



Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other

Emmanuel Levinas, Michael B. Smith (Translator), Barbara Harshav (Translator)

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Emmanuel Levinas is one of the most important figures of twentieth-century philosophy. Exerting a profound influence upon such thinkers as Derrida, Lyotard, Blanchot, and Irigaray, Levinas's work bridges several major gaps in the evolution of continental philosophy--between modern and postmodern, phenomenology and poststructuralism, ethics and ontology. He is credited with having spurred a revitalized interest in ethics-based philosophy throughout Europe and America.

Entre Nous (Between Us) is the culmination of Levinas's philosophy. Published in France a few years before his death, it gathers his most important work and reveals the development of his thought over nearly forty years of committed inquiry. Along with several trenchant interviews published here, these essays engage with issues of suffering, love, religion, culture, justice, human rights, and legal theory. Taken together, they constitute a key to Levinas's ideas on the ethical dimensions of otherness.

Working from the phenomenological method of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Levinas pushed beyond the limits of their framework to argue that it is ethics, not ontology, that orients philosophy, and that responsibility precedes reasoning. Ethics for Levinas means responsibility in relation to difference.

Throughout his work, Levinas returns to the metaphor of the face of the other to discuss how and where responsibility enters our lives and makes philosophy necessary. For Levinas, ethics begins with our face to face interaction with another person--seeing that person not as a reflection of one's self, nor as a threat, but as different and greater than self. Levinas moves the reader to recognize the implications of this interaction: our abiding responsibility for the other, and our concern with the other's suffering and death.

Situated at the crossroads of several philosophical schools and approaches, Levinas's work illuminates a host of critical issues and has found resonances among students and scholars of literature, law, religion, and politics. *Entre Nous* is at once the apotheosis of his work and an accessible introduction to it. In the end, Levinas's urgent meditations upon the face of the other suggest a new foundation upon which to grasp the nature of good and evil in the tangled skein of our lives.

Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other Details

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Ryan says

I am beginning to see the influence of Levinas' ideas in my own thinking, which is great. It's also very decentering. In this book Levinas challenges Western metaphysics (specifically ontology) as first philosophy and raises ethics in its place with a special emphasis on the Other.

Alex Obrigewitsch says

An excellent supplement for those seeking to internalize the thinking of Levinas. I would not recommend this collection of more simple to understand essays and discussions in the place of Totality and Infinity or Otherwise than Being. They are best consumed after, like a series of footnotes; renvois, sending back to the thought and the face of the other.

Scott Neigh says

Reviewed here.

Joeri Kooimans says

For Levinas, philosophy does not begin with wonder, as with the ancient Greeks or as according to other past or contemporary romantic views of philosophy, that often with this same romantic tone say that philosophy means wondering at things as if one were a child. For Levinas, philosophy begins with a shock. A philosophy that only starts out from wonder and sets out to understand things in their being, leading the philosopher to ask questions about this being - from which ever philosophical tradition this might be done - attributes a primacy to the ontological. And wrongly so, according to Levinas. What this namely leads to, he argues, is what he calls 'a terrible neutrality of being', meaning an indifferent, merely investigative attitude towards the world. Levinas exposes a violent tendency in this way of thinking. It thanks its existence to an absence of the Good.

What Levinas wants to give primacy to in ontology's stead is Ethics. For him, philosophy begins not with wonder, but with a shock, with perturbation. The question then no longer is an ontological one about how being is in its being, but an ethical one: is it good, right or justified how being is?

For Levinas, this is not only a philosophical, theoretical matter of prioritizing one way of thinking over the other for pure intellectual reasons. For him much more is at stake. Due to the violent tendency in traditional Western philosophy, we have failed to ethically deal with the Other in a humane and responsible way. With his critique, Levinas exposes an egotistical way of thinking, which he calls 'egology' that has no place for the Other, because it even excludes and even annihilates him. The I, can only constitute itself and exist by

virtue of exclusion of the Other. Time and again, cruelty in history repeats itself because we are unable to deal with the Other in an ethical responsible way. The most extreme outcome of this thinking was the Holocaust. This is why Levinas asks himself what kind of philosophy has made this possible? Or more specifically: what kind of subjectivity gave rise to such horror? And how come 2000 years of revelation has not prevented such a terrible thing from happening? It are these questions Levinas takes with him in his deconstruction and Critique of Western philosoph, of which one can attain a neat conception of by reading this book.

Charlie says

I understood very little of this. What I did understand, I liked, I think, but I don't know if I'll ever try to reread it.

Karrie Higgins says

The essay "Useless Suffering" is an essential read for anyone grappling with theodicy, especially those who have suffered an irrevocable loss or violation, and who are suffering further under the crushing weight of cultural or spiritual demands to justify--even sanction--horrendous violations in the name of personal, spiritual, or even artistic "growth."

InternetRex says

This collection of essays includes "Useless Suffering." This is the essay that made Levinas my favorite philosopher. First of all, it is beautiful. Totally beautiful. Levinas describes all of your worst emotional pain and acknowledges that it is actually unfathomable. Suffering for him is not even a kind of experience. First of all, this essay is very helpful on a personal level, because when I am that unhappy, all I am reduced to is asking, where does it go? Where do I put this? When it is no longer about the situation, when it is clear all that can happen now is I am collapsed with grief, what am I supposed to do? Well Levinas points out there is nothing. Suffering is pure submission and undergoing.

Levinas also insists on the uselessness of it. This helps define the phenomenon he is talking about. Pain or trouble in the service of something is not what he is talking about. And it is true, that pain does not leave the person with questions, sometimes it is happily borne.

Another thing about suffering is that it is always exactly the same. No matter what the cause or the individual, the culture or part of the world or the time, the "sensation" (that's a metaphor) of it is exactly the same.

Here is the part I don't understand when I am describing this essay: After all this, Levinas writes that this universality of suffering is what gives rise to the idea of something being between people, of ethics. In my maybe too literal mind, that sounds like a purpose? but suffering was supposed to be purposeless? perhaps there is no purpose to the individual. maybe that is what purpose means in this context.

If you have any insights, please leave them here for me.

XoXo Sonja

