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Response

by

Michael Fagenblat

My reading of Levinas's magnificent philosophical works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* is based on two primary convictions. The first is that Levinas's *philosophical works*, in which he addresses and enjoins people without regard for identity (without regard for peoplehood and law), were produced out of strong readings of the Judaic tradition. Samuel Moyn showed how deeply Levinas was nurtured by interwar Protestant philosophical theology,[1] and I sought to show that it was also possible to read Levinas's philosophy through the rabbinic tradition. Whereas Moyn's outstanding work shrugged off Levinas's Judaism as an "invention," I regard Levinas as a midrashic philosopher whose account of ethics amounts to a non-Jewish Judaism—non-Jewish since it is addressed to anyone, yet Judaism since, in my view, it is midrashically determined from the ground up. Most of the book attempts to show how Levinas's philosophy works as a reading of core concepts from the Judaic tradition and thereby as a phenomenological midrash of biblical, rabbinic, and Maimonidean texts, all of which Levinas knew well.

But my concern was not only to add another perspective to our understanding of Levinas's sources. My second conviction was that a profoundly hermeneutical view of Levinas was necessary to save it from the charge of dogmatism that has been leveled against it. The turn to midrash was therefore not only an attempt to account for the sources of Levinas's concepts; it was also an attempt to make philosophical sense of them by understanding their hermeneutical rather than dogmatic character. I was struck by the prospect that a major philosophical enterprise, which claimed to describe nothing less than the basic ethical conditions of the world we humans inhabit, was comprehensively shaped by a reading of Judaic texts and concepts, even if the two nonuniversalizables to which Aronowicz points, Jewish peoplehood and Jewish law, do not feature as such in these works. Even if there is no account of Jewish peoplehood or law in Levinas's

I am grateful to Annette Aronowicz for her critique of my book, and especially for her valuable and characteristically lucid presentation of Levinas's views on Jewish peoplehood. That view is indeed at odds with the interpretation of Levinas I provide, but I belive my interpretation of Levinas's philosophical position is still to be preferred. This requires explanation.

1. Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

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philosophy, here we have something like a "Torah for all who come into the world," as the Mekhilta calls it. I am intrigued by the prospect of using Jewish sources for genuine philosophical inquiry. And if I am right in finding a thick midrashic weave on the underside of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, then these works are remarkable, verging on the unique, for the way they draw deeply from the Judaic heritage to articulate a broad philosophical view that anyone at all might adopt.

To explain the secularity and nonexclusivity of Levinas's philosophical works—in other words, to explain the philosophical status of this non-Jewish Judaism—I turned to Christianity, a move Aronowicz finds "very dubious." Writing with an exclusive view to Levinas's Jewish writings, she provides an alternative, cogent, and compelling presentation of his commitment to the unique value of Jewish particularism and of his skepticism regarding anything like Judeo-Christianity. She is right in suggesting that "since in the philosophical works, he [Levinas] never mentions Jews at all, it would seem that it is only in the Jewish writings that we have access to what he thinks about them." But my study did not seek to determine what Levinas thinks about Jews, Jewish particularism, or Jewish-Christian relations. It was concerned with the philosophy of Judaism animating *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* and with the implications of having discovered the value of Judaism for phenomenological inquiry. In light of these admittedly philosophical interests, the secular, nonexclusive interpretation of core concepts from the Judaic tradition (creation, covenant, separation, goodness, holiness, the saying, singularity, substitution, and others) that Levinas deploys in his philosophical works legitimize and indeed demand the problematic hybrid of Judeo-Christianity. There are three reasons for this. One is that the founding texts of Christianity are, like my view of Levinas's philosophical works, midrashim on earlier forms of Judaism in which the categories of peoplehood and law no longer matter as they once did. Although not to the same pervasive extent, the Quran and thereafter Islam also contains interpretations of many of the theological concepts I find in Levinas's philosophy. Why then not refer to Levinas's "Judeo-Islamic" philosophy? Because Islam's emphasis on the juridico-theological determination of the community is precisely the element of Judaism that Levinas excises in his philosophical works. By contrast, in the age of Christian secularism that we in the modern West inhabit, juridico-theological and ecclesiological preoccupations are greatly attenuated. The convergence between Levinas's philosophical ethics and Christian modernity is therefore based on the twofold supposition that regards Christianity as midrashically entwined with Judaism in a unique manner and, more importantly, as signaling Judaism's capacity for self-secularization, that is, for retaining the normative force of its theological heritage without resorting to ecclesiological authority. One could therefore say that it has taken Christianity (including the Christian Hebraic tradition) to secularize Judaism, or to see that Judaism already bears the promise of a secular ethics such as Levinas provides. Secondly, it is not just the form of Christian secularity that correlates with Levinas's secular Judaism, it is also the content. Even as I argue for the biblical, rabbinic, and Maimonidean sources as work in Levinas's philosophy, I accept Moyn's view that this

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philosophy is shaped by Protestant theological sources, as well as, of course, by ancient Greek and modern European philosophers. If this complex range of sources can be bundled at all, then it seems to me that Judeo-Christian is about as close as one could get to such a label, despite the dangerous fraught geopolitical connotations this term has acquired in the years subsequent to Levinas's creative philosophical synthesis.

In contrast to my locating of Levinas's philosophy within a more or less discernible nexus of traditions that can be called Judeo-Christian, Aronowicz regards Levinas as pointing to an "absolute" account of ethics that is "outside all cultures and all times." This is the crux of our disagreement concerning how best to read Levinas, and the third reason for my yielding to the problematic hybrid of Judeo-Christianity (to which I shall return below). Although Aronowicz accepts my argument for a deep affinity between Levinas's secular philosophical works and a certain midrashic pedigree, she also wants to defend the view, promoted by Levinas and many of his commentators, that the ethical claims of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* stand independently of the religious traditions to which their author belonged. She insists that it is not just Judaism at work in Levinas's phenomenology but something outside Judaism since, according to Levinas, ethics provides an unmediated access to the real sense of the Other. "Levinas *is* making an absolute claim," she says. This is precisely the view I am trying to challenge. Our disagreement on this point is marked by an irony. In order to assert the absolute character of ethics, which Levinas constantly describes in terms of revelation, Aronowicz denies that this revelation is Judaic. To argue that Levinas's account of ethics is generated out of Jewish texts and experiences is, according to Aronowicz, to reduce the revelation of the face of the Other to historical, cultural, and conventional norms. Whereas by arguing for the significant role of Judaism throughout Levinas's philosophy, I risk contextualizing and thus de-absolutizing his claim for the transcendence of the Other. Aronowicz thus denies the Judaism at work in Levinas's philosophy in order to bestow upon it the authority of an absolute revelation, whereas I affirm this Judaism in order to deny its "absolute" claims. The irony notwithstanding, it seems to me that to make sense of Levinas's work one must either accept the absolute revelation of the Other or else account for the mediated force of the ethical claim.

If Aronowicz thinks that foregrounding the interpretative elements of Levinas's work is reductive, I think that denying them in the name of an absolute ethical claim is dogmatic. I take the criticisms raised by philosophers such as Gillian Rose, Judith Butler, Dominique Janicaud, and Alain Badiou seriously. They have argued that Levinas is ultimately not a philosopher for whom the rigor of conceptual or phenomenological analysis is paramount but a religious dogmatist captivated by the authority of a revealed law that is merely posited. The objection of these critics consists of a protest against Levinas's apparent subordination of rational and even phenomenological considerations to an ethical imperative that can neither be conceived by the mind nor received by phenomenological intuition. The putatively absolute nature of ethics, in their view, is merely a way of invoking an unphilosophical authority. Since Levinas proposes that the

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imperative of ethics comes from "the Other" whose face is invisible and unmediated, there is no way to bring discursive or rational considerations to bear on "ethics." If "ethics" is imposed by an authority standing outside the scope of reason and even beyond the evidence of phenomenality—the absolute face of the Other—it is nothing but religious dogmatism masquerading as moral piety. In Butler's estimation, Levinas's account of ethics involves "a demand that is *not* open to interpretation" and is therefore no more or less "uncritical and unthinking than an acquiescence to an ungrounded authoritarian law."[2] On the basis of a similar appraisal, Janicaud concluded that "such a dogmatism could only be religious."[3]

But what is one to do? After all, Levinas's recourse to the presence of the face is indeed an appeal to the absolute givenness of a revelation whose moral force manifests beyond every conceptual grasp one has of it. Be it in the mode of rational reflection, representation, or even volition, Levinas contends that consciousness never accedes to the face and yet is bound, indebted, or obliged to it. How, then, can the charge of uncritical, pious dogmatism be averted? Moreover, does not the appeal to a commandment beyond reason ironically wind up looking very much like an appeal to the numinous that Levinas so wants to avoid? How does a commandment outside of discourse, history, and reason reveal itself? This is the central question. How does revelation reveal itself? The appeal to the face gets us nowhere, because on Levinas's own view the imperative is not issued from the phenomenality of the face. The face is invisible. Levinas even denies, quite explicitly, that ethics is strictly phenomenological and even that there is an experience of ethics.[4] I do not agree with the critics who charge Levinas with dogmatism, but I understand their concern.

Aronowicz thinks I have given too much weight to such critics. But I think that without accepting the hermeneutical or midrashic dimension of Levinas's work the charge of dogmatism is indeed hard to avoid. How does one answer a critic, or a witness, who charges "that is not what the face says"? Aronowicz says that "The whole point of Levinas's work was to redirect reason to an acknowledgment of a responsibility that precedes it. If these philosophers feel constrained by this, it just means, from a Levinassian point of view, that they remain

2. Judith Butler, "Ethical Ambivalence," *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 2000), 15–28, 28.

3. Dominique Janicaud http://books.google.com.au/books?id=HoWAnsOly3wC&dq=janicaud+phenomenology+theological+turn&source=gbs_navlinks_s

4. As he remarkably puts it: "The ethical language we have resorted to does not arise out of a special moral experience, independent of the description hitherto elaborated. The ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics. … The tropes of ethical language are found to be adequate for certain structures of the description: for the sense of the approach in its contrast with knowing, the face in contrast with a phenomenon." *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 120, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 154–55. Although one should be careful in reading Levinas backwards, my point is that Levinas was always, and especially from the late 1940s, finding the "tropes of ethical language" that describe "the sense of the approach in its contrast to knowing, the face in contrast with a phenomenon," in the immemorial heritage of the Judaic theological tradition. Ethics is not simply a phenomenology but a phenomenological hermeneutic of everyday life.

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Western philosophers." I agree with this, but I want to make a not-so-subtle insistence on a subtle point. When Levinas redirects reason to an acknowledgment of a responsibility that precedes reason, he is not redirecting reason to some absolute realm that only an unmediated ethical intuition can reach; he is redirecting reason toward *a tradition of revelation*, more precisely, toward a tradition of revelation *reconstituted midrashically.* He indeed subordinates philosophy to an ethical revelation, but this ethical revelation "is not in heaven," as it were; it is a discursive accomplishment, a form of midrashic reasoning that actively makes ethical sense out of revelation. What worries me about Aronowicz's view is that it suggests an analogy—let me stress that it is only an analogy—to a type of fundamentalism according to which one can simply point to the literal meaning of revelation and affirm it against all those who want to constrain experience with epistemology. The rabbinic tradition is essentially antifundamentalist. One is reminded of the talmudic sage Rava, who complained that people stand up in honor of the Torah but do not stand up in honor of the sages, when in fact it is only the sages who determine the meaning of the Torah. Moreover, the fact that Levinas thinks through the Jewish tradition and that the tradition provides him with a justification for his view of ethics should not lead one to think that this reduces ethics to concepts. That is the part of my approach to Levinas that Aronowicz calls "dangerous" and "simply the opposite of what Levinas is saying." But what I want to insist upon is that midrash is not epistemology, for it does not organize phenomena into fixed a priori concepts. As usual, Maimonides is helpful here. In *Perek Helek* he says that people misinterpret the Torah (i.e., revelation) for two reasons. Either they take it literally and think that it is irrational—I think that Butler and Badiou belong to this group—or else they take it literally by jettisoning reason; and I'm afraid that this might be Aronowicz's view. And Maimonides' answer, of course, is that revelation only makes sense if one does not take it literally, which is more or less what I want to claim about Levinas's recourse to revelation. Even if I am reading Levinas against himself, I think that it is only in light of the Torah that one can make sense of his account the Other. Aronowicz's recourse to Levinas's most famous talmudic reading, "The Temptation of Temptation (BT Shabbat 88a), to demonstrate that ethics arises "before any intercession of reason or culture" nicely, if ironically, illustrates my point: Levinas's saying that ethics transcends all cultural and temporal conditions not only takes place through but is also shaped by a concrete, historical Judaic text.

This performative contradiction of using Levinas's interpretation of Judaic texts to claim that ethics appears "outside all cultures and all times" extends to his philosophical works as well, if one is attentive to their midrashic underside. When Levinas speaks of the absolute and the transcendent, I take him to be describing the sense of the absolute and the transcendent as it is indicated by the tradition inaugurated with the Hebrew Bible. Here is an example I did not mention in my book, although it is no doubt the most obvious of all. Where has anyone ever seen, or even heard of, a face that can in principle never be seen and yet speaks, and, moreover that speaks in the mode of commandment? Plainly, in the biblical *panim.* The notion of *panim* in the Hebrew Bible is marvelously resonant and perhaps ambiguous. *Panim* of course means visage, but it is

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ubiquitously applied to God, where it is often translated as "presence" precisely because in the minds of many translators, as well as many readers of the Bible, the *panim* of God has no facial features. In fact for the priestly author, to whom Levinas is especially close, the holiness of this presence of God is revealed only through command.[5] I therefore cannot see how anyone can claim that Levinas's account of the invisible face is an unmediated phenomenological description. It is, on the contrary, *an intuition of an ethical commandment expressed by the voices of the texts of Judaism, or of Judeo-Christianity, in the presence of the Other.* The only access we have to a face that is simultaneously defaced of its eyes, ears, nose, and even what comes out of its mouth and at the same time issues an absolute commandment is in the *panim* of the Hebrew Bible.[6] Moreover, I think Levinas's extraordinary phenomenological intelligence allowed him to intuit insights that have only recently been perceived philologically. For example, the intellectualist assumptions of postmedieval biblical scholarship generally insisted that the biblical God has no form and is therefore invisible. But modern scholarship has demonstrated that the God of the Jews is (or was) not invisible in the sense that he cannot be. Just so, the invisibility of the Other does not lie in the fact that she cannot be seen but in the claim that she *ought* not to be fixed by the gaze of a knowing, objectifying consciousness. This is what the prohibition on representation means in the Bible. And this is what it means for Levinas when he wages his battle against the reign of the *Be-griff*, the *comprehension* that grasps the Other in a concept.[7] The so-called "direct optics" of the *visage* is seen by Levinas himself with biblical lenses.[8]

5. As Israel Knohl explains, "[T]wo principles are at the heart [of the priestly school], holiness and commandment." Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and The Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 149. Knohl's important study of the Priestly Code of the Torah is particularly interesting for our purposes since it argues that the Holiness Code in the Pentateuch (Leviticus 17–27) is composed under the influence of the classical *prophetic critique of the sublime but amoral theology* of the Priestly Torah. The Holiness Code would attest to the earliest attempt to reunite the ethical and the sublime, which is essentially what Levinas is trying to do. That is why it is not principally Plato's "good beyond being" that provides Levinas with a model for ethical transcendence but also always an attention to the moral prophets and Leviticus 17–27. This is another example of why I think Moyn is wrong to propose that Levinas is more indebted to Rudolf Otto, for example, than to the Jewish tradition. Both the account of God as "wholly other" *and* its moral critique are *intrinsic* to the theology of the Torah. Moyn's impressive intellectual history is too historicist and not sufficiently hermeneutical. It fails to see that Levinas has not only secularized the Protestant theology of the interwar period but also the tradition of moral holiness that is intrinsic to Jewish thought and within which Levinas is also situated.

6. Compare TI, 177–80/TeI, 151–55.

7. Levinas no doubt also has other related senses of *panim* in mind, such as *standing before* (*lipnim*) and *within* (*bipnim*).

8. That is why I am not at all surprised that Levinas confessed to Derrida that "what really interests me in the end is not ethics, not ethics alone, but the holy, the holiness of the holy," Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault, Michael Maas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 4. Moshe Idel related another intriguing tale to me, which is that Levinas once told him that he regarded Rashi as the greatest philosopher. One could easily dismiss this as facile, throwaway, or

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My argument is that this midrashic approach to *Totality and Infinity* and to *Otherwise than Being* answers the problem of dogmatism. Because now we have an answer to the question "how do I know that the face commands?" The answer is, because this is how I respond to (or read) the tradition(s) that provide(s) the hermeneutical horizon for my experience of the Other. It is because I experience the Other within this Judaic or Judeo-Christian horizon that I see the sense of ethics to which Levinas is pointing. Instead of appealing to a direct optics, I make the appeal to midrash, and I emphasize that midrash is a living heritage in which the conflict of interpretation transpires. If this deflates the absolutist character of Levinas's claims about ethics, it also situates them within an open discursive field that allows them to be justified and contested. For "ethics" is doomed if it amounts to the choice between a dogmatic intuition that reason cannot know (contested by Badiou et al. in the name of philosophy) and a reductive epistemology that subordinates the Other to a concept (which is how Aronowicz and other Levinassians regard philosophy). This is the old and in my view unsatisfying dichotomy of Athens and Jerusalem. In its place I sought to explore the consistency between Levinas's philosophical works and a certain interpretation of Judaism, albeit in a secular, nonexclusivist guise. A midrashic reading of Levinas's philosophical works resists the charge of dogmatism by reclaiming the discursive and responsive work that determines the so-called "absolute" sense of the revelation of the Other.

This midrashic approach to Levinas's philosophy also enables me to address the question of the political from a different perspective. From the absolutist perspective that Aronowicz adopts, the question of the political is hard to place, since politics is unthinkable in terms of I and Other relations. Levinassians are thus faced with the prospect of a tacit humanism implicitly supporting the "universal" scope of ethical life and yet deprived of the tools to carve out its political contours in any recognizable way. Or else, as the standard view has it, for Levinas politics becomes necessary, almost as a concession, on account of "the third." The absolute primacy of the ethical cannot be sustained and therefore one proceeds to rationalize social life. So one constructs a politics on the basis of this fragile originary ethical relation. But Levinas does have a philosophical account of politics, even what might be called a political ontology or a political theology, and denying it in the name of an uncritically assumed or tenuously derived universal humanism will not suffice.

My view turns it around. Since I find that what Levinas calls ethics is hermeneutical from the outset, it always already arises in the contexts of shared traditions and living communities. The fact of the collective, of the "us," does not need to be derived; on the contrary, it is the condition for ethics, since ethics is an interpretation of *our* heritage—not something that happens to me alone in absolute relation to the Other but something to which I attest in the context of

bizarre, or else one could take seriously the thought that Levinas contemplated the rabbinic tradition quite like Heidegger pondered the Greeks, though with greater fidelity.

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my belonging to an unstable but concretely shared heritage. If we think of ethics midrashically, then what Levinas calls fraternity is not derived from ethics but is the precondition for it. Some sort of collectivity or republicanism—some sort of sharing of a heritage—is the precondition for ethics. And this means that what is required for ethics is not *politique àpres* (as Levinas called for) but *politique avant*, so long as we understand politics here not as the ordinary machinations of political life but as the political memory carrying our shared ethical heritage. This is why Levinas has such a strong sympathy for republicanism, whether in its French or Zionist form, because he understands that ethics relies on the sharing and contesting of a living moral heritage and that some political republic is the condition for such a sharing and contesting.

But if, qua philosopher, Levinas is more of a republican than a liberal or a cosmopolitan, this does not privilege the Jewish people as an ontological or ethical category. What is *philosophically* significant for Levinas is the Judaic heritage; the "Jewish" is of no ethical consequence. Think of the difference between the Judaic and the Jewish as analogous to the distinction between the ontological and the ontic in *Being and Time:* There are no ontic implications about Jewishness, although Judaism or Judeo-Christianity is the ontological horizon for our moral sense of life. Levinas privileges the Judaic, not the Jewish. I suppose it is a matter of loving the Torah more than the Jews, or more than "Jewish identity." Needless to say, I think it is tremendously important for subjects to appropriate Levinas's Judaic midrash, especially in the state of Israel. But this can happen in ways that are at odds with all reigning forms of Jewish identity and peoplehood or in ways that are entirely indifferent to them. Being Jewish is valuable for any number of personal, historical, and perhaps theological reasons, but a philosophy of Judaism, including Levinas's, is utterly indifferent to the identity of the self or the Other. Indeed from the perspective of Levinas's philosophy, neither the self nor the Other has any proper identity. The phenomenology of ethical life is conditioned by the secularized theological heritage we share—*whoever we are.* Our moral experience is shaped by the theological heritage of Judaism or Judeo-Christianity, whether we are Jews, Christians, atheists, Westerners, non-Westerners or whoever. Levinas's philosophical works function as an interpretative argument within the ownerless yet very concrete theological heritage that constitutes our ethical sense of the world. By midrashically appealing to see each other in light of this ownerless heritage, Levinas invites *anyone* to share in this sense of ethics or else to contest it by an alternative interpretation of our concrete moral situation. Like a rather recent view of Paul, Levinas's philosophical works midrashically reveal what the oracles of Israel mean for modes of solidarity and subjectivity that include Jewish particularism without *ethically* privileging it.[9] Aronowicz

9. In no way do I suggest that Levinas denies the significance of the blessings and the promises and even the lessons borne by the Jewish people in their history. Aronowicz says that "it would be a mistake to compare his project to that of St. Paul" because "for Levinas, Jewish particularism is not just one particularism among many." But neither is it for Paul. Think of Romans 9:4–5: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God

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shows how Levinas does privilege Jewish particularism—but only in his Jewish writings. My concern is to explore how Judaism works in his philosophical project, and here I maintain that Judaism is thoroughly at work, in a covert midrashic fashion, though not in a way that ethically privileges Jewish particularism.

Let me put it from another angle. I confronted a problem in regarding Levinas as a hermeneutical thinker, because this is essentially a Heideggerian gesture. It is Heidegger who transformed ontology into hermeneutics. And one might hazard to say that the difference between what Heidegger called "ontology" and what Levinas called "ethics" consists only of their respective hermeneutics. This is because Levinas follows Heidegger in locating transcendental phenomenology in the hermeneutics of everyday life, even as he inflects this hermeneutic, via a certain philosophy of Judaism, toward the face of the Other. Since this is the view I bring to my reading of Levinas's philosophy of Judaism, much like a certain hermeneutics of Christianity is "formally indicated" in Heidegger's phenomenology of everyday life, I kept on seeing my reading as repeating the major political problem of *Being and Time.* In section 74, which I regard as the beginning of Heidegger's philosophical opening to Nazism, the German philosopher virtually invokes an ontology of peoplehood and on that basis an authentic destiny of the *Volk* in order to make sense of Dasein's fundamentally cohistorical condition. Having argued that Dasein has no essential identity but derives its horizon of possibilities for *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity) from its ontological horizon, Heidegger makes two crucial moves, or maybe one and half. First, he observes that authenticity necessarily involves a coattestation of the self. Since all we really are, for Heidegger, is this sociohistorical Dasein, authenticity necessarily requires a *cohistoricizing* "in terms of the heritage which that resoluteness, as thrownness, takes over."[10] Just as "Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein," the worry is that Levinas might also think that Israel's "ethical destiny," as he once called it,[11] requires a fateful cohistoricizing of the Judaic heritage, perhaps even in the state of Israel, though Levinas did not ultimately think so. Unlike liberals, humanists, and cosmopolitans, Heidegger thinks that there is no appropriation of the self without cohistoricizing and heritage. I think Heidegger was right to point to this exigency and I also recognized that my reading of Levinas—according to which there is no ethics without the Judaic (or Judeo-Christian) heritage—leads to the same problem. The problem is this: How can one appropriate this ethics, this heritage of Judaism (of Judeo-Christianity), without cohistoricizing it? In a sense one can't. But Heidegger's other move, or the half move (because it does not follow from *Being and Time*), was to yield, personally if not philosophically, to the temptation to resolve the heritage upon a *Volk.* The way to avoid this temptation, I think,

who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen." The passage continues with Paul's allegories of Israel and the children of Abraham, allegories that Levinas frequently repeats.

10. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittoria Klostermann, 1976), 384–85; *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 436.

11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, trans. Gary D. Mole (London: Continuum, 1994), 190.

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is not to deny the heritage of our ethical concepts but to maintain its unappropriatable character. The Judaic (and Judeo-Christian) heritage of ethics that shapes *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* cannot be appropriated by any particular people in the present, including the Jewish people, just as Heidegger should have acknowledged the authentic destiny of his *Volk.* Although I argue that Levinas's philosophical account of ethics arises from the Judaic moral heritage, I also argue that there is no ethical *Volk* that could coattest to this heritage of thinking. What Levinas himself thought about this is not strictly relevant, but I happen to think he deliberately obfuscates and allegorizes the notion of Israel for this very reason, which also makes him sound rather Pauline. Needless to say, I've got nothing against the idea of Israel or of the Jewish people, on the contrary. But if what Levinas calls ethics really amounts to a philosophy of Judaism, as I hope to have shown, then it is crucial that the heritage that it interprets not resolve itself upon any people as the authentic ethical fraternity bearing this heritage in its history, memory, traditions, laws, or body. Not only is it crucial that such a resolution of the Judaic heritage never transpire in "a people," but it is also ontologically impossible. Which is why, if there is a relation between being Jewish and Judaism in Levinas's philosophical works, it is completely anarchical, a being Jewish that runs that famous risk of subjectivism that on the one hand must appropriate its heritage with others and on the other hand can never resolve itself into "a people," neither through blood, memory, or "destiny" nor through land or language, nor through determinations imposed by rabbis, states, or even enemies. In Levinas's philosophy of Judaism, the only thing that counts is Israel according to the spirit of ethics. And in my view, this simultaneously justifies the existence of political republics in which this moral heritage is preserved (e.g., France, Israel, the United States) and at the same time implies that there is no proper community that would identify the Other as only one of ours.

Michael Fagenblat
Monash University
Victoria, Australia

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