in Levinas’s writing, Cohen expresses this contrast with astonishing violence, arguing that Levinas’s “battle cry would be ‘Against evil, for the good!’” (EEP 104) Such a polemical cry could not possibly come from Levinas, but rather from Nietzsche’s man of ressentiment. According to Nietzsche, ressentiment arises from two inversions: (a) horizontally, ressentiment, the “sanctification of revenge under the name of justice” (52), looks outwards for an enemy rather than looking inwards for virtue; (b) vertically, ressentiment expresses the hatred of lowly people for the high born, and their jealous effort to revalue moral height. This attitude of ressentiment is most apparent in Cohen’s description of Levinas as “teaching morality to the intellectual elite who … think themselves too intelligent, too sophisticated, too cultured for ordinary morality” (EEP 1)
     6. To avoid confusing Levinas’s moral height with ressentiment, we must oppose the hierarchical logic of dogmatic orthodoxy by becoming subverters, overturning thought from below. [3] Judaism has always been a religion for subversion, for radical ruptures of thought that express both supreme disobedience and supreme piety. As Susan Handelman claims, Judaism contains within it a “heretic hermeneutic [that] can be part of tradition while simultaneously rebelling against it” (201). Our first patriarch, Abraham, became such an iconoclast when he smashed the idols revered and sold by his own father.[4] Similarly, modern Judaism stands in the shadow of Sabbatai Sevi, the 17th century apostate Messiah who consummated the Jewish Law by violating it.[5]
   1. Critique and Polemos
      1. critique is itself a military posture
      2. a different type of relationship
      3. Discursive vs. Conversational -- look around in Levinas
8. Political Economy
   1. OIKOS and economy
      1. OIKOS/Polis
      2. Fulfillment of human needs vs. Control of Household
   2. Self and Property <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/SelfAndProperty_FinalEssay_WEB.htm>
      1. The question of consumption is more fundamental than the question of production. Political economy is a question of human needs, not the right of labor
      2. Needs > Work.
      3. All eating is eating-of-the-Other
      4. Objectivity itself is the corpse of the Other
      5. Explore eating / orality
      6. Everything we inject has a source …
      7. Explore breathing
         1. The Flow of the Breath: Levinas Mouth-to-Mouth with Buddhism" (Ch 13, 2014)<https://www.dupress.duq.edu/products/levinas-and-asian-thought>
         2. The Flow of the Breath: Levinas Mouth-to-Mouth with Buddhism (about consumption and orality, environmental concerns of consumption)
9. Servility and the Service economy
   1. The exploitation of care labor
      1. Dalla Costa & James
      2. Silvia Federici
      3. Nancy Folbre “The Invisible Heart” -- I wrote a paper for Nancy Fraser about this. Let me see if I can dig it up.
10. Viewing Power <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm>
    1. Conclusion
    2. In this conclusion, I would like to take up Robert Gibbs’ challenge to consider possible relationships between Marx and Levinas though a rereading of this thesis.[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftn1) The trajectory from Descartes to Levinas charts a profound transformation in man’s consumer relationship to a developing commodity economy. Descartes writes at a period which marks the beginning not only of modern thought, but also of bourgeois capitalism. Descartes’ description of himself figures him as almost the paradigmatic bourgeois consumer. Descartes sits down at his desk, calm and clear-headed, relaxing in the complacency of his home, to write his Meditations on First Philosophy. From this space of comfort, Descartes looks out at a threatening world filled with possible uncertainty and insecurity. In response, he attempts to preserve this security by domesticating exteriority. Descartes masters the external world by positing it as a set of objects which offer themselves to him for his contemplation. He does not figure his consciousness as a tabula rasa, reacting to new, unexpected sense-data. Rather, Descartes sets a table for himself with morsels which offer themselves for his consumption and domination.
    3. Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s works express their distrust and disdain of this consumerist position. Both of them warn that Descartes’ spectatorial paradigm constitutes a cowardly retreat from life and its contingencies. Heidegger explains that mass culture submerges and loses Dasein by transforming its authentic possibilities into exchangeable and consumable commodities. Nietzsche contends that society effeminizes the individual, making him unable to assert his sovereign will-to-power. Both of them overcome their anxiety over modern economic circumstances by developing an anxiety over an underlying abyss. They assert that, by confronting the limits of one’s own existence, one can find one’s will to take risks, no matter what outcome fate may destine. In response to the flaccidity and passivity of modern selfhood, Nietzsche and Heidegger affirm the importance of creative, heroic individuals, of tragic artists and poetic builders. By doing so, both of them try to oppose the dominant consumerist subjectivity with a productive subjectivity. Nietzsche’s argues that the self should assert its will to power by producing new perspectives and creating new poetic visions. By developing a concept of possibility which can not be reduced to actuality, Heidegger establishes a process of perpetual production which can not be reduced simply to the commodities it produces. Furthermore, Heidegger’s Dasein confronts its world as entity which it can manipulate to promote its own possibilities like the solitary capitalist entrepreneur who exploits reality in the name of free enterprise.[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftn2)
    4. Before discussing how Levinas’ works relate to consumer capitalism, I would like to meditate on what his work describes. Although Levinas is an ethical thinker, we must be precise about what this term means for him. Levinas is not a thinker of morals or virtues. He does not — at least, not explicitly — prescribe any specific behaviors or attitudes. Furthermore, he does not furnish us with the equivalent of a Kantian imperatives; he does not give us ground rules for moral laws. Instead, I would argue that Levinas’ project in Totality and Infinity is quite similar to Heidegger’s project of constructing a ontological phenomenology in Being and Time. Although the terminology often seems cryptic and the sentences often become dizzying, Levinas intends to describe the exact structures of our everyday empirical existence.
    5. Levinas’ philosophy attempts to radically reorient my conception of my life. Rather than letting me think of myself as an independent, autonomous entity, Levinas wrenches the center of my life outside of myself. Levinas teaches me just how radically I, at every moment of my life, am radically exposed to the wills of other people. The Other always maintains the capacity to shock me in both delightful and horrifying ways. My openness to the Other explains why I can not shut out another person’s suffering, even if I choose to ignore it. Conversely, this exposure also enables another person to invade my privacy in order to harm me. By orienting me towards ethics, Levinas does not necessarily make me act “better” in the conventional sense. Rather, he demonstrates how my interactions with others — and even my relationship with myself as one who transubstantiates into an Other over time — will always disrupt my self-assertive will. The Other confronts me as a person whose actions I can’t fully predict and whose statements I can’t completely control, yet whose commitments and words directly affect me. Furthermore, the Other seizes my destiny away from myself because he always takes over my projects and my works at the very moment that I project and produce them. Therefore, Levinas demonstrates that, in this post modern age of The Rapture, control will always slip out of our grasp and our will always be violated by others.
    6. Like Marx, Levinas’ works meditate on the irreducible materiality of the human condition and on the need for economic justice. Totality and Infinity always brings the reader back to a contemplation of the incarnate nature of existence, showing how our transformations from one moment to another are always resurrections of the flesh. Furthermore, this book always makes me contemplate how my discourse, my commerce, with others always occurs through the economic relationships I establish with them and with myself. In his discussions of enjoyment, Levinas consistently praises Marx for recognizing the fundamental sincerity of man’s material desires. Describing life as alimentation, as eating, Levinas’ analysis of enjoyment grounds my existence in my consumerism. Rather than viewing the world as possibilities I can seize, I ground my existence on my sensual enjoyment of the objects I consume. Levinas cites Theophile Gautier’s assertion, “I am one of those people for whom the external world exists.”[[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftn3) He does not figure my life as a heroic one, but rather describes me as more of a dandy, as effeminate, indulging myself in the element.
    7. Levinas’ ideas can be applied to think through concrete phenomena which we encounter in our contemporary consumerist economy. For example, Levinas explains that the Other retains his transcendence through his infinite capacity to clarify the image he presents. Although he may manifest a particular facade at one moment, the Other can always present a completely different one in a new moment. The infinity of temporality allows the Other to create himself anew in a form which I never could have anticipated. This description, I would argue, can give us a phenomenology of Madonna, the post-modern person par excellance. Doesn’t Madonna’s constitute her “identity” precisely on her infinite capacity to recreate herself from one album to another, from the Boy Toy of Borderline, to the seductress of Like a Virgin, to the sophisticated vamp of Vogue? Similarly, Levinas explains that one establishes oneself in the moment by positing oneself as a concrete work. By manifesting oneself in the public world, one creates oneself as a consumable object. Again, doesn’t Madonna’s “power” derive precisely from her infinite ability to exploit herself, her infinite capacity to control her own commodification?
    8. More importantly, Levinas’ analysis can also lend itself to a new critique of the consumerist economy. The anarchist Raoul Vaneigem, in his Revolution of Everyday Life critiques consumerism in, as the title suggests, a Heideggerean manner. He argues that modern society forces us into a survival mentality in which we merely consume goods rather exploring and exerting our creative wills.[[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftn4) Conversely, Levinas can help us to develop an an-archism of the other man. For Levinas, survival connotes a literal “living over,” an existence which lives off of those who have been slaughtered by history. Levinas explains that the self’s enjoyment derives through its concretization and incorporation of the elemental as objects for its bodily consumption. Furthermore, Levinas explains that this elemental enjoyment is produced from the materiality of the works it has inherited from the past, from the human suffering and death which has congealed itself in the production of a work. Levinas updates Marx’s analysis of capitalism as vampirism, Marx’s descriptions of the machinery of production sucking the life out of the bodies it consumes in production. He draws our attention to the fact that, in an era where all dresses are made from the blood of children and all overcoats are made from human hair, the everyday of consumption implicates the consumer in profound violence.
    9. Perhaps we can use Levinas to develop a phenomenology of social protest. The Other presents me with a being who “burns without being consumed,” whose humanity can not be fully absorbed by a consumer economy, yet whose epiphany also teaches me the possibility of a holocaust. Levinas figures me as someone who is profoundly aware of human suffering, even if I choose to ignore this degradation. Furthermore, in his later works, he repeatedly explains that the material needs of the Other are my own spiritual needs. The Other calls me away from my complacent comfort, demanding that I work to promote social and economic justice. Levinas describes ways in which I can confront systems of oppression. He explains that my freedom does not derive from my ability to exert my will, but rather from an awareness that anonymous powers always threaten to crush my freedom. Although outside powers can indeed control me and objectify me, I always maintain the infinite capacity to speak to the Other. Like Abraham who argues desperately against God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, I retain the infinite ability and duty to bear witness to the suffering of myself and the Other and to speak out against the concrete facts which oppress us.
    10. [[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftnref1) Robert Gibbs, Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.]
    11. [[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftnref2) Heidegger’s later work criticizes this exploitation of the world through his analysis of Enframing [Gestell.] See his piece “The Question Concerning Technology” in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays. [Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.]
    12. [[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftnref3) Existents and Existence p. 37
    13. [[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/ViewingPower/Conclusion.htm#_ftnref4) Raoul Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life, p. 159- 163. [London: Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1993]
11. Self and Property <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/SelfAndProperty_FinalEssay_WEB.htm>
    1. The work of Emmanuel Levinas attempts to rethink the position of the individual self, reconsidering the way it is structured as a responsibility to the other person. Such an inquiry into selfhood necessarily raises the question of what is subsumed within the personal sphere, the suum. In his first magnum opus, Totality and Infinity, Levinas expresses this idea with a phrase borrowed from both Hegel and Sartre, writing that individual is ‘for-itself.’ “The subject is ‘for itself.’ It represents itself and knows itself as long as it is. But in knowing or representing itself, it possesses itself, dominates itself, extends its identity to what of itself comes to refute its identity” (87). Selfhood, Levinas explains, is not a stable identity but a process of self-identification, of appropriating the diversity of otherness and integrating it back into a unitary selfhood. Within Totality and Infinity, he delineates the steps by which this procedure occurs. Before the self involves itself in productive self-creation, he explains, its experience begins through consumption.
    2. Levinas explains that the ego is first produced as something that enjoys existence. The ego is neither a particular instance of a universal category nor something that partakes of elemental forces or codes, but rather something that lives a contented life, living from its contents, fulfilling itself by filling itself. Levinas describes this initial relationship to the world using the metaphorical language of eating, stating “Nourishment … is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other … becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me. All enjoyment is in this sense alimentation” (111). This description of the dynamic emergence of selfhood contrasts dramatically with the analyses of Hegel and Locke. For Hegel, particularity first develops through the exercise of freedom, by the way one expresses oneself through the externalization of one’s will in property. Although Locke begins with self-preservation and the biblical dispensation for enjoyment, it is productive labor that turns the world into one’s own. In contrast, Levinas explains that the self initially relates to the other through a process of incorporation and not externalization, through consumption and not production. By emphasizing consumption, Levinas seems to be drawing attention the way in which one begins one’s existence -- not as an agent asserting its sovereign will and projecting its spirit onto things but rather as someone vulnerable who needs to be sustained by the world in order to survive.
    3. More than a reaction to either Locke or Hegel, Levinas’s emphasis on consumption seems to be a response to the way that Heidegger initially situates Dasein (human being). According to Heidegger, Dasein finds itself already thrown into a situation that surpasses it (174:135). Although this state of thrownness indicates certain susceptibility within its constitution, Dasein overcomes this passivity by recognizing how it is already engaged in the world. Dasein is already involved in a variety of productive relationships; it is related to things through relationships of utility that beckon to its hand. Once Dasein recognizes its engaged existence through the possessive relationships of mine-ness (Jemeinenigkeit) and authenticity / own-ness (Eigenlich), it can actively grasp things as they refer to it as ready-to-hand (Vorhanden), concerning itself by “producing, manipulating, and the like” (88) . According to Levinas, one first relates to the world through the mouth that eats rather than the hand that uses: man’s initial relationship is consuming the elemental rather than acting within Being. He remarks, “The consumption of foods is the food of life” (114). Therefore, he criticizes Heidegger's analysis for its overemphasis on productivity at the expense of consumption, remarking, "[Heidegger's model of the] world as a set of implements ... bears witness to a particular organization of labor in which foods take on the signification of fuel in the economic machinery. ... Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry" (134).
    4. Levinas describes several phenomenological transformations that respond to this dynamic of hunger. Part of this process entails the development of an economy in which personal property can exist. In itself, pure enjoyment does not engender any property ownership. Levinas employs the notion of the “elemental” to explain why this is so. Whereas Hegel finds a lack of will, a res nullis, within the natural world, Levinas describes it as permeated by anonymous elemental forces. Qualities without substances content sensible enjoyment. For example, Levinas states that one enjoys the “blue of the sky” (141). Here, he seems to be claiming that affectivity responds to the adjectival blue rather than a nominal thing such as the ideal of blueness, or the particular object described by blue, the sky. Affect responds to intensities, not to objects. Thus, Levinas states that these elements are “coming always without my being able to possess the source” (141). That is, within sensibility, one does not find concrete things which could be seized as property. Furthermore, Levinas explains enjoyment as a passive process, in which one is affected, undergoing waves of sensation. Levinas thus claims that ownership is ambiguous within this realm, writing “to possess by enjoying is also to be possessed” (158). In order for private property to emerge, the relationship of enjoyment must be transformed into a new configuration, a phenomenon which Levinas calls the Home.
    5. Levinas's notion of the Home seems to be an adaptation of Heidegger's description of how the individual relates to the world. In Being and Time, Heidegger argues that the self is not separated from things as a subject is from an object, but is already engaged in the world. According to Heidegger, the reason why Dasein is always already in a productive, manipulative relationship with the world is because it is always already “dwelling alongside” the world (54:80ff). Levinas's discussion of the "Home" seems to indicate his ironic critique of this idea. For Levinas, the Home is precisely the event that terminates engagement, separating the individual from the immediacy of his enjoyment. “Man abides in the world as having come to it from a private domain, from being at home with himself, in which at each moment that he retires” (152). Emerging from the welcome granted to him by an other person's hospitality, the home establishes a private being, walled off from the anonymity of sensible elements.
    6. By situating oneself inside the private realm of one’s domicile, one can relate the outside world back to oneself, laying claim to things within it as one’s property. This home enables labor and possession by creating a breach between the self and the elements in which it had been absorbed. Through this distance, one can exercise the power of a laboring hand which exercises labor and identifies property. Overcoming the transience of sensual affect, the hand draws from the element concrete things, objects that endure through time. In many ways, Levinas’s description of how property is acquired echoes Hegel’s notion that possession negates the independence of the thing (§59): “labor in its possessive grasp suspends the independence of the element… as property the thing is an existent that has lost its being” (158). For Levinas as for Hegel, possession entails the absolute domination of the property by the owner.
    7. According to Levinas, my encounter with the other person prevents the spread of this domination. This transcendental experience of confronting another person is not akin either to sensual enjoyment or to masterful possession. The other person is an exterior entity, someone that cannot be absorbed into my internal sphere or made into part of my identity. However, this encounter is not experienced as a negative limit but rather as a something that is overly positive. The other person, according to Levinas, is not something that eludes the grasp of possession but someone who overwhelms it. In this experience, he claims, “the I, nonetheless, contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its own identity” (27). Envisioning the other person’s visage, one’s mind is confronted with a paradoxical experience of containing more than its capacity, something that could not have come from consciousness itself and that consciousness can not integrate into the self’s own identity. When the other person expresses herself, she produces an image or a work that can be appropriated, yet simultaneously she also expresses a transcendence that cannot be dominated. However she presents herself, she both preserves her own privacy and maintains the ability to respond in unforeseeable ways. According to Levinas, the other person transcends not just the self’s power, but its power for power (198). The only way that one could attempt to exercise absolute power over another person, to appropriate them as property, would be to murder them. However, murder would grant one possession of only a corpse, not the person herself.
    8. The encounter with the other person alters the self’s intimate relationship to the world it possesses and allows for the emergence of a common sphere. Complementing the phenomenology of the Home, Levinas describes another process that conditions ownership, the genesis of the general. He explains that, because the other person halts the self’s effort to appropriate, it both throws property into question and conditions it. “Possession itself refers to more profound metaphysical relations: a thing does not resist acquisition. Other possessors – those whom one cannot possess – contest and therefore can sanction possession itself” (162). The presence of other persons challenges my immediate enjoyment of goods, and removes me from my solitary experience of them. Paradoxically, however, this same interaction also allows for the establishment of property. In order for appropriation to occur, a subject must be counterposed against a field of objects. According to Levinas, one achieves this separation by presenting oneself and one’s goods to the outside gaze of the visage, to the other person’s vision. “In order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know how to give what I possess” (171). According to Levinas, I become aware of the general sphere once I generously offer my world to the other person.
    9. With this analysis, Levinas’s account of the commons differs dramatically from Locke and Hegel. Although Locke believes that the world was given to man in common, only the negative duty to avoid injuring others remains after creation. Since the right to existence and the right to property are individuated, generality can only emerge from a consent reached between separated persons pursuing their own ends. On the other hand, Hegel understands the universal order of the state as that which already conditions the substantial objectification of the particular person. In contrast, Levinas asserts that I move from my own solitary enjoyment to the common world through communicating with the other person and entering into commerce with him. Levinas’s analysis of the commons seems to be preferable than that of Locke, who treats the commons either as a something natural that should be privatized or as the epiphenomenal outcome of aggregated interests. The contrast between Hegel and Levinas, the question of whether we move from the general to the interpersonal or the interpersonal to the general, is much more subtle. Here it seems worth noting, though, that within The Philosophy of Right, Hegel only seems to consider the logical categories of particularity and universality. He has no comparable term for alterity, no way to discuss the unique phenomenon of the other person, as he did in the Phenomenology of Spirit.
    10. For Levinas, the realm of generality is populated not by property or by objects, but by works. Labor not only incorporates things into my existence, it also produces a thing exterior to myself, a work, a thing that attests to the absence of the worker. Levinas uses this notion of the work to argue against Locke and Hegel's assertion that labor creates property. “The product of labor is not an inalienable possession, and it can be usurped by the Other. Works have a destiny independent of the I, are integrated into an ensemble of works: they can be exchanged, that is, be maintained in the anonymity of money” (176). Whereas Hegel explained how property expresses the self by the way it embodies the human will, Levinas insists that the work expresses the will as something from which the will has removed itself. Production for Levinas does not expand the personal sphere, but rather creates something external to it, something that can be expropriated and manipulated by other wills. For Levinas, my labor not only secures what belongs to me, but also situates those expressions of myself in a general economy where they can be appropriated by anyone. Therefore, the very act of self-assertion and self-manifestation is already a primary exposure and self-alienation. “The other can dispossess me of my work, take it or buy it, and thus direct my very behavior; I am exposed to instigation. The work is destined to this alien Sinngebung [meaning-giving] from the moment of its origin in me” (227).
    11. Levinas describes the reverse process in a manner that further complicates the idea of ownership. Just as our absence is signaled in the ways that we express ourselves in our works, we also appropriate absences through our acquisitions. The other person, Levinas explains, is symbolized through the way that he has expressed himself in his works. Thus, I can acquire a certain kind of access to him through the way the person has expressed himself, but, Levinas explains, “we penetrate into this interior world as by burglary” (177). Levinas’s metaphor of burglary seems particularly striking in this discussion of property. As mentioned before, the primary threat against which Locke’s treatise defends is that of robbery: because the primary right of individuals is to promote their own self-interest, any infraction upon this privilege legitimates severe retribution. In contrast, Levinas’s describes how property is already theft: property is already situated in a public realm, and thus already subject to the economic dynamics of dispossession. More strikingly, Levinas’s example reconstrues the notion of thievery and the way it affects the personal sphere. For Levinas, the thief does not represent someone who takes property away from the sphere of selfhood, the suum, but rather someone who penetrates into it.
    12. Levinas further explores the susceptibility of the personal sphere in his second major book, Otherwise than Being. Otherwise than Being reworks the conceptual architecture of Totality and Infinity, focusing more closely on how the personal sphere develops from its responsibility to other persons. According to Levinas, the Western idea of selfhood is based on the idea that the self can possess itself through an act of identification. “In self-consciousness we identify ourselves across the multiplicity of temporal phases. It is as though subjective life in the form of consciousness consisted in being itself losing itself and finding itself again so as to possess itself by showing itself, proposing itself as a theme, exposing itself in truth” (99). In this statement, Levinas seems to be locating the problem of self-consciousness in what he refers to in an early essay as Heraclitus’s problem of the “illusory present” (“Reflections,” 65). Given that everything changes through the dynamic flux of time, how could one ever posit a stable identity for a thing such as the self? If one is always changing, isn’t the self already dispersed in otherness? Levinas claims that philosophy has consistently tried to resolve these problems by developing ways that one can integrate this diversity. It has proposed various themes through which one can grasp phenomena, allowing one to convert the external other into internal property and thereby establish self-possession.
    13. Levinas challenges the authority of these thematic organizing principles by demonstrating that before consciousness can appropriate the ex-ternal, the self is already ex-posed, already open to otherness. From the very beginning, the suum is already directed by its responsibility to other people. Otherwise than Being explains this prior exposure by clarifying one of the most puzzling aspects of Totality and Infinity: how is the “other” related to the “Other.” Totality and Infinity had presented two stages of the self’s development. First, the self emerges by integrating the “other” into the same, creating the identity of the self. Secondly, the self relates to the human “Other” as a transcendental entity that can not be appropriated. In Otherwise than Being, Levinas looks more carefully at the first stage of this process, explaining how sensible enjoyment and consumption is already ethical. Within sensibility, the self does not yet exist as a self-sufficient entity. As in Totality and Infinity, Levinas explains that consumption is the process by which the self achieves its identity. “The taste is the way a sensible subject becomes a volume, or the irreducible event in which the spatial phenomenon of biting becomes the identification called me, which becomes me through the life that lives from its very life” (73). Levinas argues that within this eating there is already a hunger that drives it. Whereas consciousness is driven to fulfill itself with contents, there is an underlying emptiness that perpetually troubles this fullness. According to Levinas, this emptiness indicates the presence of the other person’s absence. “The relationship with the other puts me into question, empties of myself and empties me without end, showing me ever new resources. I didn’t know I was so rich, but I no longer have the right to keep anything for myself” (“Meaning”, 94). One’s responsibility towards the other splits me open, preventing me from isolating myself as a self-sufficient, self-possessed identity. Levinas describes this process as an inversion and reversal of consumption: eating not only creates identity by internalizing the outside; it is also a “gnawing away at this very identity – identity gnawing away at itself – in a remorse” (OTB, 114).
    14. According to Levinas, the phenomenology of sensibility indicates an underlying vulnerability and exposedness to other persons. In contrast to Totality and Infinity’s claim that the self could be characterized as “for itself,” Levinas describes it in Otherwise than Being as a “for-the-other.” The very movement of incorporating otherness is also equivalent to being haunted by others already within oneself. The self is already committed to others before it is concerned with itself: it is exposed, posited in an external space filled with the wills of others. In Totality and Infinity, Levinas explained that the sphere of generality was comprised by works that testified to the absent wills of other people. This would suggest that, when we consume what the world offers, we are appropriating the remnants of others, incorporating their works and their actions as our own. We are thus claimed by others from the inside; we are created as entities who are already responsible for the legacy that other persons have left behind. Levinas explains “There is a paradox in responsibility, in that I am obliged without this obligation having begun in me, as though an order slipped into my consciousness like a thief, smuggled itself in me” (13). As in Totality and Infinity, Levinas’s reference to the thief refers not to the act of taking away an external object, but of penetrating into the interior. In Otherwise than Being, Levinas pushes this metaphor even further, to assert that consumption animates one’s own identity from the inside as a responsibility towards others.
    15. With this understanding of the world, Levinas helps us to reconsider and perhaps to overcome the prominence that the notion of private property has assumed in this moment of history. Levinas does so by reconsidering the notions of self, world, and other upon which are founded the ideology of possessive individualism and the institution of ownership, as well as the theories of both Hegel and Locke. In both of these writers, (1) the self is understood as an agent who exercises his labor to extend his sphere of selfhood; and (2) the world is understood as an empty vessel awaiting animation by the human will. Locke and Hegel do differ significantly with regard to their views on other people. Locke practically ignores social duties, whereas Hegel shows how universal social concerns always limit individual actions. Nevertheless, even Hegel argues that the particularity of each individual’s capacities and resources counterbalance the general right to social welfare, thereby sanctioning inequities in property ownership and modes of subsistence. In contrast, Levinas does not understand the world as merely an empty field awaiting human agency. For Levinas, the world is already occupied, haunted by the efforts of past generations of workers. The self begins its existence not as a productive laborer but as a consumer already enjoying the environment that others have created. Whereas Levinas’s viewpoint seems to be a vast improvement over both Locke and Hegel’s, he still shares a blind spot with the two of them. All three writers seem excessively humanist: for all of them, what matters the most in the world is the presence of human wills, either the self’s or the other person’s or society’s. The natural world itself exerts no significant claim on its own behalf. For this reason, we still need to consider what sorts of new ethical thinking will be adequate to respond to the environmental challenges confronting our planet today.
    16. Conclusion
    17. By analyzing the primary encounter between self and world as one of consumption rather than production, Levinas becomes interesting for modern political-economic thought. He dislodges the central category of property ownership, conceiving selfhood as an absolute generosity. “The subjectivity of a man of flesh and blood … is a being torn up from oneself for another in the giving to other of the bread from one’s mouth” (142). Although Levinas’s hyperbolic language is rhetorically radical, it is not entirely clear the extent to which it can be read as being politically radical. Despite Levinas’s occasional references to Marx and his philosophical usage of the term “anarchy,” he still seems to support politically the “pathos of liberalism” (TI, 120). Nevertheless, this paper will conclude by trying to push Levinas’s thought in a more revolutionary direction. This will be done by analyzing how this essay’s themes of property, production, and consumption are discussed by the Peter Kropotkin in his seminal declaration of anarchocommunism, The Conquest of Bread.
    18. Kropotkin criticizes the idea of property ownership because, like Levinas, he understands the world to be constituted by the works of other people. Thus, Kropotkin argues that no individual can lay claim to any particular object because the value of each thing depends on the efforts of an incalculable number of others. “And even to-day; the value of each dwelling, factory, and warehouse, which has been created by the accumulated labor of the millions of workers, now dead and buried, is only maintained by the very presence and labor of legions of the men who now inhabit that special corner of the globe” (6). According to Kropotkin, property claims are impossible because one’s existence already depends upon an infinite debt to others. The world within which one acts is already constituted by the historical deeds of past workers; one’s actions only become significant because they occur within a contemporary environment where other people currently labor.
    19. Given that everyone’s personal effort depends radically upon the efforts of others, Kropotkin further argues that ownership claims cannot be based on labor. Here, his claim is quite different from the critique of private property leveled by Karl Marx. In Although Marx’s early “humanist” writings are quite concerned with social needs (Heller, 40), his later critique of capitalism focuses more intensely on the inequity of social production, on an analysis of how the capitalist extracts surplus value from the laborer. In Capital, Marx roots the source of social value in human labor. In the first chapter, he claims that the total labor power of society can be divided into discrete units of average labor expended in a given hour (129), further distinguishing between simple and skilled labor. Kropotkin objects that Marxists and other collectivists place too much emphasis on determining the appropriate value of various kinds of labor. Thus, he argues:
    20. It is utterly impossible to draw a distinction between the work of each of these men. To measure the work by its results leads us to an absurdity; to divide the total work and to measure its fractions by the number of hours spent on the work also leads us to absurdity. One thing remains: to put needs above works, and first of all to recognize the right to live, and later on the right to well-being for all those who took their share in production. (231)
    21. Rather than focusing on labor, ownership, and production, Kropotkin asserts that people should organize themselves in such a way as to satisfy the human needs of consumption.
    22. Kropotkin criticizes the tradition of political economy from Adam Smith to Marx for consistently commencing their analyses with production rather than consumption. He defends his own decision to reverse the order by explaining
    23. Perhaps you will say [putting production before consumption] is logical. Before satisfying needs you must create the wherewithal to satisfy them. But before producing anything, must you not feel the need of it? Is it not necessity that first drove man to hunt, to raise cattle, to cultivate land, to make implements, and later on to invent machinery? Is it not the study of needs that should govern production? It would therefore be quite as logical to begin by considering needs and afterwards to discuss the means of production in order to satisfy these needs (238).
    24. Our capacity to produce, he claims, is sufficient to produce well-being for all, enough housing, clothing, luxury items, and food. The thing that prevents people from meeting their needs is the exploitation practiced within the contemporary system of private ownership, a system that reduces the majority of people to the barest subsistence. Instead of allowing this economic system to legitimate itself with the alibi that it practices efficient production, Kropotkin argues that we must begin by considering consumption. Society, he declares could only hope to meet the needs of all if it returns to the most fundamental question, the question of bread. “We have the temerity to declare that all have a right to bread, that there is enough bread for all, and that with this watchword of Bread for All the revolution will triumph” (69).
12. Against Militarism
    1. Carl Schmidt friend-enemy distinction
    2. The logic of militarism prevails not only within mainstream conceptions of politics, but also within various strands of radical thinking, from Marx’s belief that class struggle is the engine of history to Badiou’s celebration of the militant as a model for political subjectivity. Most alarming is the way that such militarism runs throughout the writings of the French Tiqqun group. Within these texts, we find the standard masculinist warnings against the way one is ‘castrated’ (Tiqqun, 2010b, p. 18) by mass society, as well as a hostile denunciation of the figure of the ‘Young Girl’, who represents for them the shallow bitch who succumbs to the idiocy of consumer culture. Worse yet are the recurrent calls to violence. Not only does it cite Clastres’s proclamation that ‘war is the truth of relations between communities’ (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 22), but the text Introduction to Civil War also tells us, ‘Only the timid atom of imperial society thinks of “violence” as a radical and unique evil. ... For us, ultimately, violence is what has been taken from us, and today we need to take it back’ (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 10). We are similarly informed that hostility is a primordial relationship and that the ‘hostis is a nothing that demands to be annihilate’ (2010a, p. 12).
13. Contra Deleuze/Nietzsche/Heidegger influences in anarchism
    1. “War Machine” Deleuze / Guattari
    2. Nietzsche & post-anarchism
    3. Critique of the “immanence of power relations” <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/thesis.htm>
    4. Nietzhean heritage of Anarchism, especially the Deleuzian stuff
    5. Maybe some of it is very good. I have never read much Bifo or Negri
    6. Explore Heraclitus
    7. Tiqqun
    8. whatever post-Tiqqun stuff there is. I don’t know the literature. Endnotes? Commune.
14. Situationism and Levinas
    1. Levinas: For the Kids
    2. <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm>
    3. “The state of nausea that precedes vomiting, and from which vomiting will deliver us, encloses us on all sides. we are revolted from the inside; our depths smother beneath ourselves; even our hearts are sick -- Emmanuel Levinas, 1935, “
    4. “ People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth. -- Raoul Vaneigem, 1967 “
    5. Also read “De L’evasion” (1935) in comparison to Crimethinc “Evasion”
15. Anarchism as a practice of caring for the other
    1. Mutual aid as care
    2. I remember what [Kropotkin] did in Geneva in the winter of 1879 to help a group of Italian refugees in dire straits, among them myself; I remember the small attentions, I would call maternal, which he bestowed on me when one night in London having been the victim of an accident I went and knocked on his door; I recall the innumerable kind actions towards all sorts of people. (Malatesta, 1965, p. 258)
    3. metta sutta
       1. “just like a mother cares for its child …”
16. Past Work
    1. Viewing Power: (Descartes, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, implicitly Foucault. Ethical relations are more fundamental than power relations. Looks at perspectivism, starting with Cartesian cogito, through Nietzsche’s radicalization. finally Levinas as exterior-perspectivism)   
       <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/thesis.htm>
    2. Self and Property (Locke, Hegel, Levinas: Consumption is more primordial than Production) <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/SelfAndProperty_FinalEssay_WEB.htm>
    3. Levinas: FOR THE KIDS!!! (Levinas and Situationism/Vaneigem) <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm>
    4. Levinas, Perverter (A very weird paper. Lots of wacky stuff. Look in here for Heraclitus, perspectivism, critique of Simon Critchley)
       1. Since the inauguration of modern French feminism in Simone DeBeauvoir’s The Second Sex, Emmanuel Levinas has been criticized for the way his thought employs gendered, familial tropes. In response, this paper argues that, although this does constitute a very real and urgent problematic in Levinas’s thought, it only becomes a problem when his writing is read in a hermeneutically "straight" manner. Beneath the apparent hetero-normative veneer of Levinas's prose lurk traces of queerness. By closely tracing the motifs that Levinas correlates with gender, this paper will illustrate how, at each instant in the ethical relationship, the Self is always transforming between masculine- and feminine-gendered performances for a feminine- or masculine-gendered Other. Rather than embodying a conservative and essentialist view of sexuality, Levinas articulates an existential performative perversity.
    5. <http://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm>
    6. Anarchism of the Other Person (Levinas and Anarchism)
17. <https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/AnarchismOtherPerson_WEB.htm>
    * 1. Throughout his writing, the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas uses the term anarchy to critique different modes of temporal, thematic, and political ordering. After an exploration of the Greek meanings of anarcian, this paper discusses the way that Levinas uses anarchy to point towards an ethical responsibility that arises before the political time of history. This interruption of time also disrupts the self's ownership of personal private property. The political ramifications of Levinas' distinction between autarchy, the selfish assertion of absolute ownership, and anarchy is illuminated by comparison with the works of various anarchists. Lastly, Levinas' development of the notion of anarchy is historically situated among the actual anarchist events unfolding around him.
    1. Undoing patriarchy, subverting politics: anarchism as a practice of care
18. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/mitchell-cowen-verter-undoing-patriarchy-subverting-politics-anarchism-as-a-practice-of-care>
19. The Flow of the Breath: Levinas Mouth-to-Mouth with Buddhism (about consumption and orality, environmental concerns of consumption)
20. Bibliography
    1. How much new stuff to read?
    2. AGORA, Greek history, military transition to political<https://classics.stanford.edu/publications/origins-democracy-ancient-greece>
    3. Arendt on polis
    4. Silvia Federici
    5. Dalla Costa and James
    6. Nancy Folbre
    7. <https://www.amazon.com/Black-Hunter-Forms-Thought-Society/dp/0801859514> Pierre vidal naquet, ancient Greece
    8. I think the gateway drug for anthropology is probably Barry Strauss and Josh Ober
    9. Sasha Luci, feminist mom stuff
    10. bell hooks, stuff about “home”
    11. black mothering
21. DEVA WOODLY TALK
22. current moment
23. scholar of social movements
24. public discourse
25. Rebecca solnits stuff
26. safety and care in a very personal manner. I am a mother …
27. pandemic and movement
28. black feminist principles
29. radical and pragmatic
30. radical political imagination
31. practical steps
32. politics of care
33. acknowledgement of trauma, healing, interdependence, unapologetic blackness, abolitionist, restorative justice
34. one of the main ways care is enacted is healing justice
35. mode of analysis that oppression causes harm more than ….
36. requires personal and political action towards care
37. causes us harm and is part of what we take into account
38. essential part of being a part of healing
39. eradicate causes of harm
40. impossible to resolve trauma and heal while only focus on internal processes
41. structural analysis at its center
42. personal care not that stuff
43. (maybe take down Foucault here)
44. not individual responsibility to heal themselves
45. social ills require social action
46. black feminist practice always in context
47. care not only an ethics but also a politics
48. activity of governance basic need and responsibility to provide care for human life
49. deep affinity with voluminous
50. JOAN TRONTO
51. caring democracy
52. “care for citizens and care for democracy itself”
53. claim because they matter
54. no alternative
55. no abstraction
56. people simply matter
57. PRIORITY OF NEEDS!!!!
58. to matter -- to exist as mass at rest
59. EXACTLY!!!!
60. materiality (form/matter Aristotle, Levinas)
61. entitles you to care
62. reason for distress, etc ….
63. not dependent on properties or rights etc
64. no justification is necessary
65. “No justification” -- foundation of the Ethical
66. provision of what is necessary for upkeep ….
67. provide for needs
68. politics of care
69. hurting
70. full personhood
71. material deprivation
72. it matters if we are hurting
73. experience of politics
74. values feelings as embodiment what actually exists
75. acknowledges devalued values in masculinity
76. REVALUATION OF VALUES
77. “interdependence” -- this is where we are talking about the Other, work on breathing
78. unapologetic blackness vs. respectability politics
79. center marginalized
80. celebration of black joy
81. affirmation of black joy
82. (LOOK AT BARBARA EHRENREICH’s book on joy?”
83. accountability/interdependence
84. CLEARLY LEVINVAS AND RESPONSIBLITY
85. abolitionist
86. ASK SOL IF HE HAS ANY GOOD WORK
87. origin of movement
88. Lorde “institutional dehumanization” systems of oppression
89. racial capitalism
90. Cedric Robinson
91. capitalism racialized
92. new dimension of the way lived experience is intertwined
93. anti black racism is virulent
94. heart of logic
95. some are disqualified from universal (?)
96. rights
97. puts lived experience as its center
98. country has pit directly care for life against the interests of the trump authoritarian capitalism
99. profits > care
100. understand resonance of politics of care
101. which movement for black lives has been talking about from its inception
102. observable fact of black lives
103. people should not suffer for ugh I forgot
104. also the case that the people of black lives with the movement
105. do people have what they need to live and thrive
106. from this point of view the purpose of governance
107. OIKONOMOS
108. people matter they do not need to suffer
109. participating in the responsibility
110. one of the folks that I interviewed nikita Mitchell (MITCHELL!)
111. enact politics of care this way
112. a lot of the way
113. we are doing something magical and new
114. not just policy change but also
115. repairing new community as basis of our power
116. tending to emotions of people involved because we have to practice now who we want to be in future
117. TEMPORALITY LEVINAS
118. NEW WORLD IN THE SHELL OF THE OLD
119. movement and greater polity are in the midst of that struggle
120. key to the way of finding that way is by talking and thinking about interdependence (LEVINAS, NAGARJUNA)
121. creating material and social conditions in which people will not hurt each other
122. pragmatic. practical. not utopian
123. fighting for allocation of resources
124. caring for people
125. preventing as many from being locked up as possible
126. policing is no good (MARIANNE KABA, RUTH WILSON GILMORE)
127. policing and jail do not do what they pretend
128. MAGON QUOTE HERE “we did not need jailers”
129. change how people think about crime
130. cause harm because already are victims of crime
131. incorporates how we feel and how we are embodied
132. how we are in the world
133. from here to there
134. ANARCHIST ETHICS
135. QandA
136. insurrection and joy
137. develop practices to take care of themselves and each other (avoid burn out in protest)
138. being grounded and centered healing justice
139. HEALKING JUSTICE
140. social movement
141. institutions become self serving
142. demand of the people
143. lost this part about Weber it was smart though
144. disability studies
145. the idea of care from the idea to fix marginalized bodies
146. CARE in LEAH LATCHI “Care Work”
147. care at the center of our politics
148. people in all their different varieties can live and thrive
149. black feminist frameworks
150. we have no prisons or police
151. from punishment to care
152. diminish presence in accordance with the lack of need
153. PRISON FUNCTION OF STATE
154. SOCIAL FUNCTION OF STATE
155. CARE AS ANARCHISM
156. what kind of social institutions
157. what do you mean? I follow the work of abolitionists MARRIANE KABA GILMORE etc
158. really basic. don’t spend your money on cps. why on punishment
159. HUMAN NEEDS
160. I don’t want to put my money on jail
161. moved past that point I don’t want to say
162. I can’t imagine it yet
163. NEW SOCIETY IN SHELL OF OLD
164. what does it mean that “can’t imagine yet”
165. FUTURITY
166. Q:
167. violence
168. black men violence towards black women
169. “leave out the laundry”
170. WHAAAAAAT? IS THIS THE SAME AS LEAVE THE PROBLEM IN THE OPEN?
171. patriarchy intersectionality
172. compound oppressions
173. depending on one’s category
174. not only racism but also the way that racism is gendered
175. sexism and misogyny
176. directed a lot of different violences
177. more interested in systems rather than attitudes
178. BEAUITUFL GENIUS
179. attached to capitalism
180. men have a lot of work to do on masculinity
181. (here the dynamics of healing -- not beating up people)
182. Q: radical and pragmatic
183. imagining new possibilities
184. simultaneous
185. community control autonomous zones
186. state for the provision of care?
187. ideological diversity within the movement
188. DIVERSITY OF TACTICS
189. localities have issues, what methods they are going to take etc
190. community control is important but also it does not negate state responsibility
191. there still is a state
192. community comes
193. different localities, care at the center
194. lived experience at the center
195. not ideology
196. Q: how does movement for black lives be translated transnationally
197. internationalism
198. always an interest to be both local and transnational
199. care is always the answer
200. move from that moment
201. Q: Deborah
202. compare and contrast human rights discourse with politics of care
203. rights is not enough
204. HEGEL PHILOSPHY OF RIGHT
205. not about rights
206. not from ABSTRACT to PARTICULAR
207. she already knows her Hegel
208. doesn’t consider right qua right
209. systematically and demonstrably unable to be housed
210. same life span
211. not starting from abstract principles
212. CAPABILITIES APPROACH
213. it has some affinities
214. Nussbaum
215. politics of care unlocked from a rights framework
216. not a JURIDICAL problem
217. what people are able to do
218. capabilities gives you a back end
219. what are people capable of? what should they give
220. THE PRIORITY OF HUMAN NEEDS
221. capitalism?
222. no.
223. capitalism is focused on profit
224. TALK ABOUT RESOURCE EXTACTION SOMEWHERE -- WHEN WE ARE TALKING ABOUT OBJECTIVITY AND DEATH, POLITICAL ECONOMY
225. what do we choose? reopening economy or life and health
226. Random Notes to Self
     1. Juggalos as “Community Who Have Nothing in Common” (Lingis). Read their stuff.
     2. Kropotkin -- opposition to Darwinism and Social Darwinism
        1. Social Darwinism as a program of the right
     3. Trans stuff
        1. Not sure what Identity is
        2. Identity as violence
        3. Hegel
        4. Levinas

Nagarjuna: let’s get a close etymology of dependant-co-arising and svabhava

* + - * 1. Contra Deleuze/desirants

Sexuality itself is about “need” as much as “desire

Priority of “need” over desire

1. [Mitchell Verter](https://www.facebook.com/mangoo.spangoo?comment_id=Y29tbWVudDoxMDE1NzI2Njg5MDc4Nzc5MV8xMDE1NzI2NjkwODYxNzc5MQ%3D%3D) I can't even tell you how much I despise this idea. All of my politics and writing are focused on human vulnerability and trauma. Criticizing someone because they are "fragile" or because they shed "tears" is the most bullying kind of politics around. It is an adaptation of macho sadism to left politics and it is completely grotesque. It is an active encouragement of emotional abuse as a political strategy.
2. <https://newrepublic.com/article/156032/diversity-training-isnt-enough-pamela-newkirk-robin-diangelo-books-reviews?fbclid=IwAR3TtcnHNH0FkToY5GlrI4mn5No5gZ8SimbhqM56K5lVX-ZSwPJGR68V1K0>
3. freaks

<https://fireweedcollective.org/our-history/?fbclid=IwAR3slt9MDrgKTMNWusCHsND8Eiqye5Lg9XSgCrWdnWrtw2Np1e7KDLoJj3Y>

APPENDIX : ANARCHISM OF THE OTHER PERSON  
  
#title The Anarchism of the Other Person

#author Mitchell Cowen Verter

#SORTtopics Emmanuel Levinas

#source Retrieved on February 19th, 2019 from https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/AnarchismOtherPerson\_WEB.htm

#lang en

Throughout his writing[1], the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas uses the term <em>anarchy</em> to critique different modes of temporal, thematic, and political ordering. After an exploration of the Greek meanings of anarcian, this paper discusses the way that Levinas uses <em>anarchy</em> to point towards an ethical responsibility that arises before the political time of history. This interruption of time also disrupts the self's ownership of personal private property. The political ramifications of Levinas' distinction between autarchy, the selfish assertion of absolute ownership, and anarchy is illuminated by comparison with the works of various anarchists. Lastly, Levinas' development of the notion of <em>anarchy</em> is historically situated among the actual anarchist events unfolding around him.

\*\*\* The Anarchism of the Other Person[2]

Reading Emmanuel Levinas for his anarchism may at first seem like an improbable task. Most attempts to think the political in Levinas have sought to bolster the ethical imperatives of the liberal state or to justify the oftentimes questionable — sometimes horrible — actions of the state of Israel. Certain writers have reduced Levinas’ profound cry for ethics to a dull moralism, a rhetorical rod used to beat down various trends of radical thought. As Simon Critchley remarks, “There is a danger in the canonization of Levinas … as some sort of apologist for a conservative republicanism whose vapid universalism would somehow be caught in Levinas’s slogan ‘ethics is first philosophy’”[3] To the extent that Levinas might indicate support for such interpretations, this paper questions whether even he himself should be considered an authoritative interpreter of his own writing. As works passed on from generation to generation through an anonymous public sphere, they are radically vulnerable to critique, reinterpretation, commentary, and exegesis. Any responsible reading of Levinas’ writing must necessarily hold it up to judgment and reappropriate the legacy of what has been said in order to say again. As a response to the messianic urging that inspires Levinas, this paper will attempt to smash any interpretations that simply idolize his work in order to produce a new, iconoclastic reading.

\*\*\* anarcian

Levinas employs the word “anarchy” in all of his post-war writings as a counterpoint to both temporal and thematic orders, but in his 1968 essays <em>Humanism and An-archy</em> and <em>Substitution</em>, he focuses more closely on how one may state this anarchy in a final term. In <em>Substitution</em>, he defines ontological self-consciousness as a movement that loses and finds itself through “an ideal principle, an <em>arch</em>.”[4] His usage of Greek terminology seems to be a deliberate attempt to engage philosophy at its Greek origin in the same manner as Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, and Reiner Schürmann after him, argue that the term <em>archē</em> enters the philosophical lexicon with Aristotle. Aristotle begins <em>Physics</em> — which Heidegger considers the foundation of Western metaphysics — by explaining that all scientific knowledge, <em>epistemē</em>, derives from a proper acquaintance with <em>archē</em>. Whereas Aristotle describes the history of Greek thought as a series of attempts to define the true nature of physical <em>archē</em>, many commentators have suggested that Aristotle himself retrospectively imposed this origin upon previous thinkers in order to position his own philosophy as the culmination of a distinguished legacy.

Heidegger and Schürmann criticize the Aristotelian notion of <em>archē</em> for correlating the inception of a phenomenon with its domination by a principle. In the same manner that “to lead” can both signify “to initiate” and “to rule”, the term <em>archē</em> has always been used — even in the most ancient Greek writings — to signify both a commencement and a political authority. Aristotle refers to these everyday significations in Book D of the <em>Metaphysics</em>, defining <em>archē</em> as the commencement of motion, the preliminary manifestation from nature, the first knowable part, and the creation by something external. Among these meanings of <em>archē</em> as origination, Aristotle defines <em>archē</em> in another sense as rulership: “that in accordance with whose deliberate choice that which is moved is moved, such as magistracies, authorities, and despotisms.”[5]

The collusion of the inceptive and dominative meanings of <em>archē</em> are further illuminated in <em>Politics</em>. Throughout the book, Aristotle employs the fundamental distinction between whole and part to rationalize domination. He explains that the parts of a <em>polis</em> consist of households, and that part of the art of household management, <em>oikonomos</em> (economy)<em>,</em> is acquiring property. The first kind of property Aristotle discusses is the slave, explaining that it is also the part of a whole. “Again, a possession is spoken of as a part is spoken of; for the part is not only a part of something else, but wholly belongs to it; and this is also true of a possession. The master is only the master of the slave; he does not belong to him, whereas the slave is not only the slave of his master, but wholly belongs to him.”[6] Because the slave is always compelled to maintain his exclusive relationship of servitude to his master, one can consider his very existence to be subsumed by his master’s existence. Aristotle further justifies slavery by founding the <em>archē</em> of rulership upon the <em>archē</em> of genesis. “Authority and subordination are conditions not only inevitable but also expedient: in some cases things are marked out from the moment of birth to rule or to be ruled.”[7] (<em>kai euthus ek genetês enia diestêke ta men epi to archē sthai ta d’ epi to archē in</em>.) He similarly naturalizes the domination of husbands over wives and of fathers over children using the same logic and the same doubling of <em>archē</em>.[8]

Whereas Aristotle insists that the dominative <em>archē</em> of men over women emerges from an original <em>archē</em>, the first active political (or antipolitical) usage of the term “anarchy” seems to have emerged from the speech of a female. Although the nominative <em>anarchos</em> does occur in the earliest Greek composition, Homer’s <em>Iliad</em>, it typically describes a faction’s lack of leader. The word was also used to describe years in which no Archon (magistrate) was elected to direct Athens. The poem of Parmenides, written approximately 300 years after Homer’s <em>Iliad</em> and approximately 150 years before Aristotle’s <em>Physics,</em> uses the term <em>anarchos</em> to signify “without beginning.” Roughly contemporary with Parmenides, the word also occurs in Aeschylus’ drama <em>Seven Against</em> <em>Thebes</em><em>.</em> In contrast to the privative usages of the term, the tragic character Antigone employs the term in the accusative, declaring that not only is she willing to risk punishment for burying her brother, she “is not ashamed to act in anarchist opposition to the rulers of the city.” (<em>oud’ aischunomai echous’ apiston tênd’ anarchian polei</em>).[9] Fifty years later, Sophocles confirms this image of Antigone as the first anarchist when Creon condemns Antigone, asserting “there is no evil worse than anarchy” (<em>anarchias de meizon ouk estin kakon.</em>)[10]

In the myth of Antigone, Creon — whose very name signifies “ruler” in Greek — represents the power of the State. Creon’s foundation of the <em>polis</em> can be understood through Carl Schmitt’s description of the political as the distinction between friend and enemy, “the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disassociation.”[11] His inauguration speech is a long meditation on the significance of friendship and enmity. “Anyone thinking another man more a friend than his own fatherland, I rate him nowhere .... I would not count any enemy of my fatherland as a friend.”[12] Creon concludes his inauguration speech with a law that establishes the boundaries of the political. “I here proclaim to the city that this man shall no one honor with a grave. ... But he that is loyal to the state in death shall have my honor.”[13] Through this edict, Creon effectively incorporates the memory and the body of one of Oedipus’ sons within the physical borders of the State as its historical friend; he incorporates the memory and the body of the other son by excluding him beyond the physical borders of the State as its historical enemy.

Rather than opposing civic morality to family morality as Hegel asserts, Creon explicitly correlates political leadership with patriarchal domination. Every fraternal citizen must be loyal to his fatherland, and must demonstrate this loyalty among his brother citizens in the battle line. Conversely, the family also has the essential political function of maintaining animosities and friendships. “It is for this that fathers pray to have obedient sons begotten in their halls, that they may requite with ill their father’s enemy and honor his friend no less than he would himself.”[14] A man who successfully controls his family will be a respected citizen in the political realm, but one who allows disobedience from within his kinship group will invite the same hostility from an external enemy.

In addition to defining the enemy as “existentially something different and alien,”[15] Carl Schmitt notes the every political entity must necessarily develop a “formula for the declaration of an internal enemy.”[16] Because a man may be a citizen in a fraternal patriarchy, he can also be a member of external enemy state or betray the state to a foreign power. As demonstrated by the conflict between Oedipus’ sons, fraternity can degenerate into fratricide, and the allegiance to a patriarchal state can devolve into a bloody fight over patrimony. However, a more insidious threat comes from a person who can never be a citizen. In Creon’s second major discourse on the nature of the political, he explains that woman can be the most subversive threat within both the state and the family; whose anarchy “destroys cities (<em>polis</em>)” and “demolishes homes (<em>oikos).</em>” Creon warns Antigone’s fiancé, his son Haemon, that a woman who provides pleasure before marriage may become evil and frigid once she enters the home. Therefore, he urges Haemon to abandon his marriage plans, “What greater wound can there be than a false friend? No. Spit on her, throw her out like an enemy.”[17]

Antigone’s very name already identifies her as an anarchist in another sense. Etymologically, it decomposes into <em>anti,</em> “against,” and <em>gonē,</em> “birth<em>.</em>” For the Greeks, she is named as one who opposes the <em>archē</em> of genesis. She recognizes her solidarity with her brother as their shared experiences of accursed origin: “of a common womb were we born, of a wretched mother and unfortunate father. Therefore, my soul, willingly shares his evils, even though they are unwilling, and live in kindred spirit with the dead.”[18] Heiress to a doomed bloodline, Antigone represents the determination to terminate the Oedipal curse. Not only does she embrace death, she refuses to give birth. Practically confirming Creon’s warning that she is unfit for normative heterosexual matrimony, she deprecates marriage and maternity in favor of an almost incestuous bond of sisterhood. “A husband lost, another might have been found, and if bereft of a child, there could have been a second from some other man. But when a father and mother are hidden in Hades, no brother could ever bloom for me again.”[19]

Antigone challenges the political order constructed by fathers and brothers by upholding the ethic of sisterhood. For her, each brother is unique and irreplaceable, and she finds herself responsible to each one even after his death. As a sister, she refuses to recognize the distinction between friend and enemy, anarchically subverting the foundation of the <em>polis</em>. Her rebellion does not originate from a political sphere as something against which Creon could struggle on a field of battle. Rather, it is produced from her radical vulnerability, her commitment to ethics. It is Antigone’s obsession by her brother — not an abstract Divine Law or Filial Piety — that allows her to take responsibility for her brother’s treachery, transforming it into her own guilt and persecution, making her a “sister soul” of “substitution and sacrifice.”[20]

Antigone expresses her solidarity with her brother by burying his corpse in order to prevent it from being consumed by vultures and wolves. Contrary to the political logic of exclusion and animosity, burial signifies an inclusion in society: among the animal kingdom, humans are the only ones who bury their dead. This image of consuming the dead can also be taken as a metaphor for the writing of history. Antigone anarchically protests Creon’s erection of a State upon human graves by preventing her brother’s corpse from being consumed as carrion for the history of the <em>polis</em>,

\*\*\* Anarchy Before History

Levinas employs the term <em>anarchy</em> throughout his work to critique the question of history posed by his former teacher, German thinker Martin Heidegger. In <em>Being and Time</em>, Heidegger associates the historical character of the world with <em>Dasein’</em>s (human being’s) historical nature as something that <em>has-been-there</em>. “Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited, as a battlefield, or as the site of a cult. ... [World-historical] signifies, for one thing, the historizing of the world in its essential existent unity with <em>Dasein</em>.”[21] Not only does history emerge through humanity’s interaction with its environment, <em>Dasein</em> realizes itself most authentically when it connects its own historical activity to its social Being-with-Others, and together they take over their heritage and determine their destiny. “This is how we designate the historizing of a community, of a people (<em>Volk</em>).”[22]

Right after the Nazis took power, Levinas warns that this Germanic assertion of an ineluctable chain to the past, history, and destiny correlates to a political ideal of war and conquest. In contrast, Jewish, Christian, and Enlightenment thought have promoted various ways that man[23] is freed from the bonds of the past and is granted a new beginning in a new present moment: “speaking absolutely, [man] has no history.”[24] After his anticipation of Nazi violence was confirmed by the horrors of the second world war, Levinas, like Antigone, critiques the institution of history for the way it consumes the murdered. He writes, “Historiography recounts the way the survivors appropriate the works of dead wills to themselves; it rests on the usurpation carried out by the conquerors, that is, by the survivors; it recounts enslavement, forgetting the life that struggles against slavery.” By definition, history can only be written by survivors, by those who those live [<em>vivir</em>] on top [<em>sur</em>] of the corpses of those whose past has already passed away.

Levinas employs the term “anarchy” in <em>Totality and Infinity</em> to elaborate this distinction between living historical speech and the silenced dead. [25]

Both the historical and the past are defined as themes of which one can speak. They are thematized precisely because they no longer speak. The historical is forever absent from its very presence. This means that it disappears behind its manifestations; its apparition is always superficial and equivocal; its origin, its principle, always elsewhere. … This world that has lost its principle, an-archical, a world of phenomena, does not answer to the true.

A historical fact is a raw datum: a dead, silent piece of evidence. By itself, it is enigmatic. Precisely for this reason, a historian can impose a theme upon it, assembling it into a meaningful system with other connected facts. Ultimately, however, this collection is arbitrary; the facts themselves remain ambiguous and open to interpretation. For example, even if I know that Heidegger joined the Nazi party during May 1933, I can never know the true meaning of that information. From my interiority, I can never penetrate the exteriority of his psychic life, even through the testimonials he himself left behind; no explicit remark or concrete action would ever provide the crucial piece of evidence for discerning his precise intention. Not only does this enigmatic anarchy cast doubt on any possible interpretation of the past, it also underlines the urgency of continuing to interpret it.

Levinas deepens his analysis of anarchy and history in his later work. Although <em>Totality and Infinity</em> does consider the past, it ultimately points towards the future. It recounts how the Other confronts me as someone who can not be fully comprehended, whose unforeseeable responses resurrect me for an infinite future of responsible fecundity. A book dedicated to the memory of his family members murdered by the Nazis and of all victims of the same hatred of the other man, <em>Otherwise than Being</em> more intensely focuses on reconciliation with the past. As in <em>Totality and Infinity,</em> it is something incomprehensible — the enigma of the silenced and forgotten past — that manifests itself as an ethical obligation. Prior to one’s origination as a historical being, one is already created as someone responsible for a world created by others. Anarchical responsibility is “a responsibility of the creature, a responsibility of one who comes too late into being to avoid supporting it in its entirety. This way of being, without human commitment, responsible for the other, amounts to the fact of human fellowship prior to freedom.”[26]

This notion that one is anarchically responsible for a world created by others echoes a foundational assertion of the ethical anarchist Petr Kropotkin. Kropotkin explains that one’s present well-being upon the earth depends upon a legacy inherited from an infinity of others. Our very material grounding rests upon the corpses of dead laborers. “The value of each dwelling, factory, and warehouse has been created by the accumulated labor of millions of workers, now dead and buried.”[27] Given this radical indebtedness, Kropotkin concludes that the very notion of private property is absurd because every thing a self creates is radically dependant on the work of others: “There is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not common property, born of the past and the present. Thousands of inventors, known and unknown, who have died in poverty, have co-operated in the invention of each of these machines which embody the genius of man.” [28]

\*\*\* What is Property?

For Levinas, the critique of history has always been echoed by a critique of property ownership. In the opening section, <em>Principle and Anarchy</em>, of his 1968 essay “Substitution,” Levinas explains that in Western ontology, essence fluctuates by losing itself and finding itself out of an <em>archē</em>, allowing it to “possess itself” and to instantiate a “moment of <em>having</em> in <em>being</em>.”[29] This doubling of having and being occurs throughout Levinas’s writing. In his 1935 article against ‘Hitlerism,’ he contrasts the way that fascist thought figures the body as an inevitable bondage to history with the way that Western thought spiritually detaches man from time and physicality. He characterizes this as a “power given to the soul to free itself from <em>what has been</em>”, italicizing the pluperfect combination of <em>to have</em> and <em>to be</em> that grammatically converts the past into a possession.

Immediately after World War II, Levinas introduces the notion of an “<em>il y a</em>” (there is), the undifferentiated whole of existence that compels part-icipation, possessing and nullifying any private separation. Not only does this term parody Heidegger’s idea of a generous “<em>es gibt”</em> (idiomatically “there is”, literally “it gives”), it redefines Being as an anonymous it (<em>il)</em> in a there (<em>y</em>) that has (<em>a</em>) existence. Emerging from this flux as someone who can <em>be</em> requires becoming someone who can <em>have:</em> the me (<em>moi</em>) that I am doubles as the self (<em>soi</em>) that I own. Through this hypostasis, the self posits itself in a particular space at a particular moment. This self-mastery allows the self to convert exteriority into personal property by exerting its labor.

John Locke is generally credited as being the first thinker to propose a labor theory of property. He bases the right to private property in an individual’s self-identity and self-ownership. “Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a ‘property’ in his own ‘person’”[30] For Locke, all property ownership ultimately originates in the fact that a man is his own, proper person -- not merely an abstract personhood, but also the concrete materiality of one’s body. By combining the efforts of his own physical body with the objects in the external world, a man can turn these objects into his own personal property.

Whereas Locke defines property as that which can be integrated back into a person’s dominion through his bodily labor, Marx argues that, under capitalism, private property emerges as the thing that is alienated from the labor of the proletariat. “Private property is therefore the product, result, and necessary consequence of alienated labor, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself.”[31] Through his labor, the worker establishes himself as a subject creating a world of external objects, a totality of cultural products. Under capitalism, the worker experiences this self-objectification as self-estrangement because the fruits of his labor do not belong to him: they are delivered over to an Other, the capitalist. “If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, this is only possible because it belongs to another man than the worker.”[32] A process of self-mortification, alienated labor converts the living essence of the worker into dead matter, sacrificing him to a stranger. Work is “vitality as a sacrifice of life, production of the object as loss of the object to an alien power, an <em>alien</em> person ... who is <em>alien</em> to labor and the worker.”[33]

Levinas’ economic analyses in <em>Totality and Infinity</em> draw from these classic sources. Like Locke, he defines the act of possession as an appropriation of external being. One is born into a sensuous element whose <em>arche</em> escapes ownership, something that is “<em>coming</em> always, without my being able to <em>possess</em> the source.”[34] Labor stills this anonymous flux and postpones the unforeseeable future of Infinity by allowing one to maintain oneself in a present. It breaks me free of my dependence on the element by suspending its independence. “Possession neutralizes this being: as property the thing is an existent that has lost his being.”[35] By generating a total ensemble of things that answer to the needs of a separated ego, ownership thereby establishes the self’s mastery over external reality.

Levinas inveighs against the ontological tradition for reducing the world to Being and beings that ultimately refer back to ownership. Despite his insistence that <em>Dasein</em> is not a human person<em>,</em> even Heidegger poses the question of Being as <em>eigenlichtkeit</em>, “own-like-ness” or “authenticity,” and as <em>ereigen,</em> “en-own-ing” or “the event of appropriation.” Levinas argues: “The relation with Being that is enacted as ontology consists in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a relation with the other as such, but the reduction of the other to the same. … a suppression or possession of the other.” Although this possession establishes one’s sovereign ownership over otherness, it also indicates “a certain form of economic life” with an Other, a stranger.

Levinas’s analysis of labor combines and generalizes Locke’s understanding of property as integration with Marx’s understanding of it as alienation, “an estrangement of man from man.”[36] Labor relates the world to the self by positing entities as graspable objects. Because these works are positioned with a social ensemble of work, they also relate to the possessive grasp of an Other who presents himself as a Master and property owner. “The inexpressive character of the product is reflected in its market value, in its suitability for others, in its capability to assume the meaning others will give it, to enter into an entirely different context from that which engendered it.”[37] Not just commercial products, but one’s will and one’s body are alienated in the instant that they are manifested. The projects a will initiates are always co-opted by another person. As an owned body (“<em>corps propre</em>”[38]), one positions oneself as a corporeal being, exposing one’s material self to being bought for gold or being murdered by steel. Therefore, one’s birth into a present moment is experienced as a kind of suicide. One becomes registered in history through the mortified material products of one’s labor, “the works of dead wills.”

As an act of appropriation, property ownership necessarily proceeds from violence and ultimately from murder. Levinas’ discussion of the first ethical commandment, <em>You Shall Not Commit Murder</em>, is sometimes misunderstood to be simply an ultimate moral prohibition. However, Levinas explains, “this interdiction is to be sure not equivalent to pure and simple impossibility, and even presupposes the possibility which precisely it forbids.”[39] Although murder is an <em>ethical</em> impossibility, it is preeminently an event that occurs within every single instant of time. The Other is <em>always</em> approached and appropriated through a doubling of his origination and his death: through his production in a work, his incarnation in a body, and his representation under a concept. At every instant, I seize the Other through his manifestation, suspending his existence, and grasping him historically through the records of his past. This everyday occurrence can be grasped most clearly on the digital commons where, online, one encounters the preservation of moments from different past identities; the real lives of real people reduced to and articulated as a multiplicity of media.[40]

This murder is enacted at every moment as cannibalism, as consumption of another person’s corpse. All of Levinas’s analyses of materiality, of need and eating, of the content of elemental <em>jouissance</em>, of the goods encountered in a home, and even of hunger and destitution, must be understood in relation to this vampirism, this flesh-eating. Levinas explains, “in satiety the real I sank my teeth into is assimilated, the forces that were in the other become <em>my</em> forces, become me.”[41] The past of the other, his death, has become retrospectively incorporated into my own present moment of consumption. Therefore, I — as a consumer, through the things I purchase and use — become entangled in a net of works, in networks of responsibility. These responsibilities manifest in consciousness once I understand that the products which result in my enjoyment are ultimately the results of human and environmental degradation and death.

Taking into account the relationship between death and consumable products, one can deduce that the first ethical commandment, <em>You Shall Not Kill</em>, results in a corollary: <em>You Shall Not Steal</em>. Levinas explicitly recognizes this relationship between ownership and robbery. “To approach someone from works is to enter into his interiority by burglary; the other is surprised in his intimacy, where, like the personages of history, he is, to be sure, exposed, but does not express himself.”[42] As mentioned above, these ethical impossibilities point to everyday realities: not only does one murder in every moment of consumption, one’s ownership of Property is Theft, as the anarchists teach.

\*\*\* Autarchy or Anarchy

Like many anarchist-communists, Levinas understands that the very existence of other persons necessarily casts doubt on my alleged right to individual personal property. “Possession itself refers to more profound metaphysical relations; a thing does not resist acquisition; the other possessors — those whom one can not possess — contest and therefore can sanction possession itself.” Whereas Aristotle grounds slave ownership on the subsuming logic of part and whole, post-Enlightenment thought considers each person to be separate individuals, and understands that ownership arises out of the social relation between them. The absolute assertion of one self’s individual freedom over the existence of others Levinas terms “autarchy.” “Such is the definition of [ontological] freedom: to maintain oneself against the other, despite every relation with the other and to ensure the autarchy of an I.” Autarchy retrospectively refers entities back to a self (<em>auto</em>) by re-presenting otherness through a theme (<em>archē)</em>. “Thematization and conceptualization, which moreover are inseparable, are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other.” Subsuming otherness under a general theme is ultimately war and violence exercised as “the imperialism of the same” and instituted as “the tyranny of the State.”[43]

Just like <em>anarchy</em> disrupts the genetic <em>archē</em> of history, it also disorders the dominating <em>archē of</em> thematization imposed by an existential state or a political state or a propositional statement. Levinas remarks, “The I’s form no totality; there exists no privileged plane where these I’s could be grasped in their principle. There is an anarchy essential to multiplicity.”[44] Even though I and the Other posit a common world using social categories, we maintain our independence through our anarchical enjoyments of the world. Even in our relationships, I always preserve my separated interiority, and the Other always maintains his separated exteriority. No matter how revealing we are to each other, we can never render our experiences entirely transparent to each other. In the words of collectivist anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, no totality could be “mighty enough and massive enough to encompass the infinite multiplicity and diversity of substantive interests, aspirations, wishes, and needs.”[45] Anarchically, we resist any common category, any plane of signification that would pretend to encompass us.

Levinas further explains this anarchy, stating “multiplicity can be produced only if the individuals retain their secrecy.”[46] The importance of this privacy is illuminated by anarchist Max Stirner’s careful distinction between freedom and individuality. Stirner recognizes that, in any relationship, one will necessarily have one’s freedom limited by the powers of others. “Even so, were I the autocrat of all the Russians, I could not enjoy absolute freedom. But as far as my individuality, I do not want anyone tampering with it. Now it is precisely individuality that society targets and means to subject to its powers.”[47] The State attempts to repress the uniqueness of an individual by subsuming his identity within its dominion. It ultimately does so by restricting the most essential freedom of the individual: his freedom to make and break associations with other individuals. An individual not only maintains the indivisible integrity of his own ego, he also retains the freedom to divide himself from any whole that would encompass him as a part. Conversely, the State compels one to maintain a constant relationship with it, denying the sovereign power for separation and reattachment. “Once an association has crystallized in society, it has ceased to be an association, since association is an ongoing act of re-association.”[48]

Like Stirner, Levinas understands freedom as the capacity to break from bondage. No matter what commitments one has made in the past, one can betray history in a new present moment. “Man can regain control and go back on his choice.”[49] The ego’s individual consciousness allows it to eschew absorption into any totalizing categories and to evade enslavement to any tyrannical state. Just as Levinas refers to this capability to break with participation as “atheism”, Stirner explains that “our individuality acknowledges no injunction to ‘fidelity’ and ‘commitment’: it permits everything, including apostasy and desertion.”[50]

The Italian anarchist Enrique Malatesta explains that the distinction between autarchy and anarchy undergirds the difference between cooperative association and the State. Authoritarian political theory justifies itself with Thomas Hobbes’ claim that the State is necessary for preventing wars between selfish and brutal human natures.

If, say the theorists of the authoritarian school, the interests, tendencies, and desires of an individual are in opposition to those of another individual, or perhaps all society, who will have the right and the power to oblige the one to respect the interests of the other or others? Who will be able to prevent the individual citizen from offending the general will? The liberty of each, they say, has for its limit the liberty of others: but who will establish those limits, and who will cause them to be respected? The natural antagonism of interests and passions creates the necessity for government, and justifies authority. Authority intervenes as moderator of the social strife and defines the limits of the rights and duties of each.

Authoritarian political thought imposes two types of domination, converting the enlightenment notion of free individuality into pure selfishness,[51] and then justifying the state as a neutral party that can neutralize all conflict. However, Malatesta points out that the state actually works to enforce the power of propertied classes and to sanction the exploitation of the rest of the populace. Against this domination, Malatesta asserts that “there exists in Man another feeling which draws him closer to his neighbor.”[52] Without any coercion from the state, people draw to work in “voluntarily formed associations.”[53] That is, man’s will, his voluntarism, necessarily refers to an allegiance to other people.

Like Malatesta, Levinas criticizes the Hobbesian model of egotistic subjectivity that justifies the war of all against all. “Being’s interest takes dramatic form in egoisms struggling with one another, each against all, in the multiplicity of allergic egoisms which are at war with one another and are thus together.”[54] An authoritarian order grows out of this pure self-interest that outlines “the birth of hierarchy”, both genesis and rule, ultimately producing political domination, “[It] is the very egoism of the ego that posits itself as its own origin, as uncreated, sovereign principle, a prince.”[55] In contrast, Levinas asserts that the self is created as someone who is radically responsible for the world of creation, anarchically committed to the Other. One’s own origin is ‘preceded by a pure passivity that is responsibility… it is my responsibility for the freedom of others’[56] Anarchist Mikhail Bakunin similarly asserts this priority of the Other over my Self “Far from being a limitation or negation of my freedom, the freedom of my neighbor is instead its precondition and confirmation.”[57]

\*\*\* University of Nanterre: 1968

In a footnote that has not yet been adequately analyzed, Levinas claims that his own usage of the term anarchy “precedes the political (or antipolitical) meaning popularly ascribed to it.”[58] However, this very statement indicates that he was seriously contemplating political (or antipolitical) anarchism while developing his later work. The two texts in which Levinas begins to seriously consider the problem of saying “anarchy” as a term<em>, Humanism and An-archy</em> and <em>Substitution</em>, were written in 1968 when he was teaching at the University of Paris Nanterre. A few months prior to the publication of these two essays, Nanterre was the epicenter of the revolutionary events of May ‘68. During this period, group after group was pulled into an anarchy of political responsibility for the suffering of Others. On May 3, eight students were to be expelled from Nanterre for protesting the senseless war that was murdering innocent Vietnamese. Students at University of Paris Sorbonne protested the injustice shown to these other students at Nanterre. In response to the violence shown to students during a succession of brutal police riots, factory workers declared a general strike that shut down the State of France.

Several of Levinas’ essays specifically meditate on the meaning of these events. He understood the 1968 political tumult as a crisis of modernity and bourgeois humanism. For him, the overwhelming problem was the same as the one that confronted Antigone: what should one do about the corpses that still haunt the living; how can one make sense of history after so much mass murder? “The unburied dead in wars and extermination camps ... render tragic-comic the concern for oneself and illusory the pretension of the rational animal to have a privileged place in the cosmos.”[59] Throughout their writings, various radicals similarly denounce the ways that modernity manifests as murder, through the actual slaughter committed against foreign peoples, through the transformation of human existence into commodity, and through the politics practiced by authoritarian leftists.

Not only was culture permeated by death, even the possibility of vital revolution seemed doubtful. Many graffiti quoted situationist Raoul Vaneigem’s condemnation of the institutional left: “People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have corpses in their mouths.” [60] The brutality of institutional revolutionary regimes in Russia and China shocked many young radicals, and many felt alienated by the authoritarian regimentation of Stalinist and Maoist parties. Levinas explained “Today’s anxiety is more profound. It comes from the experience of revolutions that sink into bureaucracy and repression, and totalitarian violences that pass as revolutions. <em>For in them the disalienation is in itself alienated.</em>”[61] Ultimately, these bureaucracies obstructed the ethical relationship with the other person by thematizing everything according to a universal principle.

Levinas observed that the May ‘68 protests arose against the ontological conception of humanity in modern society as a substance with qualities, a bearer of roles, and a thing with properties. “Over and beyond capitalism and exploitation what was contested were their condition: the person understood as an accumulation of being, by merits, titles, professional competence, an ontological tumefaction weighing on others and crushing them, instituting a hierarchized society maintained beyond the necessities of consumption, which no religious breath any longer succeeds in rendering egalitarian.” Even in the very cadence of its voice, this articulation echoes the many graffiti protesting the inhumanity of institutions. “We refuse to be highrised, diplomaed, licensed, inventoried, registered, indoctrinated, suburbanized, sermonized, beaten, telemanipulated, gassed, booked.”[62] According to situationists like Guy DeBord, this reduction of a human existence was produced by the regime of representation in the society of the spectacle, the product of the capitalism that transforms <em>being</em> into <em>having</em> and further commodifies <em>having</em> into <em>appearing</em>. Against this, Levinas asserts in <em>Humanism and Anarchy</em>. “There where I might have remained a spectator, I am responsible.”[63] Neither absorbed by egoism nor captivated by the world, the human subject finds itself ethically responsible for the freedom of the Other.

In his reflections on May ‘68, Levinas deliberately employs his ethical terminology to describe the revolutionary anarchism of the student revolutionaries. He identifies Youth as the one whose vulnerability makes him responsible for the suffering of the Other. “Youth, which the philosopher loves, is the ‘before being,’ the ‘otherwise than being’”[64] He explains[65]

The youth is the break in a context, the trenchant, Nietzschean prophetic word, without status in being. Yet it is not arbitrary, for it has come from sincerity, that is, from responsibility for the other. This unlimited responsibility is not felt as a state of the soul, but signifies in the oneself of the self, consuming itself, the subjectivity of the subject, as embers covered with ashes – and blazing up into a living torches. The responsibility, a wound smarting with cruelties and evils suffered by others, characterizes our epoch as much as these very cruelties and evils. Youth consisted in contesting a world long since denounced. … Able to find responsibilities under the thick stratum of literature that undo them, youth ceased to be the age of transition and passage and is shown to be man’s humanity.

According to Levinas, political radicalism ultimately finds its origin in this anarchical responsibility for other people. Revolution does not come from mere activism, from violent overthrow, or even from self-sacrifice. These are also qualities admired by fascists — today, by terrorists. Instead, “Revolution must be defined by its content, by values: revolution takes place when one frees man; that is, revolution takes place when one tears man away from economic determinism.”[66] Accepting responsibility for economic and social injustice is at the root of radicalism. Levinas identifies the degradation of the worker with the alterity of the other, saying “the economic deprivation of the proletarian – to be sure, his condition as one who is exploited – constitutes this absolute stripping of the other as other.”[67] Alluding to the solidarity between students and workers during May ‘68, Levinas asserts, “To affirm that the working man is not negotiable, that he can not be bargained about, is to affirm that which begins a revolution.”[68]

The radicals of ‘68, and indeed all revolutionaries “who best merit the name revolutionary,”[69] are characterized by their capacity to substitute ethically their selves for the suffering of other people. Whenever people stand up to power, they do so not merely to fight for their own rights or for the politics of their own identities. Instead, they willingly stand in for the other, declaiming the injustice shown unto him. One hears this sentiment all over the world in every revolutionary statement. For Levinas, the most poignant example of this revolutionary sincerity occurred when the revolutionary masses proclaimed “We are all German Jews” to protest the government’s refusal to allow anarchist Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the son of two Jews who had narrowly escaped Nazi Germany, from reentering France because was not a legal citizen of any country. As an ethical substitution for the suffering of the foreigner, the stranger, the Other, revolution is the most profound ethical responsibility of anarchy. As one May 68 graffito explained, “We must destroy and replace the system when it falls into a position of weakness, not just for our own sakes but for the future of humanity.”[70]

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[1] The author would like to acknowledge those whose authorities guided him towards knowledge, without whom this paper would not have been possible. My thanks go to Alphonso Lingis; to Georges Hansel and Simone Levinas; and to Simon Critchley (in a most un-towards manner) and the rest of my teachers at the New School for Social Research: Jacob Blumenfeld, Andreas Kalyvas, Agnes Heller, Jay Bernstein, Dmitri Nulkin, James Dodd, Nancy Fraser, Claudia Barrachi, and Rainer Forst.

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[3] Simon Critchley, “Levinas’s View of Politics” (Political Theory, 32:2 [2004]), 177.

[4] Emmanuel Levinas, <em>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,</em> trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 99.

[5]Aristotle, <em>Metaphysics</em>, in <em>The Basic Works of Aristotle</em>, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1013 a 10-15.

[6] Aristotle, <em>Politics,</em> in <em>The Basic Works of Aristotle</em>, 1254 a 12-17.

[7] Aristotle, <em>Politics</em> 1255 b 7-10.

[8] Aristotle, <em>Politics</em> 1259 a 36 – b 16.

[9] Aeschylus, <em>Seven Against</em> <em>Thebes</em><em>,</em> trans. H. W. Smyth, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1926), 1035-6<em>.</em>

[10] Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em>, <em>Antigone,</em> trans. David Greene, (Chicago. Univ. of Chicago, 1991), 673.

[11] Carl Schmitt, <em>The Concept of the Political</em>, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1976), 26.

[12] Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em>, 182-187.

[13] Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em>, 202-212.

[14] Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em>, 640-644.

[15] Schmitt, <em>Concept,</em> 27.

[16] Schmitt, <em>Concept,</em> 46.

[17] Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em>, 640-681.

[18] Aeschylus, <em>Seven against</em> <em>Thebes</em><em>,</em> 1036-1041.

[19] Sophocles, <em>Antigone</em>, 909-913.

[20] Whereas Hegel explicitly refers to Antigone as a figure of filial morality, she may also appear as a hidden character in Levinas’ work. Levinas mentions in <em>Totality and Infinity</em> (trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, Duquesne Univ. Press, 1969) that erotic love can be “seek but a connatural being, a sister soul, present itself as incest.” (254) Even more suggestively, he states in <em>Otherwise than Being</em> “the ego involved in responsibility is me and no one else, me with whom one would have liked to pair up a sister soul, from whom one would require substitution and sacrifice.” (126).

[21] Martin Heidegger, <em>Being and Time</em>, <em>Being and Time,</em> trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), 440:389.

[22] Heidegger, <em>Being</em>, 436/384.

[23] Because gender is such an important problem in Levinas and throughout philosophy, I will use masculine pronouns to discuss human persons and neuter pronouns for abstractions, but will try not to masquerade this issue by alternating with feminine pronouns.

[24] Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,” trans. Sean Hand, <em>Critical Inquiry</em> 17 [1990]: 62-71), 64.

[25] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 65.

[26] Emmanuel Levinas, “Substitution (1968)”, in Emmanuel Levinas, <em>Basic Philosophical Writings,</em> ed. Adrian Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 91.

[27] Petr Kropotkin, <em>The Conquest of Bread</em> (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist\_archives/kropotkin/conquest/ch1.html), Chapter 1.

[28] Kropotkin, <em>Conquest.</em>

[29] Levinas, <em>Otherwise</em>, 99.

[30] John Locke, <em>Second Treatise on Government</em>,(http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtreat.htm)

§ 26.

[31] Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844”, in <em>The Marx-Engels Reader</em> (ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 79.

[32] Marx, “Economic,” 78.

[33] Marx, “Economic,” 81.

[34] Levinas, <em>Totality,</em> 141.

[35] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 158.

[36] Marx, “Economic,” 77.

[37] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 227

[38] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 229

[39] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 232-233.

[40] Perhaps Levinas’ phenomenology of conversation can be most clearly observed in an internet chat room, in which one party makes a statement, forever etched in memory, but retains the possibility to respond in ways that can not be anticipated.

A Levinasian critique of technology would require a meditation on The Turing Test, in which artificial intelligence is assessed by whether a computer’s responses seem human to its interlocutor. In what way does an Other person’s freedom to respond forever transcends the programming of any automated network?

[41] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 129. Alphonso Lingis’ strategy of capitalizing “Other” in his translations unfortunately obscures the relationships between the human Other and the elemental Other.

[42] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 66-67. In <em>Otherwise Than Being</em>, Levinas similarly describes responsibility for the Other as something that affects the self anarchically, prior to its own identity “slipping into me like a thief.” (p. 13, 148, 150)

[43] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 46.

[44] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 294.

[45] Daniel Guerin, <em>No Gods, No Masters : An Anthology of Anarchism,</em> (Oakland, CA; AK Press, 2005), 207.

[46] Levinas, <em>Totality</em>, 120.

[47] Guerin, <em>No Gods,</em> 23.

[48] Guerin, <em>No Gods,</em> 22.

[49] Levinas, “Reflections,” 59.

[50] Guerin, <em>No Gods,</em> 28.

[51] Malatesta, “Anarchy: A Pamphlet” (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\_Archives/malatesta/anarchy.html).

[52] Malatesta, “Anarchy.”

[53] Malatesta, “Anarchy.”

[54] Levinas, <em>Otherwise,</em> 4.

[55] Emmanuel Levinas, “Humanism and An-archy,” in <em>Collected Philosophical Papers</em> (trans. Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987),137-138.

[56] Levinas, “Humanism,” 136.

[57] Guerin, <em>No Gods</em>, 151.

[58] Levinas, “Substitution,” 180.

[59] Levinas similarly notes that the Talmud unconditionally requires the burial of unattended corpse, calling it the “mercy of truth.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Ideology and Idealism” (in <em>The Levinas Reader</em>, ed. Sean Hand. London: Blackwell, 1989)<em>,</em> 248.

[60] Raoul Vaneigem, <em>Revolution of Everyday Life</em>, trans. Daniel Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press, 1994), 26.

[61] Emmanuel Levinas “No Identity” (in <em>Collected Philosophical Papers</em>), 143.

[62] “May 1968 Graffiti,” (in Knabb, Kenneth [ed.] <em>Situationist International Anthology</em> Chicago: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995. http://www.bopsecrets.org/CF/graffiti.htm).

[63] Levinas, “Humanism,” 136.

[64] Levinas, “No Identity,” 147.

[65] Levinas, “No Identity,” 151.

[66] Levinas, “Judaism and Revolution” (in <em>Nine Talmudic</em> <em>Readings</em><em>,</em> trans. Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), 102.

[67] Levinas, “Ideology,” 243.

[68] Levinas, “Judaism,” 102.

[69] Levinas, “Judaism,” 107.

[70] “May 1968 Graffiti”.

APPENDIX: ANARCHISM AS A PRACTICE OF CARE

#title Undoing patriarchy, subverting politics: anarchism as a practice of care

#author Mitchell Cowen Verter

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\*\* Subverting the Military Logic of Politics

At its roots, anarchism is already deeply feminist. When we consult Greek literature, we learn that the term ‘anarchy’ was first used in the active, anti-political sense to describe the behaviour of Antigone, a re/sister who rose up against her uncle Creon [1] to rebel against the military logic of fraternity and fratricide, a logic which divides humanity into friends who are loyal to the state and enemies who betray it. Denounced as an anarchist in both Aeschylus’s (1991) and Sophocles’ (1994) accounts of her tragedy, [2] Antigone opposes this antagonistic logic in the name of a more ethical mode of human interconnection, one that affirms that we must unconditionally nurture each other, even beyond the moment of death.

The link between feminism and anarchism has similarly been noted in the writings of more recent anarcha-feminists, as in Lynne Farrow’s 1974 proclamation that ‘Feminism practices what Anarchism preaches. One might go as far as to claim feminists are the only existing protest groups that can honestly be called practicing Anarchists’ (2002). Taking these examples as our inspiration, we will endeavour to recollect this deep connection between the project of anarchism and the feminist critique of patriarchy.

Before we consider the importance of the feminist critique, let us begin by asking what are the aims and aspirations of anarchism. Anarchism is sometimes defined simply as the refusal of the state. However, anarchism must strive towards a much more profound goal than this. The long history of authoritarian domination has penetrated our ways of thinking and acting so deeply that an anarchist critique must re-evaluate the very roots of political philosophy, of the thinking that considers communality in terms of political association. The feminist scholar Nancy Hartsock argues that Western political thinking has been shaped by the way that the Greek \*polis\* (city-state) emerged out of what she terms the ‘barracks community’ (Hartsock, 1982, p. 283). Within this military encampment, the paradigmatic virtues were defined as courage, heroism, glory and the striving for immortality; human relationships were conceived as being fundamentally antagonistic and competitive, as struggles for power and domination. Hartsock claims that war and the masculine role of the warrior-hero have been central to our conception of politics ever since: for example, the warrior’s dominance on the physical battlefield has been transformed into the citizen’s dominance on the battlefield of rhetoric and into the businessman’s dominance on the field of commerce (Hartsock, 1982, pp. 285–6).

The logic of militarism prevails not only within mainstream conceptions of politics, but also within various strands of radical thinking, from Marx’s belief that class struggle is the engine of history to Badiou’s celebration of the militant as a model for political subjectivity. Most alarming is the way that such militarism runs throughout the writings of the French Tiqqun group. Within these texts, we find the standard masculinist warnings against the way one is ‘castrated’ (Tiqqun, 2010b, p. 18) by mass society, as well as a hostile denunciation of the figure of the ‘Young Girl’, who represents for them the shallow bitch who succumbs to the idiocy of consumer culture. Worse yet are the recurrent calls to violence. Not only does it cite Clastres’s proclamation that ‘war is the truth of relations between communities’ (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 22), but the text \*Introduction to Civil War\* also tells us, ‘Only the timid atom of imperial society thinks of “violence” as a radical and unique evil. ... For us, ultimately, violence is what has been taken from us, and today we need to take it back’ (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 10). We are similarly informed that hostility is a primordial relationship and that the ‘hostis is a nothing that demands to be annihilate’ (2010a, p. 12).

\*\* Communality as the Nurturance of Needs

Clearly, some sort of revolution will be necessary to disarm the elite who oppress and immiserate the mass of humanity by their maintenance of power, property and violence. However, it is even more important to recover models of subjectivity and sociality that do not follow this military model. Is the political conception of human sociality sufficient to describe our relationships with each other, and more importantly, should it be the basis for imagining our anarchist future? Part of the problem is that we tend to think of human sociality as being already saturated by politics; that we subscribe either to the Hegelian vision that the state is the transcendental sphere which sustains all other particular affiliations, or to the Foucaultian vision of an immanent micropolitics that determines and disciplines all intimate relationships. But is human existence really so dominated by the political? By submitting to this domination, do we not already foreclose the exploration of other forms of human sociality?

It is important to note that, even in one of the foundational texts of political philosophy, there are already clues that point towards other possibilities. In the first lines of his treatise on Politics, Aristotle declares that the \*polis\* (city-state) is only one among several kinds of human \*koinon\* (community), another of which is the oikos (home) (1996, 1251b1ff ). Unfortunately, however, the analysis he offers of the home is the prototypically patriarchal one, a definition that has been influential throughout Western history. Not only does Aristotle claim that the home is encompassed within the state, but he also intersects these two communal spheres in the figure of the patriarch, who establishes his dominion over the domestic sphere through a process of domination and domestication, and who establishes the science of \*oikonomos\* (economy) to order the household and to acquire property (1996, 1253b1ff). However, Aristotle supplements this patriarchal analysis of the household with a secondary definition. The household is not simply the locus of domination, but more fundamentally, it is the association where people come together to attend to their everyday needs and wants, the communal space where people become companions through the activity of eating together (Aristotle, 1996, 1252b12–20).

How are these two definitions of the home, as the sphere of domination and as the sphere of need, related to each other? Hannah Arendt collapses these two definitions, arguing that the vulnerability of bodily need is our primordial experience of being dominated, and that our need to dominate the needs that dominate us is the reason why we need to elaborate structures of hierarchical political domination (1998, p. 31). Arendt’s correlation of dependency with domination is one of the most problematic and most characteristic aspects of patriarchal thinking. This repudiation of dependency becomes so absurd that many patriarchal thinkers even conceal the fact that we are born unto women. Thomas Hobbes, for example, inaugurates the modern conception of citizenship by comparing political subjects with mushrooms that spring out of the ground fully formed, emerging as isolated individuals who can freely establish contracts and submit to rulers (1998, p. 205).

Are there not different ways of understanding the vulnerability experienced in individual and social life? Can we not embrace a non-patriarchal vision of the home as a site for the enactment of responsibility for the needs of ourselves and other people, as a place for caring, refuge and hospitality; as a model for empathetic sociality? Could the affirmation of such social nurturance not subvert the hierarchical and antagonistic logic of the political?

\*\* Maternal Nurturance as a Model for Care

In order to consider these alternatives, it is useful to return to the critical interventions of feminist ethics. These analyses are interesting not because they posit an essence of ‘the feminine’, but rather because they have engendered a fecund critique of the patriarchal system. According to Nancy Hartsock, the dominant powers in any society promulgate an understanding of social relations that is both partial and perverse, an ideology that not only perpetuates social inequity but also denies the true nature of social life (1983, pp. 287–8). Hartsock argues that a feminist standpoint arises not out of any essential female difference, but rather because women have tended to occupy social roles involving material sustenance and support, and this proximity to materiality allows them to understand how much our everyday lives depend upon the satisfaction of material needs (1983, pp. 291ff). Influenced by Hartsock, Sara Ruddick explains that:

care workers depend on a practical knowledge of the qualities of the material world, including the human bodily world, in which they deal. This means that the material world, seen under the aspect of caring labor, is organized in terms of people’s needs and pleasures and, by extension, of the needs and pleasures of any animal or plant that is instrumental in human caring or is tended for its own sake. (Ruddick, 2006, p. 130)

Ruddick’s research into caring labour is carried out though an investigation of maternal thinking. She defines maternal thinking as the pattern of cognition that emerges out of the practice of mothering, a set of attunements women acquire as they become responsible for meeting the demands of a child. The child confronts the mother as a completely helpless being, one who is totally dependent upon her for the satisfaction of all its most basic needs. The activity of mothering requires that the mother – who according to Ruddick can be of any gender (2006, pp. 40ff) – respond to the material reality of this human vulnerability in a way that does not enforce power relations. Even the weakest mother can overwhelm the fragility of a dependent child, but domination is not what defines the activity of mothering. Instead of establishing rigid control over the child, Ruddick recommends what she terms ‘holding’ as the best way to preserve its fragility, a practice that maintains safety of the child, promotes its strength, and allows it to flourish without establishing any ownership over it (2006, pp. 78–9). In addition to reconsidering the importance of maternal care, other feminist thinkers have similarly re-evaluated the category of domestic nurturance. For example, bell hooks discusses how black women maintained what she calls ‘home place’ as a site of resistance against rampant racism, a refuge where people could gather and heal themselves from the wounds inflicted by a hostile society (2001, pp. 41–9).

Many contemporary anarcha-feminists avoid themes such as mothering and the household out of a desire to avoid gender essentialism. However, we do read anarcha-feminist authors arguing that traditionally feminine concerns such as domestic labour, sexuality and child rearing should not be treated as mere addendums to the anarchist project, but must be central to our vision of an anarchist society. This attitude was expressed most strongly in an early essay by Roxanne Dunbar in which she argued:

If the maternal traits conditioned into women are desirable traits, they are desirable for everyone, not just women. By destroying the present society and building a society on feminist principles, men will be forced to live in the human community on terms very different from the present. For that to happen, feminism must be asserted by women as the basis of revolutionary social change. (Dunbar, 1970, p. 499)

\*\* Anarchism as a Programme of Nurturance

I would argue that the importance of maternal nurturance is at the very core of the anarchocommunist project articulated by Peter Kropotkin and others. Errico Malatesta once attested to this aspect of Kropotkin’s personality, remarking:

I remember what [Kropotkin] did in Geneva in the winter of 1879 to help a group of Italian refugees in dire straits, among them myself; I remember the small attentions, I would call maternal, which he bestowed on me when one night in London having been the victim of an accident I went and knocked on his door; I recall the innumerable kind actions towards all sorts of people. (Malatesta, 1965, p. 258)

Beyond this anecdotal evidence, when we read Kropotkin’s work, we should be reminded of how much his thinking resonates with Sara Ruddick’s characterization of care work as the organization of the material world in terms of people’s needs and desires.

The best way to understand Kropotkin’s thinking is to see how much it embraces human vulnerability and how much it insists upon the paramount virtue of nurturance. In his writings on mutual aid, Kropotkin repeatedly articulates the value of human dependency. For example, he characterizes solidarity as ‘the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of everyone’s happiness upon the happiness of all’ (1902, pp. xliii–xliv). Kropotkin’s notion of dependency seems remarkable in several ways. First, he does not equate the notion of dependency with that of domination. Second, his notion of mutual aid emphasizes human dependency more than it does human capacity. That is, he concentrates not on the fact that people possess powers that they can contribute to the common good, but rather that each of us depends radically on the sustenance granted by infinite others. Third, his idea of dependency should not be reduced to the reciprocity of interdependence. While it may be true from an outside perspective that all of our social contributions balance each other out, what is important is that, from my own perspective, I realize how indebted I am to the rest of humanity.

Kropotkin’s interpretation of human dependence provides the basis for his critique of property ownership. People depend so utterly upon what other people have already contributed that they never have a foundation to claim anything as their own. Private property is unjust not simply because it fails to recognize the worker’s agency as a producer, but rather because it neglects to accept our infinite dependency as consumers. For this reason, Kropotkin declares:

All things are for all men, since all men have need of them, since all men have worked in the measure of their strength to produce them, and since it is not possible to evaluate every one’s part in the production of the world’s wealth. That each and every person has a right to well being; there is a right to well being for all. (Kropotkin, 1995, p. 19)

According to Kropotkin, the problem of satisfying needs is the most essential problem of all revolutionary problems, and the question of how we nurture each other is the most important of all revolutionary questions.

The analysis of human needs also provides the basis for Kropotkin’s critique of capitalism and the state. First, Kropotkin argues that capitalism, supported by the state, reorients material life such that it caters to the needs of the rich: rather than providing well-being for all of humanity, production becomes focused on producing luxury items for the wealthy – and by extension, for wealthy countries like our own. Second, he explains that the wealth of the wealthy ultimately derives from the poverty of the poor. Only because people are allowed to suffer such profound material destitution can the capitalist compel them to become labourers, paying them a meagre wage that allows them barely to subsist. Third, one of the alibis that the state employs to justify its existence is its monopoly over the activity of care. The state eliminates autonomous institutions of mutual aid, replacing them with various forms of charity, welfare and health care. While any form of care is significant and should be defended, the care function of the state allows it to mask the fact that the state exists as the institution that facilitates the domination of the rich and powerful and abets the immiseration of the poor and subjugated.

Despite the efforts of the state to monopolize caring, anarchists have persevered in the effort to create a society based on mutual aid. The revolutionary significance of an anarchism based on nurturance can be observed in both institutional and spontaneous settings. Anarchist groups such as Food Not Bombs organize to feed the hungry; the Really Really Free Market organizes to provide a space for free exchange of goods; the Icarus Project organizes to help people with psychological difficulties to give each other support and therapy; various squatting initiatives help people to find shelter.

In addition, we have seen examples of spontaneous anarchist nurturance throughout the uprisings in North Africa. What seems remarkable about these revolutions is not just that people rose up en masse to overthrow their leaders, but also the way that they supported each other throughout. Protesters in Tahrir Square, for example, managed to keep each other fed, tended to each other’s bodily needs, and endeavoured to keep each other safe. Reporting from Egypt, Mohammed Bamyeh marvelled at how the occupants of the square:

established autonomous field hospitals to treat the injured; formed street committees to maintain security and hygiene. I saw peasant women giving protestors onions to help them recover from teargas attacks .... and countless other incidents of generous civility amidst the prevailing destruction and chaos. ... During the ensuing week and a half, millions converged on the streets almost everywhere in Egypt, and one could empirically see how noble ethics – community and solidarity, care for others, respect for the dignity of all, feeling of personal responsibility for everyone – emerge precisely out of the disappearance of government. (Bamyeh, 2011)

A similar gesture of solidarity was practised by Tunisians who, having consummated their uprising, welcomed refugees from the Libyan conflict with food and shelter. The New York Times quotes Abdallah Awaye explaining, ‘This is how it is, these are our customs. If there is something to eat, we will eat it together. If there is nothing to eat, we will have nothing together’ (Sayare, 2011). Such behaviour constitutes the very greatest example of ethical anarchism.

\*\* Conclusion

In conclusion, let me reiterate some of my basic points and then comment briefly about what this might say regarding our current state of anarchist thinking. First of all, rereading feminist critiques can help us to remember what has been suppressed by centuries of patriarchal thought: namely, that the nurturance of material needs is more fundamental than the establishment of control. Anarchist thought should focus more on how to nurture and sustain each other. Furthermore, this is precisely what many anarchist initiatives have practised and continue to practise.

Not only should anarchists focus on promoting human well- being, we should be more careful about using the same military logic promoted by the patriarchal state. As stated in my introduction, there is something really terrifying about not only the violence but also the sectarianism promoted by the Tiqqun group. Their various texts urge us to ‘find each other’ (Invisible Committee, 2009, p. 65). While human solidarity is always a worthwhile goal, the Invisible Committee’s notion of communal organization sounds combative to the point of paranoia. The positive task of human affiliation is shadowed by an intense antipathy towards others who are not ‘worthy’ of being part of the commune (Invisible Committee, 2009, p. 66). The group proclaim:

To the citizens of Empire, we have nothing to say. That would mean we shared something in common. As far as they are concerned, the choice is clear: either desert, join us and throw yourself into becoming; or stay where you are and be dealt with in accordance with the well-known principles of hostility: reduction and abasement. (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 39)

The destructiveness of such a statement is idiotic and reprehensible. In New York and elsewhere, we have seen how this type of sectarian rhetoric has produced very real violence within the anarchist milieu. Once we understand that the goal of anarchism is human nurturance, we should reconsider the priority of our anarchist mission to be not to ‘find each other’ but rather to ‘feed each other’. Once we understand caring as a core principle of anarchism, we will endeavour not to establish coming communities of like-minded friends who are bound together by a common political spirit, but instead to create the ‘coming community’ as ‘the community of those who have nothing common’ (Lingis, 1994), one that will spread well-being to all.

[1] The Greek κρε′ων translates literally as ‘ruler’.

[2] In Seven Against Thebes, Antigone declares that she is ‘not ashamed to act in anarchist opposition to the rulers of the city’ (oud’ aischunomai echous’ apiston tênd’ anarchian polei) (1035–6). In Antigone, Creon condemns her, asserting that ‘there is no evil worse than anarchy’ (anarchias de meizon ouk estin kakon) (673).

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APPENDIX: Levinas, Perverter  
  
**Levinas, Perverter**

By Mitchell Verter

(for Alphonso Lingis)

ABSTRACT

Since the inauguration of modern French feminism in Simone DeBeauvoir’s *The Second Sex,* Emmanuel Levinas has been criticized for the way his thought employs gendered, familial tropes.  In response, this paper argues that, although this does constitute a very real and urgent *problematic* in Levinas’s thought, it only becomes a *problem* when his writing is read in a hermeneutically "straight" manner.  Beneath the apparent hetero-normative veneer of Levinas's prose lurk traces of queerness.  By closely tracing the motifs that Levinas correlates with gender, this paper will illustrate how, at each instant in the ethical relationship, the Self is always transforming between masculine- and feminine-gendered performances for a feminine- or masculine-gendered Other.  Rather than embodying a conservative and essentialist view of sexuality, Levinas articulates an existential performative perversity. 

**Levinas, Perverter**

“Now I say that Man, and in general every rational being, *exists* as an End in Himself.”

-- Immanuel Kant (95)

Throughout his work, most evidently in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas employs motifs of kinship to describe my connection with alterity.   When he describes the world as being "familiar to us" (*TI*33), Levinas implies that experience is constituted *as* family members.  Through each perspective of the ethical "relationship" (*TI*39) opened at each instant of the ethical genealogy, the Other figures as a different *relative*: the father of futural fecundity (*TI*274-277), the wife of the economic home (*TI*154-156), the brother of political fraternity (*TI*278-280), the sister soul of incestuous Eros (*TI*254), and so on.   The prevalence of these gendered family tropes has led many commentators to criticize Levinas for having a sexist and heteronormative bias.  Over half a century ago in the foundational work of modern French feminism, *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir accused Levinas's figuration of woman as Other to be "an assertion of masculine privilege” (xvi n3).  More recently, this protest has been expressed more angrily, with a recent article claiming that Levinas’s work articulates a “demonization of femininity and erasure of maternity” (Walsh 97).

For anyone who admires the work of Levinas, such anger is alarming.  Rather than reacting *against* this feminist standpoint, however, it is precisely our responsibility as Levinas scholars to be awakened by this alarm and to respond sincerely to this anger.  As Andrea Juno and V. Vale explain, “[Women’s] anger can spark and re-invigorate; it can bring hope and energy back into our lives and mobilize politically against the status quo” (5).  Only by rendering Levinas vulnerable, by exposing him to feminist critique, can we begin to answer for the problems in his thought and perhaps even to use these problems to develop new insights into gender and sexuality.

On the one hand, the feminist objection to Levinas’s language seems to be exactly correct. Without a doubt, Levinas uses gendered motifs throughout his philosophy, deploying familial structures inherited from *both* the Judaic *and* the Greek legacies of patriarchy.[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn1" \o ")  At all moments of our reading, this should indeed trouble us.  We should always refrain from masquerading his gendered language by replacing masculine pronouns with feminine ones, neutral ones, or even the hermaphroditic “he or she”; perhaps we should cease altogether to use “it” in our translations. We must keep in mind that Levinas articulates *Humanisme de l’autre Homme,*“Humanism of the Other *Man*,” and not, as a recent translation would have it, “Humanism of the Other.”  On the other hand, only to claim that Levinas “privileges” the masculine over the feminine overlooks the more essential question: what does “privileging” mean and should we necessarily privilege the privileged over the secondary?

Derrida astutely poses this methodological problem, “We will attempt to ask several questions.  If they succeed in approaching the heart of this explication, they will be nothing less than objections but rather the questions put to *us* by Levinas” (*WD* 84).  Perhaps the words that have caused so much controversy in Levinas’s work are the very terms that he himself opens up for discussion?  Perhaps Levinas’s usage of filial tropes is not merely one of the “problems” in his view of politics (Critchley 174) but rather a *problematic* which must be deepened?

More than any other thinker in the history of Western philosophy, Levinas stands accused in the very body of his texts, texts that “call for the critique exercised by *another*philosopher” (*OTB*20), texts radically open to critical readings, texts that constantly require justification.  Exactly because he employs binary gendered concepts, we can use Levinas’s texts to protest for justice not just in his work but in philosophy and in Western culture itself.  Levinas has inherited sexist language and patriarchal logic from a long tradition of canonical Western thought--most of which has been written by white males[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn2" \o ")--that has typically figured subjectivity as virility and citizenship as fraternity. Whereas many sensible, egalitarian thinkers try to masquerade this legacy by using gender-neutral language, Levinas deliberately foregrounds the problematic of gender.  Therefore, perhaps a careful and critical reading of his texts can begin to think through the history of thought as masculine and to respond to the anger of our sisters.

***Elevations* and Subversion**

As distressing as it can be when anger is directed against a thinker one admires, it seems even worse when someone defends his thought with hostility and even employs it as a weapon of attack.  As writers who have taken responsibility for the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, we have already committed to responding to the protest that his writings have engendered.  For this reason, it seems inappropriate for Richard A. Cohen to dismiss the feminist analysis of Tina Chanter’s “Antigone’s Dilemma” with so much brutality and condescension in his first book *Elevations*, characterizing her thoughtful and temperate article as “a hatchet job.  Levinas is once more made to play the tired role of the male fall guy … So why even bother with Levinas, one wonders, that sophisticated intellectual male chauvinist pig?” (*EHG*196)  It is hard for me to understand how a scholar of Levinas--a philosopher of politeness if nothing else--could be so rude and patronizing to one of our sisters.  However, Cohen dismisses Levinas’s critical questioners--feminist and otherwise--as “attackers” (*EHG*195) none of whom is given the individuated respect for separated Otherness, but who are instead defined collectively as enemies who “demonstrate loyalty to a party or school.” (*EHG*196)

*Elevations* opens upon an ominous note. Cohen recounts,“I remember distinctly to this day the impression Levinas made on me. 'This is *true*', I thought, in contrast to all the philosophers and philosophies which are *fascinating* or *provocative*” (*EHG*xi). Although anyone who has read Levinas can certainly appreciate Cohen’s “naïve” (*EHG*xi) sense of wonder, Cohen makes the dangerous move of proclaiming Levinas’s thought to be “*true*,” momentarily overlooking Levinas’s crucial “elevation” of the Good over the True.  Practically canonizing Levinas as a saint or prophet, such an orthodox interpretation verges on dogmatism.  We can already hear in Cohen’s contempt for thinkers who are merely “*fascinating* or *provocative*” an effort to reduce the ethical height of Levinas’s phenomenological ethics to a belligerent morality of *ressentiment*.

Although Cohen is an astute phenomenologist, he makes the mistake of placing the normative over the phenomenological without fully appreciating how Levinas’s phenomenology is already ethics.  Cohen states that “the central claim in Levinas is that the face of the other is manifested in and manifests a moral height” (*EHG*183).  Nevertheless, he reduces Levinas’s thought to a set of moral platitudes:  “It is quite simple:  it is better to be good than anything else.  It is better to help others than to help ourselves” (*EEP*11).  Contrary to Cohen’s interpretation, however, Levinas does not issue prescriptive commands, but instead demonstrates how the prescriptive is already embedded in the existential. Levinas’s project is closely akin to Husserl’s quest to determine the eidetic essences that structure experience (*Ideas*7-8), and even more similar to Heidegger’s demonstration that our “everydayness” actually reflects a more fundamental ontology (*BT* 380-82).  That is, Levinas demonstrates how all of our experiences, even the most “commonplace” (*TI* 53), are already bent eccentrically by our moral orientation towards the Other, already penetrated from the rear by obligation.  For example, Levinas does not simply argue that “violence is bad,” but rather demonstrates that, thanks to the ethical relationship, our wills and our bodies are always exposed to violence (*TI*229) yet this violence is always postponed (*TI*236).

Cohen equates Levinas’s motif of height with a “moral force” that justifies hierarchical judgments of “better” and “worse” (*EEP* 140).  Without properly articulating what the terms “good” and “evil” mean in Levinas’s writing, Cohen expresses this contrast with astonishing violence, arguing that Levinas’s “battle cry would be ‘Against evil, for the good!’” (*EEP* 104) Such a polemical cry could not possibly come from Levinas, but rather from Nietzsche’s man of *ressentiment.*  According to Nietzsche, *ressentiment*arises from two inversions: (a) horizontally, *ressentiment,*the “sanctification of revenge under the name of justice” (52),looks outwards for an enemy rather than looking inwards for virtue; (b) vertically, *ressentiment* expresses the hatred of lowly people for the high born, and their jealous effort to revalue moral height.  This attitude of *ressentiment* is most apparent in Cohen’s description of Levinas as “teaching morality to the intellectual elite who … think themselves too intelligent, too sophisticated, too cultured for ordinary morality” (*EEP* 1)

To avoid confusing Levinas’s moral height with*ressentiment*, we must oppose the hierarchical logic of dogmatic orthodoxy by becoming subverters, overturning thought from below.[[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn3" \o ")  Judaism has always been a religion for subversion, for radical ruptures of thought that express both supreme disobedience and supreme piety. As Susan Handelman claims, Judaism contains within it a “heretic hermeneutic [that] can be part of tradition while simultaneously rebelling against it” (201).  Our first patriarch, Abraham, became such an iconoclast when he smashed the idols revered and sold by his own father.[[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn4" \o ")  Similarly, modern Judaism stands in the shadow of Sabbatai Sevi, the 17th century apostate Messiah who consummated the Jewish Law by violating it.[[5]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn5" \o ")

**Immanent Metaphors**

Alongside the violence of critical protest yet against the violence of rhetorical orthodoxy, we can still embrace the subversive potential of violent speech by interpreting Levinas blasphemously.[[6]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn6" \o ")  In contrast to Cohen’s hierarchical and orthodox moralism, our subversive and radical reading will attempt to reveal the immanent roots, the poetic dimension within Levinas’s hyperbolic, transcendental prose.[[7]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn7" \o ")  Such a reading will show that, although Levinas deliberately uses filial tropes throughout his work, this would only constitute a "problem" if it were read in a hermeneutically "straight" manner.  Beneath the apparent hetero-normative veneer of Levinas's prose lurk traces of queerness.  The ethical relationship is directed not simply from masculine Self to feminine Other, but is everywhere perverted.

One of the reasons why readings of Levinas have so consistently upheld a heteronormative analysis is that many interpretations construe his work through a set of programmatic proclamations.  We often read that Levinas’s philosophy can summarized as “Ethics is First Philosophy” or “The Other is the Most High.”  I would argue that, in addition to considering a statement like “ethics is first philosophy” to be a thematic declaration, we must meditate upon it as a riddle to be solved.  In order to crack it open, we must think through not only the metaphysical traditions of *protē philosophia* in Aristotle and *prima philosophia* in Descartes, but more importantly, what the word “first” and what Derrida calls “the notion of primacy” (*WD* 97) mean in a Levinasian context.

Rather than focusing on the obvious rhetorical gestures Levinas makes, a radical reading must look carefully at the immanent play of tropes within his work.  Levinas’s writing can only be understood through a close investigation of the interconnections and transformation between clusters of metaphors.  Derrida slyly indicates this problem when he explains that “everything which Levinas designates as ‘formal logic’ is contested in its root.  This root would not only be the root of our language, but the root of all western philosophy” (*WD*91).

Derrida’s hint suggests that the easiest place to begin looking at Levinas’s immanent wordplay would be in his etymological roots.  For example, the Indo-European root “STA” has a long tradition in philosophy.  Greek thought articulates it as “*hypoSTAsis,*” which is transformed into Latin as “*subSTAntia*.” In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger considers this translation of philosophical terms to be one of the primordial stages in the forgetting of Being (*BW*153). He redeploys this root using terms common to the German philosophical tradition such as “*VerSTAnd*” (understand), “*GegenSTAnd*” (represent) and “*VorSTEllung*” (notion), and he coins new terms such as “*GeSTEll*” (enframing) (*BW*301).  Almost parodying Heidegger, Levinas retranslates this German lexicon back into a Latin tongue, “romancing” the words back into a Romance language.[[8]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn8" \o ")  Not only does Levinas reclaim the term “hypostasis,” he transmutes this root into terms such as “deSTItution,” “subSTItution,” and “inSTItution.”

Derrida warns against the temptations of etymological thinking (*MP* 210), so I would not make the strong claim that Levinas puts his faith in the French language the same way Heidegger considers German to be the “House of Being” (*BW*193).  Whatever the ultimate ontological status of language, it seems clear that Levinas carefully picks each word in his texts with attention to its etymological and morphological resonances.  In the 1940s, Levinas displays this extraordinary attention to linguistic detail by noting that what Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world,” “being-for-death,” and “being-with-Others” add to our philosophical knowledge “is that these prepositions – ‘in’, ‘for’, and ‘with’ are in the root of the verb ‘to be’ (as ‘ex’ is in the root of the verb ‘to exist’)” (Wahl  50).  Thus, we should assume that Levinas is always aware of roots, prefixes, and suffixes; of the nominal, verbal, prepositional, adjectival, and adverbial parts of speech; of the active, middle, and passive voices; of the nominative, vocative, dative, genitive, ablative, accusative and even locative cases.

In addition to these morphological considerations, we must attend to the semantic connections between various etymological networks.  For example, words rooted in “STA” (e.g. stand), must be correlated with other etymological networks connoting position and proximity, as well as those connoting height and depth.  The very word “origin” comes from *oriri,*to rise:  for Levinas, man has “overcome” the “destitution” of his “animal needs” (*TI* 116-17) to become *homo erectus,* already erect and masterful and virile.

**Genesis**

Now that we have proposed an immanent hermeneutical strategy, we are bold enough to ask the broader interpretive question:  what are Levinas’s books about?  What storyline runs through his work? When we pay close attention to the etymological and the semantic networks immanent to his sentences, we notice that the same motifs crop up again and again under new transformations.[[9]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn9)  Derrida gives us an insight into how metaphors develop through Levinas’s work: “*Totality and Infinity* … proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach:  return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself” (*WD* 312, n7). That is, Levinas’s writing, both across the span of his works and within a single text, can be understood as a process of reiterative rewriting.  Despite the fact that *Totality and Infinity* is broken up into a certain number of sections, chapters and subsections; and that *Otherwise than Being* was published 12 years after *Totality and Infinity*; and that Levinas’s religious work must be distinguished from his philosophical writings, I would argue that Levinas discusses one and only one thing again and again: I confront you; or, put dialogically, I converse with the Other; you say some thing to me and I listen, and then I say some thing to you and you listen.

What animates Levinas’s corpus is that each new analysis gives us a new perspective on this singular situation.  I would in fact argue that the notion of “perspectivism” is as important for understanding Levinas’s work as it is for Nietzsche’s.[[10]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn10)   Although the dialogical relation of speech surmounts the theoretical stance of vision, Levinas still retains the notion of perspective, explaining that “ethics itself is an optics” (*TI* 23).  He does not abandon visuality, but instead warps it, perverts it.[[11]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn11)  “The differences between the Other and me … are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being ‘starting from oneself’ towards ‘the Other.’  The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which cannot arise without this orientation) summarizes the theses of the present work” (*TI* 215).[[12]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn12)

Once we understand the way that Levinas’s perspectives bend, we can begin to reflect upon the metaphorical networks that illuminate his work.  Most frequently, Levinas indicates the double-sidedness of a phenomenological event by reversing a perspective.  For example, to claim only that the Other is situated in an elevated state as the “Most High” is to miss the full dynamic mobilization of this metaphor.  The “height” of the other is the hyperbolic correlate and the perspectival reversal of the “the upsurge of the self (*le surgisment de soi*) … One becomes a subject of being … [by] an exaltation, an ‘above being’” (*TI* 119, *TeI*123).  Keeping in mind that the French root “*sur*” means “over,” we can then understand why Levinas insists that we experience history as a “SURvivor” (*TI* 57), why infinity “SURpasses itself” (*TI* 103), and why fecund temporality is a “reSURrection” (*TI* 56).  Through a different perspectival reversal, this height of separation can also be expressed as “an abyss within enjoyment itself” (*TI* 141), which becomes articulated as my “hypostasis” (*TO* 54-55) and the Other’s “destitution” (*TI* 78).

Now that we have a preliminary understanding of Levinas’s particular usage of tropes, we can better investigate why he seems so attached to what Derrida calls “the family schema” (*PF* viii). Already a doubling reversal is expressed through this trope: the “familiar” already hyperbolically inverts the Other’s existence as an alien, as “not resting on any prior kinship” (*TI* 34).  For Levinas, the notion of “family” connotes the way an individuated, separated multiplicity of entities are already related to each other, through social temporalities and moral obligations that preexist the political order.  Contrasting his analysis with a philosophical tradition stretching from Plato to Hegel, he asserts “the family does not only result from a rational arrangement of animality; it does not simply mark a step towards the anonymous universality of the State.  It identifies itself outside of the State, even if the State reserves a framework for it” (*TI*306).

Filiality does not emerge simply as a social construction, but rather constitutes a responsibility for other human beings independently of unifying structures such as Hegelian Spirit or Heideggerean Being.  Writing from within the phenomenological tradition, Levinas most pointedly questions the reductive universalization of Husserl’s *genus* (*TI* 194-96), a term derived from the Indo-European GEN, signifying “birth.”[[13]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn13)  For Levinas, the generative family demonstrates that, rather than merely issuing from an origin, existence is a continuous creation: “the discontinuity of Cartesian time, which requires a continuous creation, indicates the very dispersion and plurality of created being” (*TI* 58).[[14]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn14)

There is a sense in which *Totality and Infinity* may be read as if were the first Book of Moses, Genesis or בְּרֵאשִׁית,[[15]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn15) the story of the engendering of generations.  It tells a story of life stage development, from birth through mature home ownership, through old age, through sex and death, to rebirth.  Levinas employs the terminology of birth repeatedly to describe a variety of interconnected phenomenological events such as the “latent birth” of the subject (*OTB* 139), the “birth of love” in Eros (*TI* 277), and the “birth of thought, consciousness, justice, and philosophy … of a meaning” through the third party (*OTB* 128).

In the life-stage narrative of *Totality and Infinity*, the event of birth is explored through the opening section on enjoyment, “the very production of a being that is born, that breaks the tranquil eternity of its seminal or uterine existence to enclose itself in a person” (*TI*147).[[16]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm#_edn16)  The motifs Levinas employs in this original section are connected to other metaphorical networks throughout his work.  In addition to being a member of the biblical triad of destitution along with the stranger and the widow (*TI* 77), the “orphan” describes a particular aspect of this production of being, “an orphan by birth” (*OTB* 105).  This orphan event occurs because the child is born separated, after the erotic death of the mother and the father, “having absolved oneself from relations” (*TI* 195), separated from all relatives, constantly menaced by neediness.  One reversal of this concept--this conception--of the orphan is the concept of the work, which Levinas describes as “always in a certain sense an *abortive*action” (*TI* 228, my italics), a doubling of birth and death.

As mentioned above, this continuous GENesis must be understood as a creative enGENdering, and thus gender informs all phenomenological matters.  As with the family, gender is essential for overcoming a unifying totality.  Levinas asserts, “The difference between the sexes is a formal structure, but one that carves up reality in another sense and conditions the very possibility of reality as multiple, against the unity of being proclaimed by Parmenides” (*TO* 44).  For Levinas, gender is essential for breaking with “the neuter (the sole gender formal logic knows)” (*TI* 256), and with the neutral, Heideggerean Being that Blanchot criticizes (*TI* 298).  Unlike German and English which do have neuter cases, the French language gives all proper nouns a masculine or feminine gender.  For example, “*le sujet*” is masculine in French, just as human subjectivity and political citizenship have traditionally been figured as masculine by male philosophers.

**Seconds**

Now that we have begun to understand what the theme of gender signifies for Levinas, we can begin to consider the meaning of the Feminine.  Perversely, I am going to attempt to give this Feminine a proper name, a biblical name.  It is not one of the feminine names Levinas gives in “Judaism and the Feminine” such as Miriam or Tamar or Leah (*DF* 31), but it is perhaps the most frequently used name in the bible.  Before I produce this woman before you, let me begin by suggesting that, in his early work, Levinas states that “all philosophy is perhaps a meditation on Shakespeare” (*TO* 72).  In contrast to the tragic Greek heroes who confront death as part of their fate and destiny in a Heideggerean Being-towards-Death, Levinas discusses man’s confrontation with death through the character of Macbeth.  Macbeth not only wishes that the world would die along with him, “he wishes that the nothingness of death be a void as total as that which would have reigned had the world *never been created*” (*TI* 231, my italics).  Two important things must be said about this dramatic person who opposes origination.  First of all, he is warned by the witches--the Moirae, the Fates--that his death will come at the hands of an Other who is “not of woman born,” his friend MacDuff.  Second, in order to understand who Macbeth himself is, we must understand that “Mac” is a common Gaelic prefix for “son of.”  “MacBeth” is quite an unusual name because generally these names are patronymic, such as “Johnson” for the son of John or “MacDonald” for the son of Donald, but in this case it would appear that this familiar character is the son of a woman named “Beth.”

There are multiple reasons why it is useful to express the Feminine as being named “Beth.”  In Hebrew, “Beth” signifies not only a proper name, but also the second letter of the alphabet, בּ.  It can function as a locative prefix indicating “inside,” perhaps even “interiority.”  Although בּ is the second letter of the alphabet, it is the first letter of creation, the first letter in the first word of the first parshah of the first book of Torah: **בְּ**רֵאשִׁית, “In the beginning.” Already in this very word, the root רֹאשׁ--which can be translated as “head” or “first” or even “ἀρχή”-- is preceded by the secondary letter בּ.  “Beth” in Hebrew signifies not only the letter בּ, but also the word בַּיִת, which translates as “house,” even as “dwelling.”  For this reason, “Beth” is the most frequently used feminine name in the Bible, as a locative signifier in place names such as “Bethel” and “Beth Israel.”  Again, the first word of Torah, **בְּ**רֵאשׁ**ִית**, houses the primary רֹאשׁ within the בַּיִת.

In addition to these various linguistic meanings, בּ also has a mathematical signification:  Because Hebrew uses letters to represent numbers, בּ also signifies the number 2.  One of the motifs that most pervasively underlies the Levinas’s work is the question of number.  Like many philosophers before him, Levinas confronts a perennial mathematical problem: when we think of a certain quantity of things, we generally conceive of a singularity rather than a multiplicity.  That is, when we contemplate “twenty dogs,” we typically consider this as a single group of twenty rather than thinking the twenty-ness of the twenty itself.  Levinas expresses this problem through meditations on plurality and multiplicity “The plural … is given to a number.  Unity alone is ontologically privileged.  Multiple is, but in synthesis is no more” (*TI* 274).

At the risk of implicating Emmanuel Levinas in paganism or kabbalah, let me state that there is something almost Pythagorean in his thought, in the sense that numbers are not used merely for counting, but themselves describe certain configurations of Being.  A thorough investigation will require additional study, but we can begin to account for his numbers here.

Levinas thinks the “negative” in tension with the skeptical negations of Descartes (*TI* 92-93), the dialectical negation of Hegel’s *Aufhebung* (*TI* 305), and the negation of *Dasein*’s death (*TI* 56).  He invokes the terrible quality of the negative as the *il y a*, that which exists after the negation of all particular, positive entities (*TI* 190, cf. *EE* 57-64).  On the other hand, I establish my own positive, separated selfhood by negating alterity through labor and integrating it back into the Same (*TI* 40-41). Against this murderous violence that “proceeds from unlimited negation” (*TI* 225), the Other can “sovereignly say no” (*TI* 199).  Negation occurs not only in this masculine confrontation, but also through the feminine “less than nothing” (*TI* 258) encountered in Eros which has “reference --be it negative--to the social” (*TI* 262).

Closely related to but distinct from the negative is the zero. Before the positive singularity of selfhood, zero occurs as anarchy (*OTB* 99), the zero point (*TI* 159), the null site (*OTB* 10), creation *ex nihilo* (*TI* 104)*,* freedom originally null (*TI* 224)*.*  More generally, zero describes a boundary surrounding positive existence as the elemental menace of nowhere (*TI* 141), the void of illumination (*TI* 189), the nothingness of the future (*TI* 146), and the “no man’s land.”[[17]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn17" \o ")  Relationships through the zero occur as the erotic caress “seizing upon nothing” (*TI* 257), the ethical “exteriority coming from nothingness” (*TI* 293), substituting oneself in a “null place” (*OTB* 116), and fraternity as “a complicity for nothing” (*OTB* 150).

Now that we have begun to work through the negative and the zero, we can think through the positive, in which we can already hear spatial “position,” cognitive “positing,” and philosophical “positivism.” The social and political are produced as a “multiplicity” or “plurality” (*TI* 220-2), which is related to but distinct from the “third party” who calls for justice (*TI* 157).  Alterity itself can be considered as the greatest positive of all, “infinity” (*TI* 41).

Arithmetical transformations can be illustrated most clearly through the number one.  One is invoked as zero, as the neutralizing, nullifying singularities of the “unity of the system” (*TI* 150) and “universalization” (*TI* 247).  One occurs as singular masculine subjectivity in the “solitude” of “man” (*TI* 119), as well as in the “happiness [that] comes for the first time” (*TI* 114), and the apologetic “speech in the first person” (*TI* 242).  Doubling into one occurs in the “dual solitude” (*TI* 265) of Eros. Dialogically, it manifests in the ethical relation to the Other because the neighbor is “the first one on the scene” (*OTB* 11), whose “first teaching” of ethical height (*TI* 171) expresses “the first word ‘you shall not commit murder’” (*TI* 199).  Because the Other is “from the first the brother of all men” (*OTB* 158), a “community” (*TI* 214) can arise in which “the unity of plurality is peace” (*TI* 306).

It is necessary to meditate on this entire network encompassed by the motif of “one” before evaluating Levinas’s assertion that morality is “first philosophy” (*TI*304) or to address the problem that he “privileges” masculinity.

Just as there is a certain masculinity associated with the single, femininity is typically manifested as double. Levinas most explicitly refers to the duality of gender in his Judaic writings.  “Did not God give the name ‘Adam’ to man and woman joined together as if the two were one, as if the unity of the person were able to triumph over the dangers lying in wait for it only by virtue of a duality inscribed in its essence” (*DF* 33).  Levinas distinguishes yet relates this biblical story of gender division from the tale of sexual mitosis and nostalgia that Aristophanes recounts in the *Symposium*, which he instead uses to illustrate the “incestuous” character of Eros (*TI* 254).  Beyond this, 2, by being the first plural after the singular 1, first opens up plurality as such.  Thus, Levinas asserts that the vital impulse “presupposes the intervals of sexuality and a specific dualism in its articulation. … Sexuality is in us neither knowledge nor power, but the very plurality of our existence” (*TI* 276).

This theme of doubleness applies not only to gender but to absolutely every movement in Levinas’s thought--the very notion of alterity implies secondariness.[[18]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn18" \o ")  Levinas’s entire analysis is built upon changes in direction, so duality enters any time he uses the Latin root *verter*, to turn,[[19]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn19" \o ") in terms such as “reversion” and “inversion.” This structure of doubling is already within all terms prefixed by “equi,” “ambi,” “amphi,” or “dia,” such as “equivocation,” “ambiguity,” “amphibology,” “ambiguity,” and “diachrony.” The double indicates the dynamic tension of the “non-assemblable duality” (*OTB* 69), and of the diachronic interval “between two times” (*TI* 58). Doubleness articulates the orientation between every trope, such as the relation between masculine Height and its hyperbolic correlate, feminine Depth.    This dynamic reversal occurs not just between the genders in sexuality, but also as the homosocial “man to man,” the ethical “face to face” (*TI* 79-81). Through enjoyment and recursion, this doubling is produced even in the relationship between the ego and the self, the *moi* and the *soi*(*TO*56), the nominative “I” and the accusative “me” (*OTB*112).

**Ambisexuality**

Now that we have a better understanding of the binary character of gender and the importance of duality throughout Levinas’s work, we can begin to think more carefully about the problem of the “Feminine” in Levinas.  Not only does Levinas explicitly discuss the feminine and masculine aspects of the Other, a careful reading of his texts indicates that these structures of masculinity and femininity are also present within the Self.  This is most evident in his description of the Home, whose condition is the Woman.[[20]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn20" \o ") The principal role of the feminine dwelling is to provide the site for reversion, the base of welcoming (*accueil*) for recollection (*recueillement*) (*TI*155; *TeI 165*), of acceptance for receptivity.  Levinas describes this phenomenological production, saying “this refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it before every inhabitant, the welcoming*par excellence,* welcome in itself – the feminine being” (*TI* 157).  If Levinas here characterizes feminine alterity by the “welcome” it offers, then we can only conclude that *I* am figured as a woman only a few pages later.  “I welcome the Other who presents *himself* in my home by opening my home to *him*” (*TI* 171, my italics).  In fact, my identification as a welcoming woman is the very basis of Levinasian ethics: “metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge” (*TI* 43).

Even more than his linking of womanhood with domesticity, Levinas’s description of the erotic feminine Beloved in “The Phenomenology of Eros” has incurred condemnation from feminist critics for its usage of stereotypical motifs.  It is easiest to conceptualize this section if we remember that the French slang for orgasm is “*la petite mort,*” the little death.  When we read *Totality and Infinity*’s central narrative as being about continuous creation and recreation, we see that the story has brought the subject from childhood enjoyment (147-51), to matrimony (154-56), to adult labor and mastery (158-62), and then to an awareness of temporal mortality (226-36).  After this, the storyline of the “Phenomenology of Eros” transits through the arc of death and rebirth, from “dying without murder” (258), to sexual “voluptuosity as a pure experience” (260), to the womblike “community of sentient and sensed” (265), and then to the “engendering of the child” (266).  Within this narrative, Levinas employs several characterizations of the feminine Beloved (*aimée*) that have given rise to considerable controversy, especially his description of “the beloved return[ing] to the stage of infancy ... [like] a young animal” (*TI* 263, see Walsh 80-82 for a critique).  In response, one should first point out that the motifs Levinas employs in this section also relate to the wider metaphorical networks that constitute his thought: the “frailty” of the Beloved relates to the dynamics of “destitution;” her “foreignness to the world” relates to the “alterity” of the Other; her secrecy and profanation, hiddenness and monstrousness relate to the question of expression and appearance; her “nudity” relates to the tropes of embodiment and exposure; her “ultramateriality” relates to “matter” and the “body;” her “virginity” and “violability” relate to the problematics of “violence” and “murder.”  As mentioned above, the motif of “infancy” partakes in the network of terms connoting birth, which Levinas describes in the phenomenology of separated enjoyment.  In this section, Levinas also introduces an almost-Bergsonian notion of “animal need liberated from vegetable dependence.”[[21]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn21" \o ")

This explication does not necessarily blunt the feminist critique of his thought, but it complicates the issue considerably.   Simone De Beauvoir is precisely correct:  Levinas *does* “privilege” the masculine. For him, tropes signifying one-ness and first-ness refer to the masculine, and tropes signifying duality and two-ness refer to the feminine.  However, it is unclear whether we should necessarily reach from these facts the conservative conclusion that primacy is “better” than secondariness or that masculinity is “better” than femininity.

In *Gender Trouble,*Judith Butler takes this problem of gender even further by questioning the very binary division of sexuality. “Power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender … that binary relation between ‘men’ and ‘women’” (xxviii).  Those attempting to overcome binary gender divisions will find that, in many ways, gender is the binarism of binarisms for Levinas, that it could perhaps be considered the paradigm for all other binarisms.  I  would argue, however, that sexuality is already so overdetermined for Levinas that it already anticipates or includes within it the movements of deconstruction and dialectic, and thus a deconstructive or dialectical critique must proceed carefully.[[22]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn22" \o ")

Levinas explains repeatedly that the dualism of gender is related to but not reducible to the biological division between the sexes.  Thus, we could perhaps use his thought to open up the categories of “masculinity” and “femininity” for various biological genders; to oppose, along with Judith “Jack” Halberstam, the fact that “masculinity … has been reserved for people with male bodies and has been actively denied to people with female bodies” (269).  Ultimately, for Levinas, no matter the biological or ontological gender, both the Self and the Other always embody both feminine and masculine traits in a state of metaphysical ambisexuality.

***Tergum Verter***

(*do not penetrate me, oh my angel*)

A perverter of philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas continuously corrupts ontological relationships, demonstrating how ethical ambiguity prevents the copula, the third-person “is” of a neutral Being, from reducing the essential Saying to a nominal Said (*OTB*41-4). According to him, the being of the Self is not a straightforward self-relation but rather a “fundamental inversion, not of just some function of being, a function turned from his end, but an inversion in his very exercise of being” (*TI* 63, translation modified).  The Self does not relate to itself through a reflection of selfhood, but rather through the Other, both through an actual human Other and also through the Other that the Self was in the past and the Other that it will be in the future.  Magnetized by the displacement that separates the Self from the Other, the ethical relationship perverts Being from any simple, straight union.  Just as Freud describes perversion as a deviation of the normal sexual aim, “the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation” (15), Levinas explains how the “return to oneself” (*TI*266)of copulation is perverted in the “Phenomenology of Eros” (*TI*256-266).

Levinas’s description of the very site of the dual relationship, Eros, is profoundly ambiguous.  It is often unclear how to distinguish the Lover from the Beloved and the I from the Other; to figure out who is who and who is doing what to whom; to understand which is feminine and which masculine.  Even more explicitly than the case of welcoming home, Eros affects a gender transformation.  In a statement that can read heterosexually, homosexually, transsexually, or completely otherwise, Levinas explains, “The relation with the carnal and the tender precisely makes this self arise incessantly:  the subject’s trouble is not assumed by his mastery as a subject, but in his entenderment [*attendrissement*], his effemination, which the heroic and virile I will remember as one of those things that stand apart from ‘serious things’” (*TI* 270, *TeI*303, translation modified).

Reading perversely, I would argue that the section “Substitution” in *Otherwise than Being*is Levinas’s return, reversion, and reversal of *Totality and Infinity*’s analysis of Eros, a more developed account of the “effemination” of the “virile I.”  Levinas claims in this chapter that the approach of the neighbor is experienced as a “non-erotic proximity, a desire of the non-desirable, a desire of the stranger in the neighbor” (*OTB* 123).  We should not let ourselves be misled by these negations: Levinas repeatedly distinguishes his philosophy from “formal logic,” which would deduce a complete absence from a negative operation.  Negation is never simple elimination but rather the enactment of a certain type of relationship.  Derrida emphasizes the importance of these reversals: “It could doubtless be shown that it is in the nature of Levinas’s writing, at its decisive moments, to move along these cracks, masterfully progressing by negations and by negation against negation” (*WD* 90).

When we ourselves explore these cracks, working backwards from the “non-erotic” moment, we can see how extraordinarily sexual “Substitution” is.  The description “non-erotic” occurs in the sixth subsection of the chapter (“Finite Freedom”), in which Levinas contrasts “infantile spontaneity” with the created “subject come late into the world” (*OTB* 122).  Previous to this, Levinas seems to be describing a process of maternal childbirth – not merely in his explicit reference to “maternity” (*OTB*104), but also “the self as a creature is *conceived* in a passivity” (*OTB* 113, my italics), and “its recurrence is the *contracting*of an ego” (*OTB* 114, my italics).

Previous to this description of birthing, Levinas seems to describe metaphorically a process of fornication, in which I am situated as the recipient of the Other’s thrusts.  I am posited as an open orifice, an event of being which is the “folding back” (*OTB* 110) or the “hollowing out the fold of inwardness, in which knowledge is deposited, accumulated and is formulated” (*OTB* 28).  Levinas explains that the for-itself is “not the germinal model” (*OTB*106), but rather occurs in the accusative as my “pure surrender to the logos” (*OTB* 110) -- the logos which is perhaps the *logos spermatikos*, the fertilizing power of reason.  Similarly, Levinas explains my loss of sovereignty as an experience of being pricked from the rear.  “Backed up against itself … the self in its skin is both exposed to the exterior … and obsessed by the others in this naked exposure” (*OTB* 112). In contrast, the Other seems to be getting an erection:  whereas my soul is not “thickening and tumefying” (*OTB* 109), the Good is a “firmness more firm than firm” (112). Ultimately, the Other is experienced as an “entry inwards” (*OTB* 108); a diachrony that signifies “the one-penetrated-by the-other” (*OTB* 49).

Levinas’s description is suggestive enough that this penetration may be interpreted in a heterosexual “biblical” manner, or in the “Greek” way so beloved by Plato’s symposiasts. In many ways a homosexual interpretation seems more plausible.  In *Totality and Infinity*, Eros can be read as heterosexual because it occurs between a masculine lover (*l’amant*) (*TI*257, *TeI*288) and a feminine Beloved (*l’Aimée*) (*TI*256, *TeI*286), who Levinas characterized as a “sister soul” that “self-presents as incest” (*TI* 254, translation modified).  “Substitution,” however, makes no mention of this feminine Beloved*.*Instead, she has been substituted by a past conditional subjunctive perfect “would have liked to pair up a sister soul [of] substitution and sacrifice” (*OTB* 126), a figure more reminiscent of Sophocles’ *Antigone* than Aristophanes’ fable.

Our interpretation will become even more blasphemous once we examine the radical turning that determines Levinas’s orientation, sexual and otherwise, the root *verter*.  Levinas uses the language of *inversion* in “Substitution,” describing obsession as an “inversion of consciousness [that] is no doubt a passivity – but it is a passivity beneath all passivity” (*OTB* 101).  This “inversion” can perhaps be understood as a rethematization of the Erotic “effemination;” in his seminal work, Havelock Ellis defined inversion as “sexual instinct turned by inborn constitutional abnormality toward persons of the same sex” (1).  The invocation of passivity can similarly remind us of Foucault’s discussion of the Greek *polis*.  According to Foucault, the Greeks juxtaposed “an ethos of male superiority” with “a conception of all sexual intercourse in terms of the schema of penetration and male domination.”  Thus, Athenian democracy was compelled to maintain the principles of political equality among male citizens while still recognizing one as the active, masculine sexual partner and the other as passive and “*feminized*” (220-22).

For Levinas, does not the ethical itself emerge as this very reconciliation of a dual Eros and a fraternal community?  Levinas seems to highlight the Foucaultian problematic of homosociality, of sociality and homosexuality, by referring to the “will”-- my virile self-assertion--as “the psyche backed up against itself,” exposing its hindquarters.  He draws attention to this issue by using the conspicuously obscure term “tergiversation” (*OTB* 112), turning us back to the same Latin root, *tergum* (back) + *verter* (turn).

The thematic of the backside seems to be a Levinasian reversal of the motif of the visage or face.[[23]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_edn23" \o ")  As many authors including Derrida (*WD* 108) and Cohen (*EHG* 244 n5) have commented, Levinas’s reflections on this figure should return us back to the biblical description of the face-to-face in Exodus 33:11-23.  Interestingly, the Hebrew term for face, פָּנִים*,*derives etymologically from the rootפנה, to turn.  Thus, this same passage of Torah again reverts to a primordial turning.In this strange narrative, God first speaks“face-to-face” (פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים) with Moses, and then the “presence” (פָּנַי, from the root פנה) goes with the Jewish people. After Moses asks not just to *speak* to the Lord but to actually *see* “Your Glory” (כְּבֹדֶךָ, from the root כבד, to burden or to respect) God replies that no one may see his face (פָּנַי, from the root פנה) and live. Instead, God asks Moses to stand upon a rock.  “And it shall come to pass, while My Glory (כְּבֹדִי, from the root כבד) passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand until I have passed by.  And I will take away My hand, and thou shalt see My backside (אֲחֹרָי, from the root אחר, to come after, to differ or defer); but My face (פָנַי) shall not be seen.”  Although we do not necessarily agree with the Freudian interpretation of this verse as a proof of Jewish anal eroticism (Dundes 125), we must admire here how odd it is to have this Jewish patriarch, this first Messiah of the Jewish people, this leader of the exodus from slavery, to have Moses looking at the Glory through a cleft, a crack – we would dare say a “gloryhole” – gazing at the rear end of God.

**Conclusion**

When we try to get to the bottom of Levinas’s views on gender, on the Cheek-to-Cheek relationship between the sexes, we are still left with an abyss, a gap *inter urinas et faeces*, between the manifold creativities of ejaculation, defecation, and parturition.  For Levinas, this is the very hole that separates the masculine from the feminine, a difference that corresponds most apparently to heterosexual positions but that perhaps can be also perverted for homosexuality, lesbianism, transgender, and other forms of queer sexuality.

Gender and sexuality for Levinas constitute some of the most fundamental ways that difference is produced in experience, the most important ways that Otherness resists neutral universalization.  However, as many critics have objected and as this paper has affirmed throughout, Levinas problematically employs patriarchal themes in his argument.  We still who find value in Levinas’s work must accept responsibility for this rhetoric, and must carefully consider creative ways to respond to the protests it has engendered.

Derrida suggest that perhaps one may try to read Levinas’s texts as “a sort of feminist manifesto” (1999, 44).  Precisely because Levinas so deliberately exposes patriarchy in his writing, feminist and queer interpreters can perhaps use his thought to critique patriarchy’s legacy, to foster more gender openness, and to reconsider the gender and sexual dimensions of various ethical relationships as well as the ethical dimensions of various gender and sexual relationships.

In the end, however, this author of this paper you are right now reading can offer no final answer to these problems, but instead, as both a Levinas scholar and an anarcha-feminist, can only thank you for your time and welcome your responses.

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[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref1" \o ") Lisa Walsh asserts that “[Levinas’s] assumptions as to the nature of the maternal and paternal functions draw on the same Greek sensibilities [as psychoanalysis.]” (80). Although the Greek mythical and philosophical traditions have influenced Levinas, another distinct but often interrelated tradition of patriarchy, the Judaic, seems equally if not more important for him – and arguably for psychoanalysis as well.

[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref2" \o ") The very writer of this very paper is also identified as a white male.  To what extent should any of these words of identification--subject copula adjective noun--be placed under erasure?

[[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref3" \o ") FROM THE BOTTOM,

AN OPEN LETTER TO RICHARD A. COHEN AND DUQUENSE PRESS:

In the final chapter of *Elevations*, “Derrida’s (Mal)Reading of Levinas,” Richard A. Cohen transforms Levinas’s eschatology of peace into a declaration of combat.  In Cohen’s words, he “passes over the details of Derrida’s 99 page deconstruction” (*EHG*305) and instead picks a fight between Derrida and Levinas: “my intent is to explain why and with what good reason Derrida’s essay has been construed as an attack on Levinas” (*EHG*314 n10).  Cohen figures the “Levinas-Derrida conflict” (*EHG*306) as the very site of an original *polemos* that “on this ultimate question, Athens or Jerusalem … the true or the good … one must take sides” (*EHG*315). Cohen argues that Derrida takes Heidegger’s side.  Failing to recognize how Derrida rearticulates the problematic of philosophy and its Other in order to return to Levinas’s own problematic of Reason and its Other (*TI,*82-101), Cohen claims that “Derrida’s ultimate response to Levinas is ostracism, exile, exclusion, excision” from the philosophical community.

Cohen regularly attacks Derrida for being Heidegger’s “most faithful and clever” (*EEP*4) disciple dangerously evoking the anti-Semitic disparagement of the Jew for being merely “clever” (for example, Hitler 412 ff.)  Worse yet, because Cohen believes Derrida to be a “sycophantic follower” (*EEP*121) of Heidegger, he refuses to accept the mutual respect between Derrida and Levinas. Alluding to *Adieu*, Derrida’s funeral oration to Levinas, Cohen accuses Derrida of, “hiding behind the masks and ruses of language, language reduced to rhetoric, escaping responsibilities and obligations by saying ‘adieu’ to Levinas” (*EEP*160).  It is almost impossible to read a line so dense with cruelty.  One trembles with anger and sadness at the demeaning of this friend’s grievance for the loss of his friend, of this philosopher’s mourning for another member of the philosophical fraternity, of this mother’s hospitality that welcomes her child into death, of this sister’s obedience to the divine law of *Θέμις* that urges her towards the anarchic responsibility of burying her beloved brother.

Claiming that Levinas “sides with” Jerusalem over Athens, Cohen turns Levinas into a murderer, claiming that “Levinas cannot live with either Hegel or Derrida” (*EHG*319).  I often wonder whether Cohen has read the same Levinas that I have.  How could an interpreter of Levinas bring such violence into the field of Levinas studies?  How could a reader of Levinas so willfully ignore his prefatory quest to separate thought from war (*TI*21)?  Yet Cohen repeatedly describes philosophical conversation in the most combative terms, employing the language of fighting, applying Carl Schmitt’s logic of friend and enemy, and transforming intellectuals into armies.

Is philosophy the same as pugilism and thinking the same as war? Are we who pretend to be thinkers mere bullies who use ideas as if they were gloves to beat down opponents?  Wouldn’t these blows knock us out, numb us into dogmatism, the slumber from which Kant awoke us over two centuries ago?

Do philosophers *fight* or, as Levinas wonders, is “reason constituted rather in a situation where ‘one chats,’ where the resistance of a being as a being is not broken, but pacified?” (*IOF* 126-27)  Hasn’t philosophy been the opportunity to consider what calls for thinking and to whom the intellectual is responsible?  Can we philosophers be what Derrida in his essay on Levinas refers to as “a community of the question about the possibility of the question?  This is very little – almost nothing – but within it, today, is sheltered and encapsulated … an unbreachable responsibility” (*WD* 80).  Can’t we hear Levinas’s *direct response to Derrida*’s call to responsibility in the conclusion of the introduction to *Otherwise than Being*: “the naiveté of the philosopher calls, beyond the reflection for oneself, for the critique exercised by *another*philosopher … Philosophy thus arouses a drama between philosophers and an intersubjective movement”?(*OTB*20)?

In its new publication of *Otherwise than Being*, Duquesne Press has allowed Richard A. Cohen to insert his Foreword before Alphonso Lingis’s thoughtful, analytic, and often-translated Translator’s Introduction (for example, in *Cahier de L'Herne: Emmanuel Lévinas,*edited by Catherine Chalier and Miguel Abensour*.*)  In this essay, Cohen recruits Levinas as a warrior in “a new and future *gigantomachia* that has arisen in the twentieth century” (*OTB*xiii).  It is unbelievable that such a veritable call for the fratricide of Cain could enter a book written by Levinas. Right here and right now, in the very Saying of this very text, I am please requesting that Richard A. Cohen recant this violence, and that he and Duquesne Press agree to remove this Foreword from all future reprints

Thank you for your time.  I look forward to your response.

                                                                                                Sincerely Yours,

                                                                                                Mitchell Verter

[[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref4" \o ") Genesis Rabbah 38:14.  A similar story is told about the same yet Islamic patriarch Ibrahim in the Qur’an 21:51-59

[[5]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref5" \o ") Scholem 287-324.  Sevi’s antinomian acts were finally consummated when, threatened with execution by the Turkish Sultan, he converted to Islam.

[[6]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref6" \o ") Indeed, Levinas implicates himself as such a blasphemer by daring to speak against the most infamous blasphemer in philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche (*OTB*, 177).

[[7]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref7" \o ") Derrida writes, beautifully, “Levinas recommends the good usage of prose which breaks Dionysiac charm or violence, and forbids poetic rapture, but to no avail.  In *Totality and Infinity,*the use of metaphor, remaining admirable and most often –if not always--beyond rhetorical abuse, shelters within its pathos the most decisive movements of the discourse” (*WD* 312 n7).

[[8]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref8" \o ") Thanks to Helen Douglas for this apt wordplay.

[[9]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref9" \o ") Like many other philosophers, most notably Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Levinas writes in a prismatic manner.  His language is packed so tightly with words that have been chosen so carefully and that reverberate against each other in such particular ways that, perhaps if we meditated upon and fully analyzed just one sentence, it would reveal the entire complexity of Levinas’s thought.  Conversely, almost Talmudically, we need entire sections from other essays and books to interpret the placement of each particular word in each particular sentence.

[[10]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref10" \o ")   Nietzsche writes, “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective knowing.” In many ways, Nietzsche’s critique of a Kantian “eye turned in no particular direction” (119) anticipates Levinas’s critique of Hegelian “panoramic” (*TI* 15) or “synoptic” (*TI* 53) thought.

[[11]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref11" \o ") See my paper “Viewing Power” for an extended exploration of visual motifs in Descartes, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Levinas.

[[12]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref12" \o ") Levinas develops his viewpoint on perspective through the motif of “the curvature of intersubjective space [that] inflects distance into elevation” (*TI*291).  This curvature occurs through a distortion of length and height, a warping of vertical and horizontal dimensions, and a perversion of lateral and hierarchical relationships.  Levinas’s notion of “height” has inspired Cohen to discuss his hierarchical “elevations” and Bettina Bergo to look at his stratified “levels of being” (Bergo 55-81).  In addition, Levinas also describes the singular ethical confrontation as various angularities.  I would suggest that the “schema of being” in *Totality and Infinity* does not, as Bergo states, “resemble the figure of two parabolas intersecting at their bases” (59).  Instead, his self-described “hyperbolic” (*OTB* 49) phenomenology resembles a hyperbola, the eccentric set of points defined by the difference between two separated points.  Perhaps each of his analyses could be considered as describing the tangency of infinitely unapproachable asymptotes?  Could this perhaps be compared to Lucretius and Deleuze’s “clinamen,” the infinitesimal deviation from a straight path?

Even more ambitiously, perhaps we could account for the multiplicity of tangent vectors by attempting parallel transport between Levinas’s notion of curvature and the definition of curvature proposed by mathematician Bernhard Riemann, “the measure of the deviation of the manifold from flatness at the given point in the given surface-direction” (657).  The analogy between Levinas and Riemann could be perhaps extended as well to Einstein’s ideas on how gravitational mass-energy curves space-time.

Although we are mindful of Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont’s warning to be cautious when employing technical language, I would assert that there has always been a fruitful interchange between the natural sciences and philosophy, even when they don’t entirely understand each other.

Levinas rarely makes ambitious claims about mathematics, but he must have been familiar with basic concepts, especially because at least two of his earliest philosophical influences, Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl, were former mathematicians who wrote about mathematical concepts.   It seems likely that Levinas would have learned about Bernhard Riemann through these authors.  Deleuze remarks, “Husserl too gained inspiration from Riemann’s theory of multiplicities, although in a different way from Bergson” (118n4).  Perhaps we could even trace a path from Riemann manifolds, through Bergson and Husserl, to correlate the anarchic “multiplicities” discussed by *both* Deleuze *and* Levinas.

[[13]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref13" \o ") Husserl himself seems to recognize the flexibility of this root by associating essential “genus” and “genera” with logical “generality” (*Ideas* 24-25), as well as “genetic” and “generative” phenomenology (*Analyses* 628). Even more deliberately, Bergson argues that that a vital genesis ultimately generates the neutral generality of *a priori* Kantian laws (245-46).

[[14]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref14" \o ") In addition, this idea of continuous creation can be found in the Jewish religion, both in the Talmud and in the morning blessing for the Lord who “renews every day the work of creation.”  Levinas also finds the idea in the Greek philosophy of Heraclitus and Cratylus who describe a “becoming … radically opposed to the idea of being … the resistance to every integration … destructive of Parmedian monism” (*TI* 59-60).  The difference is often described as a distinction between Parmenidean ἐὸν, Being / *Sein / être*and Heraclitean γενέσις, which is generally translated either as genesis / *Genese* / *genèse* or becoming / *Werden* / *devenir*.  The divergence and convergence of these two sets of translations again announces intriguing proximities between Levinas and Deleuze.

[[15]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref15" \o ") Perhaps we can consider *Otherwise than Being* as לֶךְ-לְךָ, the story of Abraham’s departure?

[[16]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref16" \o ")  Lingis takes care to translate the infant’s practically “oceanic” relationship to the element,*“nourriture*,” into English as “nourishment,” thus drawing attention etymologically to the way that maternal “materiality” (133) of the infinitive *nourrice,* to nurse, becomes “substantial” (133) and nominal in the infant.

[[17]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref17" \o ") Historically, this phrase was used during the First World War to refer to the neutral or the disputed territory between battle lines. Metaphorically, it connotes negativity and femininity, as well as placement, territoriality, nationalism, and utopia.

[[18]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref18" \o ") In his discussion of Husserl, Anthony Steinbock explains, “As the expression of an ordinal number, both terms *ander* and *autre* used to mean and can still mean ‘*second*’” (58).

[[19]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref19" \o ") Perhaps related to Heidegger’s *Kehre*?

[[20]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref20" \o ") Because the woman makes the world “familiar” (*TI* 154-56), she is the key to *all* of Levinas’s family tropes.

Although this “woman” and the home she makes can most evidently be conceived as a wife for the mature male self, it also implicates the phallus and the cavity that receives it, the mother and the womb, as well as the counterpart of the Master: “the enjoyment … that becomes *mistress* of the world interiorizing it with respect to its dwelling” (*TI* 141, my italics).

[[21]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref21" \o ") Compare Bergson 105-35.  Throughout *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas takes pains to distinguish humanity from mere animality.  In *Otherwise than Being,*Levinas extends these tropes by employing the motif of “animation” (*OTB* 69) while analyzing spirit (*anima* in Greek).

[[22]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref22" \o ") To my knowledge, Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida have done the best work confronting this problem.

[[23]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/LevinasPerverter_20_1.htm" \l "_ednref23" \o ") Isn’t the face already two-sided?  The English word “face” can translate two French, *visage*and *face*.  Lingis translates *le visage*as “the face” of the transcendent Other (*TI* 25), and *la face*as “the side” (*TI* 131) of the immanent element.  Following this logic, *le face-à-face*should perhaps not be translated as “the face to face,” but rather as the opposite, “the side-to-side.”  The ethical encounter occurs only between two persons, two *persona*, two masks, two nobodies (*deux personnes*); I confront only a front of the Other.

Given the ambiguity inherent in the ethical situation, how can we philosophers then avoid Cohen’s relentless urging to “take sides” and to treat thinking like a fight between Athens and Jerusalem, a battle on the Western Front?

**Levinas: FOR THE KIDS!!!**

“The state of nausea that precedes vomiting, and from which vomiting will deliver us, encloses us on all sides.  we are revolted from the inside; our depths smother beneath ourselves; even our hearts are sick -- Emmanuel Levinas, 1935, “

“ People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth. -- Raoul Vaneigem, 1967 “

Against philosophies that propose impersonal origins, Levinas’s thought describes a continuous creation of gendered generations.  In this family drama, one begins life in the infantile state of enjoyment; then gets married to the woman who opens up the home; then becomes a man who owns property and produces works; then has sex and dies; then is reborn in a new generation as a son.  It often seems as if Manhood is somehow the telos of this genealogy.  In many ways, the “Face-to-Face” relationship described in *Totality and Infinity*is figured as a “Man-to-Man” relationship.  One is welcomed by the feminine alterity of the home, but facehood *qua* facehood seems to be the property of an adult male.  Only a man can manifest himself as a sovereign speaker, as a master who presents his words.  Thus, I am eminently responsible to *l’autre homme*, the Other Man, the brother I meet through fraternity.

            The correlation of ethical responsibility to masculine adulthood is reinforced by Levinas’s 1957 essay “A Religion for Adults” and *Totality and Infinity*’ssection “The Mythical Format of the Element.”  Paganism bathes one in the childlike innocence of elemental, oceanic consciousness, subjecting one to possession by anonymous forces.  Against this, Judaism tears one away from mere enthusiasm and positions the individual as an adult, as person who already exists in a state of ethical responsibility, who must already follow commands and perform duties.  Levinas avers “my consciousness as a man” – again, as an adult male – is contemporaneous with “the consciousness of any natural injustice, of the harm caused to the Other, by my ego structure.”[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn1), which Levinas elsewhere refers to as an offense perpetrated on *man*.[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn2)

            Although the Face-to-Face does describe a relationship between adult males, it would wrong to consider this relationship as the goal of one’s ethical development.  Although Levinas only employs the term “ethical” in certain sections of his texts, each moment of his genealogy opens up a new perspective, a different ethical orientation towards the Other, a different hyperbolic Riemann curvature of intersubjective space.

Alongside the Man-to-Man, Face-to-Face relationship, different ethical perspectives are denoted by every figure and every metaphoric that Levinas introduces in his writing.  Already in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the ethics of fecundity:  erotic love is not only a relationship with the Beloved, but also engenders a child, a messianic future of new hopes.  Furthermore, the figure of the “orphan” does not merely refer to a biblical motif, but subtly alludes to the moment of Need felt in the heart of childlike Enjoyment.[[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn3)  Through fecundity, one is already ethically responsible in relation to the consumption of others, committed “FOR THE KIDS!!!”, for all those born into misery, for all those lost in the supermarket of empty commodities.

Levinas deepens his meditation on the ethical significance of youth throughout the sixties.  In his essay on the May 1968 student and worker uprisings, “No Identity”, Levinas states that “Youth, which the philosopher loves is the ‘before being, the otherwise than being.’”[[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn4)   He praises this radical political movement:[[5]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn5) “among the most imperative sentiments of May 1968 was the refusal of a humanity that would be defined not by its vulnerability .. but by its self-satisfaction. … the person understood as an accumulation of being, by merits, titles, professional competence … instituting a heirarchized society maintained beyond the necessities of consumption.”[[6]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn6)

Levinas’s remarks demonstrate some interesting affinities to one of the texts that inspired the uprisings, Raoul Vaneigem’s *Traité du savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes generations,*known in English as *The Revolution of Everyday Life.*A more literal translation of the title, however would better demonstrate that this glorious affirmation of free subjectivity is not mere egoism, but is straightaway an ethical declaration *à l'usage des jeunes generations,*for the usage of the young generations, an immediate responsibility “FOR THE KIDS!!!”

Vaneigem’s critique of everyday life can be understood as emerging from Karl Marx and Georg Lukacs’s analysis of commodity fetishism and reification.  Under capitalism, all social relationships between persons appear as commodity relationships between things.  Because all human existence is mediated through these apparently objective, impersonal structures, men are alienated from the products of labor, from nature, from other men, and ultimately from themselves.

Vaneigem writes at a certain juncture in the development of capitalism in which the domination over production was in the process of being complemented by the domination over consumption.  As has become obvious in today’s world oversaturated by spectacles, capitalism not only controls the process and product of labor, but also dictates the way that one enjoys one’s own leisure time.  Vaneigem states, “The dictatorship of the consumable … perfects the real mastery of dead things over men.”[[7]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn7)  He repeatedly laments the way that consumerism is crushing the youth, making them “children doomed to age prematurely as soon as the market system has transformed them into mere objects of passive consumption.”[[8]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn8)  Personally, I fully concur with this profound sadness in seeing how much the kids today are being coerced into identifying themselves with corporate products**.**

The commodification of existence not only impinges upon the expression of free subjectivity, but also distorts the possibility of genuine interpersonal relationships.  One constantly experiences the humiliation of being an object to other people and one meets only with other objectified people, “cogs in the general machine for destroying people.”[[9]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn9)  Vaneigem decries the way that people represent themselves and perceive each other according to roles, becoming “people who are crushed under their wardrobes.”[[10]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn10)  Vaneigem bemoans, “Who reduces a man’s life to this pathetic sequence of clichés.  He does it himself, breaking his day down into a series of poses chosen more or less unconsciously from the range of dominant stereotypes.”[[11]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn11)   It is important to not confuse this statement with an existentialist condemnation of inauthenticity or an elitist avant-garde critique of kitsch culture.  Vaneigem’s remark comes from a compassion towards those of us – all of us – who are complicit in our own degradation, and from the defiant optimism that affirms that we are more than just clichés.

Like Vaneigem, Levinas also opposes the domination of roles, “violence ... makes persons play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray their own substance.”[[12]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn12)  In his analyses of the economy of phenomenon and expression, Levinas explains that individuals express their interiority through external works, works that could have been produced by and can be consumed by anybody in the impersonal public realm.  This is how we generally encounter others, through their works, consuming them as if they were products, entering their interiority by burglary.[[13]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn13) Thus, most of the time we meet another person not as an ethical *who,*a human face, but rather as an ontological *what,* a thing with properties.

To overcome this dehumanization, Vaneigem recommends that we rediscover the spontaneity, creativity, and poetry of our subjectivity.  Whether they know it or not, people are continuously expressing their creativity, and need only to reawaken their wills to live in order to bring new realities to being.  Until it is crushed out of her by consumer society, the child maintains the greatest power to affirm her daydreams, to transform her life, and to grasp her freedom.  Vaneigem explains, “The child acquires a subjective experience of freedom unknown to any other animal species. …. the child possesses a feeling of the continuous transformation of the world, or poetry, to an unlimited degree.”[[14]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn14)

Levinas figures a similarly exuberant childhood as the state of enjoyment, remarking that “enjoyment is the very production of a being that is born … [and] encloses itself in a person.”[[15]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn15) Levinas’s affirmation of this ecstatic state echoes the sentiments of Bataille by declaring “To enjoy without utility in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure – this is the human.”[[16]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn16)  That is, the humanity of the human and the subjectivity of the subject is constituted by enjoyment.  One can not overemphasize the importance of this affective joy.  The Face-to-Face would not be ethical if it did not begin from my own personal enjoyment:  “Whatever be the transfigurations this egoism will receive from speech, it is for the happiness constitutive of its very egoism that the I who speaks pleads”.[[17]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn17)

I would argue that it is within this realm of enjoyment that ethical responsibility emerges.  Once Levinas’s work is understood to be a series of reversals,[[18]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn18) it becomes clear that my enjoyment also doubles as an indigence, a lack, a suffering riveted to being.   Furthermore, the Other’s destitution for which I am responsible is the perspectival inversion of my own indigence.

Although Levinas dedicates his second major book to those “of all confessions and all nations, victims of the hatred of the other man,”[[19]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn19)it is not just the horror of man made mass death that we need to remember.  Vaneigem reminds us: “will it need as much blood again to show that a hundred thousand pinpricks kill as surely as a couple of blows with a club?”[[20]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn20)  As memorializing suffering and protesting continuing atrocities, we must also oppose the manifold ways we are degraded and conditioned in everyday life.

Vaneigem cites an “admirable principle” of Keats “"Everything that can be annihilated must be annihilated so that children may be saved from slavery"[[21]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn21)  As a gloss, we can adduce Levinas’ statement from his essay on May 1968 “the condition (or the uncondition) of being strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt brings man close to his neighbor.  In their uncondition of being strangers men seek one another.”[[22]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn22)  I would claim one’s responsibility to the other is not merely to undo her enslavement, but to encourage her liberty, to help her discover and embrace that which makes her free.  A pre-original anarchism obligates us to what Levinas calls “my responsibility for the freedom of others.”[[23]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_edn23)

I would like to claim that one is not only responsible for the other’s suffering but also for their pleasure.  Vaneigem explains the authentic communication of genuine love, saying “To love only oneself through other people, to be loved by others through the love they owe themselves.”[[24]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn24" \o ")  This sentiment does not express some empty egoism, but rather echoes Levinas’s explanation of love as a voluptuousity that delights in the voluptuousity of the beloved, perhaps even what Levinas refers to as the “wisdom of love”? The foreigners, the strangers do not just want an end to discrimination for their otherness, but as “Gentleman” Joe Strummer points out “the immigrants want to sing all night long.”[[25]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn25" \o ") As Simon Critchley urges, even if Levinas is correct that everything outside of the Bible and the Greeks is dance, then “let’s dance, let’s dance all night, let’s party hearty.”[[26]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn26" \o ")

Critchley’s remark should remind us that, in his later writings, Levinas maintains a constant dialogue with philosophy’s greatest dancer, Friedrich Nietzsche.  Although Levinas does dare to blaspheme against most infamous blasphemer in philosophy, he deliberately reappropriates obviously Nietzschean concepts.  Zarathustra’s Yes-Saying is reiterated as Levinas’s Saying in the form of Youth, the lightness of a free spirit already denucleated of its center of gravity. The *Otherwise than Being* of youth is inspired *Beyond Essence* through Nietzsche, of whom Levinas asks rhetorically “Is not Nietzsche the exceptional breath to make this ‘beyond’ resound?”

Nietzsche’s exceptional breath is exhaled in the form of laughter.  This can be understood on two levels.  First of all, to laugh is to use one’s mouth in a way that prohibits speaking.[[27]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn27" \o ")  Levinas had previously introduced this distinction between laughter and speech in *Totality and Infinity*through the witches of Macbeth[[28]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn28" \o "), whose laughter signals the ambiguity of a phenomenon that is manifested  “an-archic[ally], without principle, without beginning,”[[29]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn29" \o ") Levinas’s relocation, revocation of laughter through Nietzsche’s lips should therefore be understood as a way of reconceptualizing ethical anarchism.

Levinas moves beyond *Totality and Infinity* in his second book by further correlating this laughter with the dynamics of breathing, an inspiration which is religious prophecy rather than pagan possession.  Levinas states “the breathlessness of inspiration that paralyzes essence, that transpierces it with an inspiration by the other, an inspiration that is already expiration that ‘rends the soul.’”  In this form, the laugh is almost indistinguishable from a cry.  It is the sound made during the very trauma of birth. Levinas explains, “the human subject – me – [is] called on the brink of tears and laughter to responsibility.”[[30]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn30" \o ")  Subjectivity itself is reborn as youth each moment, in a continuous creation, perpetually “born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward”[[31]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn31" \o "), always laughing-crying at the wounds that tears it apart.

Levinas’s reference to the exceptional quality of Nietzsche’s “breath” should remind us of Alfred Jarry’s remarkable teaching of ‘pataphysics, “the science of the particular … [that] examines the laws governing exceptions, … since the laws that are supposed to have been discovered in the traditional universe are also correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones, but in any case accidental data which, reduced to the status of unexceptional exceptions.”  Even if commodity culture mass manufactures a series of formally identical[[32]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn32" \o ") objects, and each person is being objectified by the society of the spectacle, nevertheless, each person undergoes his own history of accidents, of joys and pains, has been scarred by time with unique identifying marks.  Time has imprinted you through your vulnerability, through your openness to wounds and outrage; time has left its traces in the places where you slit your wrists because you can’t forget the guy you killed and where your girlfriend hit you so you needed to move in with us and where you shot up your veins when you could still get China white instead of brown tar and where years of living on the streets have wrinkled you prematurely and where your facial piercings got infected because you were train hopping and hadn’t showered in weeks.

Levinas calls the May 68 demonstrators, “The youth [who] is the break in a context, the trenchant, Nietzschean prophetic word, without status in being.  Yet it is not arbitrary, for it has come from sincerity, that is, from responsibility for the other."[[33]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_edn33" \o ")  Breaking away from the weight of the past, we the kids, the broken kids, and all of us as broken subjectivities, are created anew each moment unto a world that we did not create, unto a world already broken.  Don’t look at us: it’s not our fault, the world is not our property, we don’t own it, we’re not the one’s who broke it; and thank you very much -- thanks for nothing -- because it looks like we the kids are the ones who have to fix it now.

FOR THE KIDS!!!

[[1]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref1) “A Religion for Adults, 16-17

[[2]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref2)

[[3]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref3)

[[4]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref4) P 147 This remark already indicates that Levinas’s central problematic in his second major book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*is how to conceive of the subjectivity of youth, of how to reconfigure his earlier correlation of childhood with elemental enjoyment.  The word “Beyond” similarly indicates a radical affiliation, but this is not yet the time to explicate it.

[[5]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref5) However, other comments demonstrate Levinas’s hesitation towards radicalism.  “While we recognize in Judaism as in certain aspirations of the left  …. defender of a the human person we cannot identify destiny of Judaism with destiny of proletarian … not just a social cause …. Revolution be fatal to Judaism, death of Judaism in revolutionary man … more delicate values than those at disposal of socialism.”  Nevertheless, we consider it important to read along this fissure to understand the mutual implications of Levinas and radical politics.

[[6]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref6)

[[7]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref7)

[[8]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref8) Page

[[9]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref9)

[[10]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref10)

[[11]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref11)

[[12]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref12)

[[13]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref13)

[[14]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref14)

[[15]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref15)

[[16]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref16)

[[17]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref17)

[[18]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref18) See “Levinas, Perverter”

[[19]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref19)

[[20]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref20)

[[21]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref21)

[[22]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref22) “No Identity” 149

[[23]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm#_ednref23) “Humanism and An-archy”136

[[24]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref24" \o ")

[[25]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref25" \o ") “Straight to Hell”

[[26]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref26" \o ") “Five Problems” p 176. As someone who has gone drinking with Professor Critchley, a man with many friends, I must aver that he really does know how to party.

[[27]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref27" \o ") Kissing is another such way of using one’s mouth.  Levinas’s discussions

[[28]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref28" \o ") See Levinas, Perverter for a discussion of Macbeth

[[29]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref29" \o ")

[[30]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref30" \o ")

[[31]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref31" \o ") Job

[[32]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref32" \o ")  (but not temporally, as Deleuze points out)

[[33]](https://www.waste.org/~roadrunner/writing/Levinas/Levinas_FTK_Paper_WEB.htm" \l "_ednref33" \o ") “No Identity” 151

1. Sensation breaks up every system; Hegel places at the origin of his dialectic the sensed, and not the unity of sensing and sensed in sensation. It is not by chance that in the Theaetetus\* Protagoras’s and Heraclitus’s theses are brought together, as though the singularity of the sentient would be required for Parmedidean being to be able to be pulverized into becoming and to unfold otherwise than as an objective flux of things. A multiplicity of sentients would be the very mode in which a becoming is possible—a becoming in which thought would not simply find again, now in movement, a being subject to a universal law, producing unity. Only in this way does becoming acquire the value of an idea radically opposed to the idea of being, does it designate the resistance to every integration expressed by the image of the river, in which, according to Heraclitus, one does not bathe twice, and according to Cratylus, not even once. A notion of becoming destructive of Parmenidean monism is acquired only through the singu­larity of sensation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)