FACING THE OTHER: LEVINAS, PERELMAN AND ROSENZWEIG

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Idealism completely carried out reduces all ethics to politics—
—Levinas (Totality and Infinity 216)

"Otherness" or "alterity" have become fashionable terms in recent literary theory. The most problematic question, however, is defining just what and who is the "other." In most post-structuralist theory, "otherness" is usually accompanied by the notion of a "radical rupture" which subverts closed identities and all-encompassing systems. Is "otherness," then, an inchoate anonymous unknown reminding us of the limits of our knowledge and thus the fount of endless skepticism? Or is it the passage through which the Otherness of divine transcendence crosses? Is it the basis for nihilism, or for a political awareness of the relation of power to knowledge and the commitment to subvert oppression? Is it Derrida's "difference," Kristeva's feminine semiosis, Lacan's Unconscious, Foucault's marginalized discourses?

Moreover, can the relation to the human other as an individual other person have anything to do with epistemological alterity in general? And what do these notions of alterity have to do with the relation of philosophy and literary theory to Judaism?

In this essay, I want to examine the ways in which the contemporary French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas addresses these issues, for they are at the heart of his work. Levinas is one of the few writers who is able to restore ethical binding in the face of the ruptures enacted in post-modern thought. His aim is to deconstruct the subject but re-

A shorter version of this essay was first presented as a paper at a conference on "Covenants in Law in Literature" at Bar-Ilan University in Israel in honor of Professor Harold Fisch.

R&L. 22.2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1990)
tain it as responsible, lucid, awake, obligated. In fact, Levinas' work may be characterized as an extraordinary ethical critique of philosophy. It is a "summoning" of philosophical reason in the sense that a summons is an urgent call or order to a trial. It is also a summons of "witnesses" whose testimony will enact a judgement on philosophy, and a summons to a prior obligation of both the philosophical "knowing subject," and the subject as the "contents" or object of philosophy.

I will analyze Levinas' work in relation to both contemporary literary theory and modern Jewish philosophy by comparing it to two other important modern theorists of language and ethics whose work, like his, needs to be brought much more into contemporary debates about these issues: the rhetorical theorist Chaim Perelman and the great German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. Finally, I will discuss some of the relations between Levinas' work and the Holocaust, that catastrophic event which seems to have broken all covenants between God and humanity, human and human, language and ethics.

I. Levinas' Background

Since Levinas' work is not as well known in America as in Europe, let me begin with some biographical facts. Though Levinas is commonly described as a "French" philosopher, he was actually born in Russia, in Kovno, in 1906 and left in 1923 for philosophical studies (especially in phenomenology) in France and Germany. He became a French citizen and was mobilized into the French army when World War II began; the French uniform saved him from deportation to the gas chambers when he was captured by the Germans. While he was held in a prisoner-of-war camp, however, all his family remaining in Russia were murdered by the Nazis. When he emerged from the camp after the war, Levinas wrote of his "profound need to leave the climate of that [Heidegger's] philosophy" (Existence 19). He proceeded with an extensive critique of phenomenological thought and the way it related consciousness to being.

The entire thrust of Levinas' work is to reverse the subordination of ethics to ontology (the study of Being) and the other branches of philosophy. Ethics is not something to be added on after we establish a metaphysics or logic or aesthetics or epistemology. Ethics, which he defines as the irreducible relation of obligation to the other, is prior. Prior here does not mean "coming before" in any linear chronological sense, but a realm which has not been thought and upon which thought nevertheless depends for its possibility.

This search for what philosophy has not or cannot think is an enter-
prise common to many modern French and German thinkers, from Heidegger to Derrida. In Deconstructionist literary theory influenced by Derrida, the focus on the non-knowledge which always conditions and eludes knowledge led to a recognition of the instability of linguistic meaning, and a practice of skeptical critique as the constant unsettling of all foundations. Those more inspired by Foucault examine the hidden links of knowledge and power, force and signification. These varying means of rupturing philosophical “totality” all involve a solicitation of what is “other” as what has been “marginalized, repressed, excluded” by philosophy and its modes of intelligibility. The “subject” defined as the individual perceiving self or transparent consciousness who makes meaning of the world has been put into question. Levinas, however, differs from most post-structuralist thinkers by asserting that “l’absolument Autre, c’est Autrui” (Totality 39). The word “autrui” signifies the other as personal other; in other words, absolute alterity passes or is traced through the personal human other.

But there is another sense in which what is other is the Jew, and there is this “other” side to Levinas the philosopher as well. In 1947 Levinas also became the Director of the École Normale Israélite Orientale, a Jewish school which is part of the Alliance Israélite, an organization dedicated to spreading French and Jewish culture throughout Jewish communities in France and its former Mediterranean empire. He held this position simultaneously with his posts teaching philosophy in French universities and has written prolifically on Judaism and Jewish life.

He has also delivered, for the past twenty years, the annual Talmudic lecture at the Colloquium of French-Jewish Intellectuals. In these lectures he has argued that what modern Judaism needs most of all is a renewed relation to the Talmud, that vast corpus of ancient and medieval rabbinic commentary on Jewish law and lore. His work is permeated with a distrust of religious mysticism; in his view, such attempts at ecstatic fusion or “direct experience of the sacred” destroy the lucidity of an ethical metaphysics.

One of the figures Levinas uses to describe alterity in both his philosophical and his Jewish writings is “face.” But the “face of the other” is not for him a visual image; it is, rather, a facing relation. The other faces my own separate and narcissistic ego, interrupts, and shames it—a calling into question which is the call of conscience as both an appeal and an order. The connotations of the Hebrew word for face (panim) in biblical and rabbinic tradition are all important here. The verbal root panah in Hebrew connotes a “turning” towards something, and
also a kind of personal presence. In Levinas, facing is being confronted with, turned towards, facing up to, being judged and called to by the other. Facing is a disruption of that free, autonomous self which through its reasoning and consciousness thinks it can construct the world out of itself, or know the world from itself.

For both Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), the great German-Jewish philosopher whose work deeply influenced Levinas, that presumption is the archetypal gesture of philosophy: idealism. Indeed, Richard Cohen has persuasively argued that the very notion of the "face" in Levinas may have its source in the culminating pages of Rosenzweig's great work The Star of Redemption wherein Rosenzweig describes the apocryphal truth with the figure of a face.

The facing relation in Levinas is not, however, a relation of free reciprocal exchange, and not a Buberian I-Thou dialogue. Instead, this facing traumatizes and empties the subject. It binds the self to the other despite the self's will in an obligation prior to freedom, a heteronomy or "difficile liberté," to use the title of one of Levinas' books on Judaism. Identity comes not from the coincidence of self with self but from the recurrence of the call of obligation to the other. On the one hand, Levinas seeks within the philosophical tradition for moments of recognition of this ethical otherness (for example in Plato's notion of the "Good beyond Being" and Descartes' "Idea of the Infinite"). On the other hand, I think he is also calling philosophy to this recognition in what I would characterize as a kind of prophetic and rhetorical appeal that coincides with Levinas' understanding of Judaism.

II. Rhetoric and Politics in Recent Literary Theory

The relations of Levinas' Jewish thought to his philosophical thought and to his personal biography are highly complex matters which I can only touch upon here. Levinas never directly mentions his own experience of World War II in his philosophical work, but it seems to me to be one reason why he "brings philosophy to trial" and part of the explanation for the kinds of witnesses he summons in that trial—and for his very notion of signification as a kind of witness, of language itself as summons, judgment, apology, and teaching. That devastating experience must have also been one motivation for his attempt to construct a philosophy which itself is not based on war (even as a game) but on justice and peace—peace defined as that very moment of renunciation, apology, welcome, and vulnerable exposure to the other.
It is not fortuitous that Levinas begins and ends both his great philosophical books *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being* with meditations on war and peace. The very first sentence in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* is “Are we duped by morality?” Isn’t war the very “truth of the real” as Heraclitus long ago argued when he said “War is king of all”? If so, politics as the art of foreseeing and winning war would be the “very exercise of reason” and moral consciousness would have no recourse against “the mocking gaze of the political man” (21). Needless to say, that mocking gaze is found in much recent literary theory which has taken an intensely political turn through schools of criticism variously dubbed the New Historicism, cultural materialism, or cultural poetics. What might be some of the relations of Levinasian ethics to this new literary politics?

Both right-wing pragmatists such as Stanley Fish and left-wing Marxists such as Terry Eagleton argue that truth is a variable social construct connected to the interests and ideologies of particular social groups. The key question, however, is, What is the sociality of this social relation? For the political critics it is at bottom a contest for power, a struggle between domination and subversion wherein different social forces endlessly vie for control of meaning. The aim of this kind of criticism is to reveal the “social constructedness” (or what some critics call the “rhetoricity”) as opposed to the “ontological groundedness” of these historical and social versions of truth. This act of “de-mystification” is intended to empower other voices which have been muted or repressed to contest these accounts. Roland Barthes’ “pleasure of the text” has been turned into the “war of discourse.”

Yet for most of the cultural-political critics there is no space “outside” this realm of war and negotiation, or outside the mutual implications of discourse and power and the constraints of institutions on “cultural practices.” Hence they call for what they term a “rhetorical” notion of truth, and associate rhetorical criticism with the detection and deployment of language in the assertion of power, or with “textual strategies” in the war of discourse. Or, rhetoric is used—as in de Man or Derrida—to denote a form of negative epistemology and antagonism to philosophy, a language of tropes that interferes with and undercuts the philosophical logos.

In any case, this is a very distorted notion of rhetoric which severs it from one of its ancient roots—what Aristotle called “dialectic” or deliberative argument, a mode of reasoning which deals with theses that are not necessary but only probable. That is, where formal logical syllogisms cannot apply, where there are not absolute grounds for truth,
but in which decisions and actions still need to be reasoned over and taken.

That is the aspect of rhetoric which Chaim Perelman revives in his masterwork *The New Rhetoric*. Rhetoric for Perelman involves a critique of modern forms of logical and mathematical rationalism which have their precursor in Descartes, but which have been overextended and misapplied as criteria for all argument. Perelman argues that there are many areas of human thought and endeavor—including questions of politics, ethics, religion, philosophy—which elude the methods of mathematical and natural sciences. If we restrict our notion of reason to the model of formal logic, and Cartesian intuitive self-evident truths, we create uncompromising and ineradicable dualisms such as "reason/imagination," "knowledge/opinion," "universal objectivity/incommunicycle subjectivity," "judgments of reality/judgments of value," "theory/practice" (510). These dualisms "and the assertion that whatever is not objectively and indisputably valid belongs to the realm of the arbitrary and the subjective create an unbridgeable gulf between theoretical knowledge, which is rational, and action, for which motives would be wholly irrational" (512). The consequence is that practice ceases to be reasonable, critical argument becomes incomprehensible, and philosophical reflection itself becomes meaningless.

Why such a fear of an "end of philosophy" or of the irrational? I suspect that Perelman’s *The New Rhetoric* (1958) was written, like much of Levinas’ philosophy, in response to the catastrophes and violence of World War II. Perelman was a Belgian Jew and one of the leaders of Belgian resistance; he also had a distinguished career as a professor of philosophy and law.5 Like Levinas, he had personally experienced the effects of a massive collapse of reasonable discourse in the violence of that war. Like Levinas, he is searching for a "third way" beyond these dualisms, and for a form of reason that is itself neither violent nor injurious to the other and to individual human responsibility. He shares the Levinasian impulse to modify the Enlightenment version of the universal light of reason rather than abandon it completely to a war of conflicting power interests and self-interested ideologies.6

So like Levinas, Perelman instead redefines, extends, and amplifies reason to include forms of reasoning which do not involve what is conceptually self-evident, necessary, or autonomous, but which “require an other” and depend upon the relation of address and assent of the other person through discourse. (Rosenzweig makes a similar turn from what he perceived to be the violence of the Hegelian version of history and philosophy to what he called *Sprachdenken* or “speech-thinking.”)
In sum, Levinas and Perelman are both in search of a reason-of-the-other, an other-reason which is not however arbitrary, violent, or willful, but rather a non-necessary form of imperative. And that for Perelman is found in the forms of reasoning and persuasion of the rhetorical tradition from the Greeks onward, forms of discourse which were denigrated and neglected by Cartesian logicians and philosophers—described as merely “ornamental,” “literary,” or “sophistic.” From this tradition, Perelman constructs a “critical rationalism” that “transcends the duality ‘judgments of reality/value judgments,’ and makes both judgments of reality and value judgments dependent on the personality of the scientist or philosopher, who is responsible for his decisions in the field of knowledge as well as the field of action” (New Rhetoric 514). 7

In other words, for Perelman rhetoric is a form of social but non-coercive and non-violent reason which is required to deliberate in areas where there are no necessary or absolute truths. That is, a realm where there are no truths which have coercive power, such as the “coercions” of self-evident reason or deductive logic or non-rational faith. Formal Cartesian reason is founded on the solipsistic notion of self-evident truths, clear, distinct, and necessary—there is no need for deliberation with others, nor any question of varying intensities of adherence to these truths, nor the possibility of withholding one’s assent from them. Such reason, like the theoretical reason of Kant, “imposes itself on every rational being” and “agreement is inevitable” (2). Rhetoric, by contrast, is defined by Perelman as that form of reason which involves the freely given and responsible commitment of a deliberating audience. Perelman’s “new rhetoric” is then a “third way” between the compulsions of formal autonomous reason and the coercions of violence. To deliberate or argue with another

implies that one has renounced resorting to forces alone, that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one’s interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion, and that one is not regarding him as an object, but appealing to his free judgement. Recourse to argumentation assumes the establishment of a community of minds, which, while it lasts, excludes the use of violence. (55)

This is a notion of rhetoric quite at odds with the way the term is used in much contemporary literary theory where rhetoric has often been used to denote the ineradicable political biases and ideologies involved in language use and interpretation. Rhetoric is then the deployment of “textual strategies” in the war-game of interpretation; and/or linguistic self-consciousness and self-reflexivity; and/or the critical self-consciousness of the interpreter who recognizes that there is no onto-
logical or transcendent foundation to language or truth, that all truth is embodied in the social constructs of linguistic practice. To attain this critical self-consciousness is posited as an act of demystification which is a necessary part of a politically progressive practice, a kind of “post-modern ethic.”

In fact, much of the recent epistemological skepticism and political criticism in literary theory justifies itself through an implicit stance of ethical and moral superiority: that is, it claims to resist by its demystifications and radical critiques the absolutism of tyrants and fanatics. But Perelman has a remarkable insight to add to the debate: the radical skeptic is often not the opposite, but the counterpart of the fanatic—for both equate adherence to theses with recognition of absolute truth. Both skeptic and fanatic thus foreclose deliberative argument about choice when no absolute ground exists. Writes Perelman:

Since rhetorical proof is never completely necessary proof, the thinking person who gives his adherence to the conclusions of an argumentation does so by an act that commits him and for which he is responsible. The fanatic accepts the commitment, but as one bowing to an absolute and irrefragable truth; the skeptic refuses the commitment, but under the pretext that he does not find it sufficiently definitive. He refuses adherence because his idea of adherence is similar to that of the fanatic: both fail to appreciate that argumentation aims at a choice among possible theses; by proposing and justifying the hierarchy of these theses, argumentation seeks to make the decision a rational one. This role of argumentation in decision making is denied by the skeptic and fanatic. In the absence of compelling reason, they both are inclined to give violence a free hand, rejecting personal commitment. (62)

This passage might be used to gloss the painful political controversy that has so troubled many contemporary literary critics—the connection between Paul de Man’s radical skepticism and his pro-fascist writings in World War II. Many of de Man’s defenders have argued that his deconstructive skepticism was an implicit repudiation and overcoming of his earlier ideological writings, a posture of critical self-reflexiveness whose notions about “undecidability” and the “impossibility of reading” are intended to guard against all violent engagements. But Perelman’s analysis indicates that such radical skepticism, which denies the grounds for any choice between meanings, is overly restrictive in its definition of truth and knowledge. Foreclosing deliberation and choice in endless aporias and “undecidabilities” is an act as absolutist and open to violence as that of the fanatic who refuses to debate due to her or his conviction of possessing that absolute truth.

The same criticism could be made of the “ideological” critic, who holds that all values are masks for self-interested power plays; or the
relativist who is intent on constantly undermining any and every claim to a firm foundation for a given value or truth, and refuses to allow for any deliberative argument about the hierarchy of values or criteria for making choices among them. For as the jurist knows, regardless of the lack of any absolute, clear, or unambiguous ground, choices still must be made and decisions rendered.

In Perelman's view, both the fanatic and skeptic relieve themselves of the burden of personal responsibility, action, and commitment to choices made. Rhetorical argumentation, though, is oriented towards decision and the future: "it sets out to bring about some action or prepare the way for it by acting, by discursive methods, on the minds of the hearers" (47). Argumentation, Perelman reminds us, is not merely an intellectual exercise divorced from practical preoccupations. "Language is not only a means of communication: it is also an instrument for acting on minds, a means of persuasion" (132). That is precisely why argumentation is a substitute for the violence which attempts to obtain an action by the use of force or compulsion. I would argue that there are many lessons here for literary criticism and theory. First, restricting questions about meaning or the nature of the literary text to questions about the epistemological status of language is as artificial as the attempt to restrict all reasoning solely to formal logic. Nor is the only alternative an uncritical embrace solely of "politics" and the assertion that the way language acts on the world is essentially ideological and marked by relations of force, domination, and violence.

In sum, for both Perelman and Levinas, aesthetics and politics need to be subsumed to a critical rationalism which for Perelman is rhetoric and for Levinas ethics. As philosopher, however, Levinas partakes of the ancient philosophical contempt for rhetoric, which he views as the approach to the neighbor through ruse, as a mode of sophist manipulation and violence rather than as a search for truth. But Levinas' insistence on language as pre-eminently a call or command before it is an exchange of information, is at bottom "rhetorical."

III. Rosenzweig's Critique of Philosophy

In other words, ethics as the obligation and binding of the self to the other constitutes what Levinas describes as "the 'rationality' of a reason less hard on itself than the reasons of the philosophical tradition," not a decline of rationality, but a fuller rationality (L'Au-delà du verset 176). Levinas' critique of reason does not negate reason but tries to formulate a "second" type of reason, a reason which is not
autonomous and imperialistic or slavish and mindless. The essential
point is that when aesthetics or politics become their own autonomous
realms, obliterating the prior realm of the ethics, they inevitably con-
vert into forms of violence and tyranny. They deny the alterity and
singularity of otherness, which for Levinas passes through the human
other and is the essence of the ethical relation.

To explain this idea more clearly and consider the relation of Levinas' thought to Jewish thought, we need to examine Levinas' relation to Rosenzweig. Along with Rosenzweig, Levinas saw (long before Foucault) the complicity of power and knowledge, of philosophy and violence. Rosenzweig's work was a fierce attack on Hegelian philosophy and especially Hegel's assertion that "History is the judge of history," that is, that immanent history was the dialectical Life of the Spirit on its road to the consummation of self-knowledge. In Rosenzweig, there is a devastating critique of philosophical idealism, but also an attempt to reconstellate the shattered fragments of that idealism in a new way. And this way involved Rosenzweig in a new relation of philosophy to theology.11

What World War II was for Levinas, World War I and its cata-
 trophic slaughter had been for Rosenzweig. For both thinkers, it
became imperative to judge the violence of that history and to give
its victims voice. That meant locating an "elsewhere" or "beyond" or
"other" which could enact a judgment upon immanent history, even
while recognizing that there can be no recourse to traditional theology or traditional notions of transcendence to secure this judgment.

This project ultimately involves both Levinas and Rosenzweig in
a kind of prophetic eschatology. And this search for such an elsewhere,
or "otherwise than being," or time of the other, is central to the project
of many other modern Jewish thinkers—even those who are highly
secularized such as Walter Benjamin. One line could be traced that
goes from Rosenzweig to Levinas, and from Levinas to Derrida on
into post-structuralism; another line goes from Rosenzweig to the
Frankfort School of Critical Theory through Benjamin and T.W.
Adorno, both of whom were influenced by Rosenzweig's critique of
totality.12 Levinas mentions his profound debt to Rosenzweig in the
very first pages of Totality and Infinity: "We were impressed by the
opposition to the idea of totality in Franz Rosenzweig's Stern der Erlösung,
a work too often present in this book to be cited" (28).

To briefly (and too simplistically) explain this reference: Rosenzweig's
great undoing of "totality" in The Star was a critique of the pretensions
of Western philosophy from, as he puts it, "the Ionean Islands to Iena"
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(1hat is from the Greeks to Hegel) to “know the All.” This project, Rosenzweig argued, has roots in the fear of death. Philosophy flees this singular human mortal self by attempting to construct impersonal death-less systems. It tries to reduce the heterogeneity of reality into single, impersonal, explanatory principles (Star 1-15). The project culminates in Hegelian idealism where philosophy seeks to construct out of itself a completely autonomous totality, identifying the self-fulfillment of Thought with the consummation of world history, and with Hegel's claim that his own philosophy itself is the final union of Thought and Being wherein identity dialectically overcomes difference. Needless to say, Rosenzweig is only one of the countless philosophers and critics from Kierkegaard to Derrida who have devoted their energies to opposing that notion.

One of Levinas' special contributions, however, is the application of Rosenzweig's critique to contemporary forms of impersonal reason. For example, he writes “Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny” (Totality 47). Levinas' critique of Heidegger and his connection of Heideggerian philosophy to political violence may be applied, I would add, to de Man's linguistic theory, the key to which is the impersonality and autonomy of language. And this critique would shed another light on both Heidegger's and de Man's own problematic relations to Nazism.

One could even say that in much literary theory of the 1970s and 1980s, “Language” or “History” have taken up the role of impersonal term through which all is mediated or known. The alterity of the singular, personal human other is then defined only as a subordinate function or “site” of impersonal significations or ideologies. But Levinas' critique of impersonality is not made to defend the personal ego as some individual, unified, sovereign center of meaning—a notion which most post-structuralists have also vigorously attacked. As he puts it, “It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the Other” (Totality 40).

The aim of Levinas' work is to show that reason and freedom are not autonomous but are founded on prior structures, and that freedom is justified not of itself, but by and for the other. In other words, what claims to be autonomous, independent “for and of-itself” (classical reason, the dialectical march of History, reflexive self-consciousness, the impersonal world of art, the narcissistic ego, the play of the signi-
fers, institutional Discourse, etc.) in Levinas is "faced" with the other and this facing, as the very questioning and shattering or hollowing out of the subject becomes an extraversion into a for-the-other. Before the face of the other I am judged, brought to account, accused and so made responsible.

But one cannot logically or deductively prove that the other puts me in question; one cannot accomplish the break with totality through the very kind of philosophical consciousness which is by definition the attempt to grasp and master the All, or what Levinas calls an "ego-

ology." His notion of the "face" is thus a rhetorical appeal, an attempt to create an "outside" of philosophical consciousness (or the totality) by which it can be judged and brought to account.

That is why he writes that "the call to question is not a matter of turning around upon oneself and becoming conscious of the calling to question. The absolutely other is not reflected in consciousness. . . . We are concerned with questioning a consciousness, and not with the consciousness of questioning" ("Trail" 41). The exile of the self through the demand of the other is not the negative "consciousness of this exile." In Levinas, the exile of the self is a turning outward, an extraversion, a positivity, "precisely the welcome reception of the absolutely other" which summons me to reply. He redefines the subject as "for-

the-other," not as a consciousness bringing objects to representation "for itself." Moral consciousness, then, is not "an experience of values" but an access to exteriority, to Being as other, and finally beyond ontology to the otherwise than being ("Signature" 183).

Subjectivity as for-the-other, in sum, involves a "plural reason" com-
manded not by the logic of identity which itself is the return of dif-

ference to the same — a "for itself" — but instead a reason commanded and penetrated by the other, heteronomous instead of autonomous.

IV. For Itself and For-the-Other

The "extra-version" of the for-itself into the for-the-other is another key move one finds in Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig models for Levinas a path by which the totality of Idealist cognition of the All is shattered, and how the subsequent fragments (subject-object-universe, or God-humanity-world) each isolated in and for themselves can then be opened up to and for-the-other. In Levinas this opening constitutes the ethical move par excellence; in Rosenzweig it is the very meaning of Revelation. And for both Rosenzweig and Levinas, it is a funda-

mental characteristic of Judaism.
In an essay on Rosenzweig, Levinas makes the crucial comment that the conjunction "and" used to designate the re-connections made in The Star among God, humanity, and world as Creation, Revelation, and Redemption means "for": God for humanity, humanity for world, etc. The unity Rosenzweig constructs is not any formal unity of philosophical logic but "is in the sense that they are one for the other, when one is placed in these elements themselves" ("Entre" 128). "One for the other" is a "living" relation, not a philosophical category, or a Hegelian dialectical synthesis which empties the terms of their irreducible individuality, or perceives them from the "outside" in the all-seeing gaze of the philosopher.

For Rosenzweig, the "I" is drawn out of its mute and isolated self-enclosure, (which Rosenzweig identifies with the mythical, aesthetic, and pagan worlds) by God's emerging from God's concealment, questing for and turning to the individual human self (Star 156). That is how Rosenzweig understands God's question to Adam, "Where are You?" in Genesis. But as Rosenzweig notes, God receives no real response from Adam to this initial question; instead Adam hides himself, and blames Eve and the serpent; Adam remains defiant and self-enclosed. Only when God calls out to Abraham in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:1—in the vocative, in direct address, not with an indefinite "you" but with his proper name "Abraham"—that is, in all his non-conceptual individuality, in love for his singularity, "now he answers, all unlocked, all spread-apart, all ready, all-soul: 'Here I am.' Here is the I, the individual human I, as yet wholly receptive, as yet only unlocked, only empty, without content, without nature, pure readiness, pure obedience, all ears" (176). For Rosenzweig, this movement of turning and opening to the other is the essence of Revelation before Revelation signifies any propositional or doctrinal content. And this "turning towards the other," as we remember, is a prime meaning of the "face" (panah, panim) and is also essential in Levinas.13

In Levinas' philosophical writings, a similar pattern emerges but it is derived without direct exegesis of the Bible or explicit reference to Jewish thought, although terms such as "election," "creation" and "here I am" are used. The subject is elected (the "chosen people"), called out of its narcissistic self-enclosure not by any traditional God of theology but by the "revelation of the face" of the other, the human other through whom the other-than-being "passes" or is traced. Levinas reverses, in a sense, the path of the Star: in the Star, God's immediate and pressing love as "shining countenance" (157; 164) opens up and
awakens the human soul to both God and to the love of the neighbor; in Levinas, the immediate and pressing face of the other opens and awakens the ego, and traces the otherness of a divinity which is otherwise than being, otherwise than any theology, escaping the revelation of any logos.

It is important to emphasize here that like Rosenzweig, Levinas claims not to base his philosophical writings a priori on any traditional "theology." He firmly maintains that he does not use the Bible or theology as his starting point, nor does he rely on or intend any orthodox theology. His "other than being" is not intended to be theological—"of the logos," or any "ology"—i.e. any identification of logos and being or assertion of a God who is the Being behind or beyond beings. Though the other "resembles God," the relation to the other and the assignation from the Good survive the death of God (Otherwise Than Being 123).14

The face is not, he reiterates, the image of the God who has passed. "Being in the image of God does not signify being the icon of God but to find oneself in his trace":

The God of Judaeo-Christian spirituality preserves all the infinity of his absence which is in the personal order itself (silence). He does not show himself except in his trace, as in the 33rd chapter of Exodus. To go toward Him is not to follow the trace, which itself is not a sign. To go toward him is to go towards the others who are in the trace. ("Trail" 46)

In other words, ontological absence becomes ethical presence; difference becomes my non-indifference to the other. Ethics as obligation and responsibility to and for the other is the relation and Revelation of Otherness.

V. The Holocaust Witness

Finally, I want briefly to examine how this notion of the self emptied out and bound over to the other is radicalized in Levinas' later work, and its possible connections to Levinas as a holocaust survivor.

The famous biblical phrase "here I am" with which Abraham answers God (hineni in Hebrew) is also, of course, the formulaic response given by many other biblical characters and prophets when called by God. In Levinas' later philosophical works, he uses this phrase to analyze and describe subjectivity as unlocked, wholly receptive, emptied and bound over to the other: "The word I means here I am [me voice] answering for everything and everyone" as a gratuitous sacrifice (Otherwise 114). He describes the "here I am" as the "I possessed

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by the other," a figure of inspiration and obsession, and a "reason" or "intelligibility" beyond the cogito. In effect, this analysis founds the "I think" of the rational Cartesian cogito (which itself founds modern philosophy) upon the biblical "here I am" of subjectivity and ethics.  

"Here I am" is also a language of the accusative—both grammatically and as the language of "witness," of the "first person." But he emphasizes that "here I am" is a witness before any content or "truth of representation": "it is the meaning of language, before language scatters into words . . ." This "bearing witness of itself to the other" (Otherwise 119) is the "sign bearing witness of the giving of signs"—an ultimate exposure and vulnerability which is the condition for all communication.  

In other words, this one-for-the-other constitutes the very ability of a sign to be a sign, to stand for something else, and the very possibility for there even to be communication, shared meaning. Signs, that is, are given, offered to the other before they can even comprise a system, a code, a contract, a game. Speech is always said to someone before it has any particular content. There is a prior summoning in language—before the reciprocity of exchange of information, or code, or convention. There is a primordial donation in response to a primordial command, or what he calls an "election by the Good."  

And there is an ongoing and continuous oscillation between this prior contentless realm, which Levinas now calls saying or le dire, and the realm of codes, systems, concrete meanings, contracts, representations, or what he calls le dit (the "said"). This oscillation between the "saying and the said," he affirms, is necessary to guarantee that the contracts and codes, the politics and philosophies, do not obliterate the ethical and revert into violent tyrannies.  

But in these later writings the terms he uses to describe subjectivity and responsibility often become disturbing: trauma, wounding, hostage, obsession, persecution, sacrifice without reserve. In a highly charged description Levinas writes: "signification is witness or martyrdom. It is intelligibility before the light . . ." (Otherwise 77-78). Imagery of wounding now describes the way the other puts the self in question; it is a radical denuding and shattering of egoism, so that the self is now "like a stranger, hunted down even in one's home, contested in one's identity . . . it is always to empty oneself anew of oneself . . . like in a hemophilia's hemorrhage" (92). I cannot help but hear in the voice behind this voice, and in these disturbing images of bleeding wounds the "witness" of the Holocaust survivor, even though that event is never explicitly evoked. And I would argue that in Levinas, the witness of the
Holocaust enters into the “reason” of philosophy. At the same time, this rhetoric of witness is indirect for he does not explicitly invoke either his personal experiences or specific historical events within his philosophical work. The most profound signification of these events for him is not their specificity for any one nation or group. On a deeper level, this is consistent with his philosophy: witness is not “confession,” a witness for and of the personal experiences of the self, but a testimony for the other.

So Levinas does “not make a graven image” or icon of these wounds as some kind of holy stigmata upon which we should fixate in horror. The task instead is to make these traumas revert into the foundation and guarantor of language and ethics. “Hebrew” reminds, calls to, founds “Greek” not by losing its specificity or being sublated (to use the Hegelian term) into the “universality” of Greek reason, but by being witness to the ethical relation to the other in a prophetic call to all human beings.

But it is also almost as if this notion of signification as martyrdom is a kind of secular or philosophical equivalent of the Jewish notion of kiddush ha-shem—the “sanctification of the name of God” that Jewish tradition ascribes to the death of a Jew murdered for his or her faith. As if Levinas is attempting to sanctify and redeem the deaths of those murdered in the Holocaust, that event which above all expressed hatred and intolerance for the other.16 And also as if he is making it impossible for the persecutors to escape responsibility, to forget, deny their involvement, and making it impossible for any one of us, any reader of Levinas to escape ours.17

For he expands his notion of substitution to an extreme responsibility that makes even “the persecuted one liable to answer for the persecutor” (Otherwise 111). As if the very outrage of persecution itself inverted into a grounds of solidarity as expiation rather than violence. Once can see why this becomes an almost “unsayable” position. It also has strong Christian echoes and moves beyond Jewish tradition.16 In classical Jewish law, one is not to actively seek martyrdom; the only cases in which one must allow oneself to be killed are if one is ordered upon pain of death to commit adultery, idolatry, or murder. In these cases, one is required to choose death rather than commit any one of those three sins. In other cases, such as for self-defense, the Talmud says, “If one arises to kill you, arise and kill himself first.” One does not always give one’s life for the other.19

Yet for Levinas, finally, the “subject” so called and elected finally signifies all human beings—not just the Jews. And so, on the conclud-
ing page of *Otherwise Than Being* there are the following words: each individual of all the peoples “is virtually a chosen one, called to leave in his turn, or without awaiting his turn . . . the concept of the ego . . . to respond with responsibility: me, that is, here I am for the others, to lose his place radically . . .” (*Otherwise* 185).

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Notes

1. See, for example, Maimonides’ discussion of the meaning of the trope “face” in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, part I section 37. Among the biblical significations Maimonides enumerates for “face” (*panim*) are “the presence and existence of a person,” “the hearing of a voice without seeing any similitude,” that is, the inability to comprehend God’s true existence as such; and “attention or regard” for the other person.

2. See Rosenzweig’s *Star*, 418-424, entitled “The Face of the Figure,” and Cohen’s explication of these passages in his essay “The Face of Truth in Rosenzweig, Levinas, and Jewish Mysticism.” Rosenzweig notes that the face is composed of the most receptive organs in the body—nose, ears, eyes, mouth. In the inner sanctum of divine truth, the human catches sight of “none other than a countenance like his own. The Star of Redemption is become a countenance which glances at me and out of which I glance. Not because God is my mirror, but God’s truth.”

At the end of the *Star*, the shining of God’s “face” signifies redemption and ultimate truth. “But for him whom he lets his visage shine upon, to him he also turns his visage. As he turns his visage to us, so may we recognize him” (418). Rosenzweig also uses “Face” or “Countenance” to signify human communion: “Nor is this brotherliness by any means identity of everything with the human countenance, but rather the harmony precisely of men of the most diverse countenances. One thing is necessary, of course, but only one: that men have a countenance at all, that they see each other” (345). On the glance as gesture beyond word and deed related to dance and poetry, mutual recognition through processions, pageants and carnivals, Rosenzweig writes, “The power to dissolve all that is rigid already inheres in the glance. . . . Once an eye has glanced at us, it will glance at us as long as we live” (372).

3. A good introduction to these schools of criticism is Veeser’s *The New Historicism*.

4. See for example the oft cited essay by de Man “Semiology and Rhetoric” in *Textual Strategies*, ed. J. Harari, and Derrida’s “White Metaphor: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy” in *Margins of Philosophy*. In Lacan, for example, the rereading of Freud via structuralist linguistics asserts that the “unconscious is structured like a language,” and that an analyst needs to understand the rhetoric of tropes to interpret these structures. Brian Vickers in the concluding chapter of his *In Defense of Rhetoric* lucidly explains the distortions in many of these contemporary invocations of rhetoric. In modern thought, Vickers writes, rhetoric as a discipline has atrophied to “slogation” alone, now detached from its expressive and persuasive functions, and brought down finally to handful of tropes” (*In Defense* 439). One sees this move, Vickers notes, in Vico, who in turn is the inspiration for Hayden White’s tropological analysis of historical nar-
ratives; in Roman Jakobson's structural linguistics which further reduces the tropes to only two: metaphor and metonymy; and in de Man especially "whose actual knowledge of rhetoric as revealed in [his] essays is limited to a fundamentally misguided conception of the art, and to a few tropes, not always correctly understood. But this did not prevent him from making grand generalizations" (457).

5. Foss and Trapp write that Perelman's impetus for writing his masterwork was the problems he encountered in defining the nature of justice and reasoning about values, and the difficulty of resolving questions of value on rational grounds, that is, not being able to draw an "ought" from an "is." Along with his co-writer, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, he decided to investigate the ways authors in different fields actually used arguments to reason about values—from literary to political to philosophical texts and daily speech. They "rediscovered" the neglected heritage of Aristotle's "dialectical" as opposed to "analytic" modes of reasoning, that is, rhetorical as informal, non-demonstrative reasoning (102-3).

This jurists' perspective has much to add, I would argue, to current questions about the nature of interpretation, the relation of the literary to the political, and recent literary interpretations of rabbinic texts. Most of these attempts to relate literary criticism to rabbinic texts have no satisfactory way of linking up their dual functions of halakhic, legalistic deliberation, and aggadic, non-legal creative story telling. One of the few writers to bring attention to this issue is Gerald Bruns in his essay "Midrash and Allegory" in The Literary Guide to the Bible.

This problem is due in part to the identification of "Law" with oppression in much French and German post-structuralist literary theory (see Kristeva, Barthes, et al), an identification which often goes back to a Protestant anti-nomianism. It is also due to the separation of literary criticism and theory from the kind of rhetorical theory which Perelman is proposing, a "new" rhetoric because it returns rhetoric to its ancient rational deliberative functions and away from its demotion to a "merely literary" analysis of style and tropes. Levinas and Perelman have shown me an important dimension to the literary approach to rabbinic hermeneutics that I neglected in my earlier book, The Slayers of Moses—the ethical and juridical. I address it in my forthcoming book Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas (Indiana UP, 1991) from which the present essay is taken.

In another article on "The New Rhetoric" as a mode of practical reasoning written in 1976, Perelman even cites the talmudic tradition as an example of the kind of deliberative rhetorical model he is propounding, in contrast to a Cartesian model where rational self-evidence and necessary truth make it impossible for two persons to come to opposite decisions about the same matter without one being wrong. In the Talmud, Perelman notes, "it is accepted that opposed positions can be equally reasonable; one of them does not have to be right." For instance, the schools of the sage Hillel and the schools of Shammai are in constant opposition, but in a famous passage, R. Akiva is told from above that "both are the words of the living God" (305).

The key point here is that there are rational grounds for multiple positions about truth, not that since all language is arbitrary—or all values are relative—that therefore there are multiple interpretations. Perelman's juridical rhetoric is also close to Levinas' defense in his Jewish writings of the halakha, the Jewish legal tradition which for Levinas is the embodiment and guarantor of the ethical relation. Both Perelman and Levinas are also inspired by the Kantian notion of practical versus theoretical reason.

6. In current literary theory, another set of dualism is established. Those who dispute the position that all truth is socially constructed are often accused of being
"essentialists"; those who disagree with the notion that the human person is constructed by and through an impersonal "Discourse" are labeled unself-conscious and uncritical ideologues of "the liberal humanist myth." These dualisms, in my view, have become a species of name-calling which often substitutes for rigorous argument. Literary theory today is itself in dire need of a "third way" beyond them.

Perelman's work preceded the advent of French structuralism and post-structuralism, but Perelman most likely would have viewed the notion of language as an impersonal system in which human selfhood and action are but anonymous functions as but another abdication of rational deliberative argument to distorted notions of reality—or as Levinas puts it, "the primacy of formal theoretical reason." Levinas seeks a "third way" between the dualistic alternatives of classical ontology: being/autonomy/heteronomy.

Nor would the post-structuralist critique of structuralism alleviate this problem; proposing the arbitrariness of the sign and the instability of the structures of signification only replaces existentialist irrationality with linguistic irrationality. Nor does a cultural materialism which finds all structures marked by ideology, power, domination, and force provide grounds for the kind of reason which Perelman seeks.

7. I am grateful to my colleague Jeanne Fahnestock for introducing me to and helping to explicate Perelman's extraordinary work. *The New Rhetoric* is a lengthy and complex book and I only briefly touch upon it here. The central portion of the book is an extensive set of philosophical and technical analyses of the various techniques of argumentation, rhetorical strategies and tropes. Perelman also directly addresses the problem of rhetoric used deceptively to manipulate, of propaganda and ruse in his idea of the "universal audience" (section 7), his discussion of the "audience as a construction of the speaker" (section 4), and the "adaptation of the speaker to audience" (section 5). The speaker is not obligated to persuade an audience if that audience can only be persuaded by repugnant means. As Quintillian said, rhetoric is *scientia bene dicendi*: speaking well means also speaking what is ethically good (25).

Perelman's difficult and controversial idea of "the universal audience" is an hypothetical construct in the mind of the speaker of an ideal audience competent to understand the argument and give assent; it plays a normative role in judging the convincing nature of argument. It does not refer "to an experimentally proven fact" (31): "Instead of believing in a universal audience analogous to the divine mind which can assent only to the 'truth,' we might with greater justification characterize each speaker by the image of the universal audience that he is trying to win over to his view... Each individual, each culture, has its own conception of the universal audience" (33). In dialogue, for example, the interlocutor is regarded as the incarnation of the universal audience. Argument is protected from being purely manipulative and unethical by the interaction of universal and particular audience.

For an excellent analysis of the notion of the "universal audience," see Allen Scult, who defines it as a "metaphor which functions as an invention tool" to help support Perelman's notion of a "responsible rhetoric which must be systematized in such a way as to make nonscientific discourse, which is at the core of our societal life, somehow rational... without recourse to 'absolute truth'" ("Perelman's Universal Audience" 176). "The universal audience is your rhetorical conscience" (179).

8. The debate over de Man surfaced a few years after his death when, in 1987, a set of his writings from 1940-42 for the collaborationist Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* was discovered. See the volume of these writings translated into English by Ortwin de Graef, *Wartime Journalism, 1939-1943*, ed. Werner Hamacher at al (Lincoln: U of
9. Perelman makes an important distinction between a "disinterested" or "object-
ive spectator" and an "impartial" one when it comes to judging discussions that must
lead to a decision. (One of the most frequently heard statements in current literary
theory is that "everything is political," meaning that there is no possibility of disinter-
estedness, objectivity or impartiality). Perelman writes that "interference in a con-
troversy whose outcome will affect a specific group may be made only by one who
is a member of, or closely bound up with, the group in question": "being impartial
is not being objectove, it consists of belonging to the same group one is judging, without
having previously decided in favor of any one of them" (60). Like Levinas, Perelman
wants to preserve the possibility of "dissociating our beliefs from our interests and
passions" (61).

Similarly, his interesting analysis of epideictic oratory reveals a fundamental rel-
ation of value to action. Epideictic oratory was classically defined by Aristotle as the
rhetoric concerned with praise and blame (a eulogy, for example), the beautiful or
ugly. Aristotle distinguished between epideictic and the two other forms of oratory:
deliberative and legal oratory (counseling what is expedient; establishing what is best).
Perelman points out that epideictic oratory—often considered merely ornamental or
"purely literary"—cannot be separated from the functions of deliberative and legal
oratory because epideictic oratory "strengthens the disposition toward action by in-
creasing adherence to the values it lauds" (50); it thus establishes a sense of commu-
nion that is the very foundation for deliberative and legal discourse.

10. This "critical rationalism" is also a feature of many other major modern Jewish
philosophers who stressed the rational and ethical character of Judaism (Hermann
Cohen is the most outstanding example). Nathan Rotenstreich attributes this trend
in part to the influence of Kant. Ethics could remain a realm unchallenged by Kant's
critique of metaphysics and religion. But also, "The ethical interpretation of Judaism
makes possible a further, more radical interpretation, that the ethical teaching of
Judaism may be meaningful and binding apart from religious attachment. Thus the
ethical interpretation can be placed historically on the borderline of the religious at-
titude and the secular transformation of Judaism" (Rotenstreich, Jewish Philosophy 3-4).

11. While there is not space here to examine Rosenzweig's position in depth, Rosen-
zweig asserts that what he calls his "new thinking" is not theological in any classical
sense, nor is it any form of apologetics:

If this is theology, it is, at any rate, no less new as theology than as philosophy.
. . . Theology must not debase philosophy to play the part of a handmaid, yet
the role of charwoman which philosophy has recently assigned to theology is
just as humiliating. The true relationship of these two regenerated sciences is
a sisterly one. . . . Theological problems must be translated into human terms,
and human problems brought into the pale of theology. (in Glatzer, Rosenzweig,
201)

Or as he writes in the Star:

. . . The theologian whom philosophy requires for the sake of its scientific status
is himself a theologian who requires philosophy—for the sake of his integrity.
What was for philosophy a demand in the interests of objectivity, will turn out to be a demand in the interests of subjectivity for theology. They are dependent on each other and so generate jointly a new type, be it a philosopher or theologian, situated between theology and philosophy. (106)

12. When asked by Richard Kearney whether his search for a non-site or u-topos other than that of Western metaphysics can be construed as a prophetic utopianism, Derrida answers by affirming a positive moment in deconstruction as a response to the call of alterity, and says that although he interrogates the classical ideas of eschaton or telos, "that does not mean I dismiss all forms of Messianic or prophetic eschatology. I think that all genuine questioning is summoned by a certain type of eschatology. . . . " Though he does not feel the kind of "hope" that would allow deconstruction to have a prophetic function—as "exodus and dissemination in the desert" it does have, he admits, certain "prophetic resonances," but as a search without hope for hope (Dialogues 118-19).

13. For Rosenzweig, God's turn towards humanity is an opening up and act of love which simultaneously is the command to the human person to turn and open up to the other—to love the neighbor. The neighbor to whom this love is also commanded is the turning of the human toward something else, to the world, and that is redemption. Rosenzweig also connects this receptive "Here I am" and the moment of revelation with Jewish law whose foundation is love as command. That is, this summons to hear is itself the preface to every commandment, and especially of the commandment which for Rosenzweig is the essence and highest of all the other commandments, to "love God with all your heart, soul, and might."

In an essay on Rosenzweig, Levinas writes that

it is very curious to note what is produced in response to God's love and how revelation is prolonged. God's love for selfish is, ipso facto, a commandment to love. Rosenzweig thinks that one can command love . . . contrary to what Kant thought. One can command love, but it is love which commands love. And it commands in the now of its love, so that the commandment to love is repeated and renewed indefinitely in the repetition and renewal of the very love which commands love.

Consequently, the Judaism in which revelation is inseparable from commandment in no wise signifies the yoke of the Law, but precisely love. The fact that Judaism was woven from commandments attests to the renewal, at all instants of God's love for man . . . the eminent role of the mitzvah in Judaism does not signify a moral formalism but the loving presence of divine love eternally renewed. . . . Two typically Jewish ideas have appeared: the idea of commandment, as essential to the relation of love . . . and the idea of the redemptive God and not a redemptive God. Even though the redemption comes from God, it has an absolute need of this intermediary man. ("Entre" 129)

14. See Levinas' important essay "God and Philosophy" (1973) in his Collected Philosophical Papers. Here he attempts to clarify the relationship between philosophy and religion, and define his notion of a religion that exceeds not only theology but also is not even founded on "religious experience" or faith and the loss of faith. The key question of this essay is "Can God be expressed in a rational discourse which would neither be ontology or faith?—in a way beyond the inadequate alternative of "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" versus "the God of the philosophers" (153).
He traces the connections between Western philosophy and Western spirituality which share a notion of truth defined as manifestation of being, and he posits another knowing, a “knowing otherwise” where consciousness is conscience and insomnia not enlightenment and affectivity. This knowing otherwise is reflected in a religious discourse in which God does not signify to begin with as a theme, or object of a dogma. (In his Jewish writings, his talmudic lecture “The Temptation of Temptation” in Quatre lectures talmudiques defines the meaning of the revelation at Sinai just in these terms—as a “doing before hearing,” an acceptance of an obligation prior to any “knowledge of its content,” a non-naïve mode of knowing otherwise.)

Nevertheless, Levinas’ philosophical language strongly shadows, evokes, and echoes traditional Jewish categories. To what extent we should accept his assertions that he has used no theological traditions as a starting point is another issue for which I have no space here.

15. For Levinas, the election or calling or displacement of the subject (as Abraham was elected, called, displaced) to undecidable responsibility and sacrifice for the other means that the subject is “unique” not because of any particular attributes of the ego, nor because it is loved by God, but by very virtue of this undecidable assignation (Otherwise, 115). These terms, nevertheless, again seem not only to echo but be founded on classical Jewish descriptions of the covenantal call.

In a sense, Levinas’ philosophy and language theory is a kind of phenomenological translation of the covenantal idea. Harold Fisch has similarly devoted much of his career to tracing the covenantal idea in Western literature. In chapter four of his recent book Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation, Fisch eloquently describes the nature of the biblical prophetic call and contract which underlies the Scripture’s notion of language as summons, bond, obligation, witness, judgment—and its model for the relational contract between reader and writer, text and interpreter, God and Israel. See especially also here his gloss on the meaning of the Shema, “Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6:4): “To accept the role of ‘hearer’ in the sense understood by ‘Hear O Israel’ is to accept an almost overpowering responsibility. It is not a simple act of response that is required of us as though we were readers of a novel called upon to assist in the creating of a fictional illusion; rather we are called upon to commit ourselves, to accept an obligation. For the word Shema implies not only reading but also obeying; the text seizes us even against our will” (49).

16. In an epigraph, Levinas dedicates Otherwise Than Being to the memory of those killed by Nazis, both those “closest” among the six million Jews, and the “millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.”

17. In the recent Marcel Ophelis film about the trial of Klaus Barbie, Hotel Terminus, one of the most chilling moments comes when Barbie himself after his arrest says: “I have forgotten everything. If they haven’t that’s their problem.”

18. Andrius Valevicus is quite right to point out in these Dostoevskian and Tolstoyan accents, Levinas’ Russian background and the connection of even his most mature philosophy to Slavic as well as Jewish thought. See his twelfth chapter, “From East to West: Levinas and Russian Thought” (From the Other to the Totally Other) 146-55.

19. There is another similar famous passage from a talmudic discussion about the meaning of Lev. 25:36, the directive not to take interest when one lends money to sustain “your brother who has become poor” but “fear your God; that thy brother may live with you.” What is the meaning of “that thy brother may live with you”?
That is what Ben-Patura expounded: 'Two men are journeying through the desert, and one of them has a single pitcher of water. If one of them drinks it, he (alone) will get back to civilization. But if both of them drink it, both of them will die. Ben Patura taught that they shoud both drink and die, as it said "That your brother may live with you." Said Rabbi Akiba to him: "That thy brother may live with you." Your own life comes before the life of your fellow-man. (Sifra, Behar 5:3;p 109c (ed. Weiss); cf. B. Metzia 62a)

This is the same R. Akiba who also propounded that the fundamental principle of the Torah was "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." See discussion of these issues in relation to Levinas by Abner Weiss, in Fox, Modern Jewish Ethics 139-152. See also David Roskies' compendium of Jewish responses to catastrophe, The Literature of Destruction and his Against the Apocalypse for the typology of the historical Jewish responses to suffering.

But as Robert Gibbs writes, Levinas' work would also require a Christian thinker to recast Christology for

Is not the other in the me, the other person, and not the absolute You of God? . . . Is not the truth of incarnation that we are incarnate, vulnerable in our naked skin? That we are persecuted and so expiation for others, and not that some divinity is expiation for us? I make expiation and suffer for him: not "You or even He make expiation for me" . . . but then perhaps we would no longer need to worry whether it was Jewish or Christian." ("Substitution" 14)

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