

## **The opposite of totality: Levinas and the Frankfurt School**

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Emmanuel Levinas is frequently compared and contrasted with the deconstructionists, above all Jacques Derrida. Derrida made Levinas famous, his sympathetic criticism bringing Levinas's work to a wider audience. Indeed, it is Derrida's criticism that set the agenda for the last thirty years of Levinas's project, leading Levinas to struggle more self-consciously with the contradiction of writing about infinity in the language of ontology. How can one respect an unknowable otherness in a text that by its very nature as text must say something about the other? This is the challenge posed by Derrida. Levinas's late master-work, *Otherwise than Being* is his answer.<sup>1</sup>

Although Derrida helped shape Levinas's agenda, Levinas helped fill in Derrida's, providing an ethical basis for the leading categories of deconstruction, difference, and the other. Difference and other are in Levinas's account not just textual categories, but ethical ones, the way we honor what gives our lives weight and mystery: the infinite otherness of the other. "I'm ready to subscribe to everything he says," says Derrida about Levinas.<sup>2</sup> Much is known and written about this encounter, so I am going to write about another. Or rather, I am going to create an encounter that never took place, but would have been fascinating: between Levinas and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, especially Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Since the parallels between Adorno's work and the deconstructionists have been frequently noted, one could see mine as an argument by transitivity, so to speak: Levinas is to the deconstructionists as Adorno is to the deconstructionists, so Levinas and Adorno must be similar. Both investigate those "heterogeneous fragments that slip through the conceptual net, rejecting all philosophy of identity."<sup>3</sup> Or do they? This is how Adorno proceeds in the fight against identity thinking, the

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reduction of the other to the same. It is not Levinas's way. The strategy of transitivity turns out to be misleading. It will be better to imagine what Levinas and Adorno might have said to each other. Better still might be to imagine their mutual incomprehension.

I know of only a passing reference by Levinas to Adorno, in a late (1988) interview, where Levinas says "I learned quite recently that the philosopher Adorno has already denounced the jargon of authenticity."<sup>4</sup> In *Theologie im Pianissimo: Die Aktualität der Denkfiguren Adornos and Levinas*, Hent de Vries takes up their relationship. Although I too am fascinated by their apparent similarity, I argue that de Vries works too hard to make them complementary, downplaying what is so different and disturbing about Levinas. In the conclusion, I briefly spell out the implications of this difference for social theory.

For Levinas, Western philosophy is an egology, "the reduction of the other to the same." It begins with Plato and the doctrine of anamnesis, according to which I already know everything I might learn. Much of Levinas's work, at least until *Otherwise than Being*, was an account of this egology, by which Levinas means not a selfish teaching, but one that after many twists and turns eventually discovers that what appears alien, different, and mysterious was really an alienated part of me. Like the Frankfurt School, Levinas takes Homer's *Odyssey* as a leitmotif of Western thought, the aim always to return from where one started.

Consider Husserl, who according to Levinas began by turning to the things themselves, only to conclude that the other is knowable only insofar as he is like me. Or consider Heidegger, who, while surely concerned with the presence of others in my world (*Mitsein*), experiences them only as though they were always already there, part of the furniture of my life, not an intrusion of shattering otherness. Or consider Kant, for whom the basic categories that I think I discover in nature (the synthetic a priori) are really projections of human reason, the way the world must be, given humans as they are. About Hegel, the less said the better according to Levinas. More important is to see how the process of incorporating history into reason (the other into the same) that is so dramatic in Hegel's work is present in all enlightened thought. For each of these authors, indeed for Western thought, "knowledge is always an adequation between thought and what it thinks." The Frankfurt School thinkers said almost exactly the same thing.<sup>5</sup> Neither they nor Levinas meant it as a compliment.

One can debate the accuracy of Levinas's analysis of Western thought, which is only somewhat less glib than my summary of it. But, of course, one could say the same thing of the Frankfurt School. There is something in itself totalistic about sweeping summaries of Western thought, as though each thinker were not more complex than his system, as though Western thought were defined by a dozen thinkers. However tendentious Levinas's interpretation, in this he is matched by the Frankfurt School.

"Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear." That, say Horkheimer and Adorno, is the mark of Western thought.<sup>6</sup> The source of the fear is the same as that identified by Levinas, that the world is alien and other. It is in this context that Adorno writes of "idealism as rage" at a world too sparse and strange to be dominated.<sup>7</sup> Idealism is rage against the sheer otherness of the natural world, which refuses to be devoured by the sovereign mind of man. If not rage, then nausea at the sheer "swooning abundance" of the natural world, like that felt by Sartre's character Roquentin: this is what the mind of Western man can hardly stand.

Idealism is not confined to philosophy, according to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Science is as idealistic as philosophy, in Horkheimer and Adorno's most radical argument. Science too subjects the world to an idea, the idea of nature as meaningless, fungible units to be broken apart and calculated according to whatever theory predicts them. Under this broad definition, idealism is at work wherever concepts rule, wherever the goal of thought is to name and categorize, so that nothing is left over, and nothing is left outside. It began with Genesis, man naming the animals, as though to name them was to own them.

Not only do Levinas and the Frankfurt School share a similar analysis of Enlightened thinking, but they share the guilt of it. For Levinas, the primordial experience of consciousness is the guilt of having taken away the other's possibilities of existence.<sup>8</sup> One does this every time one fails to acknowledge the otherness of the other, instead assuming that the other is like me, an instance of my categories. In a similar fashion, Adorno writes of making apologies to the object for having sought to subsume it under this or that concept, which must always distort the manifold reality of the object.<sup>9</sup> If this sounds extreme, as though one must apologize every time one places someone else in a category, such as man or woman, the reader might find Edward Said's *Orientalism* helpful.<sup>10</sup>

Their analyses of the disease of Western thought are so similar, both in tone and content, including the tone that is their guilt at the self-assertion necessary to exist in this world, that it comes as a surprise that in many respects Levinas and the Frankfurt School are talking about different things. Both are concerned with the tendency toward totalization, best defined as the reduction of the other to the same, the elimination of difference. Both, for example, see Heidegger's ontology as one more instance of the will to grasp the whole.<sup>11</sup> The moment one looks at their solutions, however, it becomes apparent that they mean something quite different by totality and same. Against totality Adorno sets the particular. Levinas sets infinity. The difference could not be any more fundamental than that, or so it seems.

In analyzing the difference, I focus here on the work of Adorno, and to a lesser extent his collaborator Horkheimer, as representative of the Frankfurt School, contrasting both with Levinas. Only occasionally do I turn to Marcuse. This is not because I find less to admire in Marcuse, but because aspects of Marcuse's work come too close to that criticized by Levinas, the discovery of the other as an instance of the same. Finding in nature an eros akin to human eros, Marcuse sometimes writes as if reconciliation with nature meant humanity discovering its true erotic self in nature. This is not so much totalization as reconciliation through reversal, the human subject finding its true nature in what it mistakenly regarded as its object.

Adorno's manner and style comes closer to Levinas, but not too close. If it were simply similarity that I was looking for, then Walter Benjamin, friend and student of Gershom Scholem, would be the Frankfurt School theorist closest to Levinas. Even then, the similarity would be misleading. Whatever Levinas is looking for, it is not redemption, not even in fragments.

More than other members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno was suspicious of reconciliation between subject and object, imagining how readily reconciliation might be extorted from vulnerable object or needy subject. More than other members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno feared eros, except perhaps in the smallest doses, what Adorno calls velleity. More similar to Levinas in tone than teaching, it is this that makes their comparison interesting.

### **Distant nearness or hostage being?**

Reversing Kantian subjectivity, Adorno would let the object take the lead in defining itself. Yield to the object; do justice to its qualities; refrain from definition. Let the object be, approach it with utmost velleity, help it to become what it is.<sup>12</sup> These are the watchwords of Adorno's approach, whose utopian goal is, as Martin Jay puts it, "the restoration of difference and non-identity to their proper place in the non-hierarchical constellation of subjective and objective forces he called peace."<sup>13</sup>

Levinas would never put it this way, and not just because it places the subject on an equal footing with the object. The other about whom Levinas writes is not an object. The other is closer to an anti-object: an otherness so complete it explodes every human category, including object and being. To be sure, the other may be said to have qualities, but the subject misses the point when he or she notices them. Once I notice the qualities of the other, I am in a relationship with the other. I have already gotten too close, entered into a social relationship and so invariably drawn the other into my needs, my project, or so Levinas argues. I approach the other in the proper attitude, says Levinas, when I don't even notice the color of his eyes.<sup>14</sup> Not the particularity of the other, but the way in which the sheer otherness of the other shatters my categories, my existence, my going on being in the world: that is what counts.<sup>15</sup> The moment before I recognize the particular other, the moment before the face has a name: it is then that I suffer the experience of exteriority, as Levinas calls it.

In his later works Levinas refers not to the face, but to what he calls "saying" (*le Dire*). Saying is the unspoken, unwritten dimension of the said. The said (*le Dit*) is the text, my words, what I say. Saying is my exposure to the other, in which I wordlessly assert "here I am, naked and exposed to you." It is this aspect of Levinas's work that many deconstructionists have become so intrigued with, as it seems to justify what is sometimes called reading against the grain. "One reads against what is said in the text in order to remain faithful to what the text says."<sup>16</sup> But notice what saying is not: conversation. In saying I expose myself to the other, but I do not talk with the other. Saying is not a dialogue. Like the face, saying is my exposure to the infinite otherness of the other.

Adorno writes about “beautiful otherness” (*Schönen Fremde*), a term Levinas would never use,<sup>17</sup> and not just because the term implies a relationship of “protected nearness to the distant and different.”<sup>18</sup> Levinas would never put it this way because the experience of the other is too shattering to be beautiful. The experience of the other for Levinas is more akin to the sublime, an experience of awe and terror because it shatters human categories, including the beautiful.<sup>19</sup> For Adorno, the subject and object remain in a tender relationship, almost like a teacher waiting patiently for a child to finish her long story without interrupting. “Distant nearness” Jürgen Habermas called it, a useful term as long as we remember to emphasize the distance over the nearness. For Adorno, beautiful otherness is principally an aesthetic experience, one that requires closeness, but not intimacy.

Not distant nearness, but a “relation without relation” marks the encounter with the other in Levinas’s work.<sup>20</sup> “Even to describe the relationship with the Other as a relationship implies a totalizing perspective,” says Davis.<sup>21</sup> An encounter takes place, but it is “without relation,” as the other remains absolutely other. I serve the other, but I am not attached to the other, in the sense of needing or desiring the other. Although Levinas uses the term “proximity” to characterize the relationship to the other, proximity is more about distance than closeness. What else could proximity to infinity mean but distance? Or death?

One other thing proximity means for Levinas is that I become a hostage to the other. Exposed to the other, overwhelmed by the vulnerability and nakedness of the other, I have no choice (if I allow myself to be open to the experience of the other) but to become the other’s hostage, devoted to his or her welfare, about which I know nothing. Which is why I must devote my life to trying. Confronted by the other, I know only that my intent has been murder, by which Levinas means that I have put myself first. Nothing less than a lifetime of expiation can redeem my egoism.

If Levinas has a motto, it is these lines from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he quotes more than a dozen times throughout his work. “Every one of us is guilty before all, for everyone and everything, and I more than others.” For Levinas, the only ethical relationship between you and me is one in which I become your hostage, persecuting myself for your sins as Levinas puts it. Anything less, or more, is egoism in disguise. “The word I means to be answerable for every-

thing and for everyone, says Levinas.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Adorno's account of distant nearness sounds positively cuddly, a term one would otherwise not associate with Adorno, though Habermas did use the term *anschmiegen* (snuggle) to describe Adorno's ideal relationship to nature.<sup>23</sup>

### Infinites

Adorno writes about non-being and infinity in terms that seem to resonate with Levinas. In fact, the different senses in which they use, or imply, the term "infinity" marks the difference between their projects. Consider some of the different senses in which the term "infinity" may be used.

1. Timelessness, in the sense of going on forever, as if I could just keep counting forever, 1, 2, 3.... Rarely does Levinas use the term "infinity" in this sense; nor does Adorno.
2. Timelessness in the sense of the medieval *nunc stans*, eternity as a place outside of time. The shattering experience of the other about which Levinas writes is located (if that is the right word) under this sense of infinity.
3. Difference, as in an infinity of difference between you and me. This is the "practical" version of infinity, so to speak, how it manifests itself in our ontological world. Levinas frequently implies this sense of the term when writing about the other person. No matter how similar I am to another person in sociological terms, we are completely and utterly different by virtue of being separate people, so different we cannot be compared. "It is not a question of a difference that is due to the absence or presence of a common trait; it is a question of an initial difference that is entirely self-referential. That is the I... What is unique in each man – and this is ultimately a banality – is that he is."<sup>24</sup> The difference is infinite in the sense that it is not subject to comparison.
4. An intrusion of otherness so shocking and complete it tears me from my ego. "The epiphany of the other, which is the concrete form of the infinite."<sup>25</sup> Here infinity refers not just to otherness, but a shattering experience of non-being, as though someone ripped open the vault of the heavens to reveal nothing. Perhaps a better example would be if I looked into the mirror and saw the other. This is the most important use of the term in Levinas's work, although one wonders about the tension between the other as

being and infinity as non-being. They do not fit readily together, which is what Derrida was worried about.

5. Infinity as generative power, a profusion of endless possibilities. This sense of the term is related but different from number 1, as there is no sense of sequence, just endless, proliferating possibilities. It is in this sense that Adorno uses diversity as synonym for infinity. "If delicately understood, philosophy would itself be infinite. Its substance would lie in the diversity of objects that impinge upon it . . . to these objects, philosophy would truly give itself rather than use them as a mirror in which to reread itself, mistaking its own image for concretion."<sup>26</sup>

Only one sense of this term is possibly present in Levinas, that of infinite obligations to the other, who may ask anything and everything, needing more than I could ever give. Even here, the sense of profusion is not strong, so that the need of the other comes close to infinity number 1, an endless succession of needs. One wants to find traces of infinity as profusion in Levinas's discussion of fecundity, seemingly similar to generative power, but by fecundity Levinas means a realm between transcendence and sensuality, not quite the same thing.

6. Infinity is death, non-being, an exit from the terrible burden of being that Levinas calls "there is" (*il y a*). Most of the ways in which Levinas uses the term "infinity" imply an exit from the burden of being, an escape from living and dying in a single human body cut off from transcendence. As Roquentin is nauseated by the sheer thingyness of the Chestnut tree, or a glass of beer, in Sartre's novel *Nausea*, so Levinas writes of the horror of "condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with 'no exits.'"<sup>27</sup> For Sartre, the other is the death of me. Levinas would agree. The difference is that for Levinas this is good, the death of my ego an opening to infinity. Becoming hostage to the other is this death, one that serves not just the other, but also myself, liberating me from my grasping ego.
7. Infinity is God. For Levinas, the infinity of God has little to do with His infinite mercy, justice, wisdom, or power. God is infinite in His otherness, the supreme non-being. In addition to being a philosopher, Levinas is a Talmudic scholar. Abraham Heschel writes that for the religious man, "it is as if things stood with their backs to him, their faces turned to God." For Levinas, it would be more accurate to say that God stands with his back to man, so that we might see His face in the other. Of course, even to see the back of God is to bring him far closer than infinity, but the struggle over



how close one can get to God without becoming non-being oneself is familiar to readers of the Pentateuch (*Exodus* 24.9–12, 33.18–23). Suffice to say that others who have inspired Levinas, such as Franz Rosenzweig in *The Star of Redemption*, have not equated the infinity of God with His non-being. On the contrary, for Rosenzweig God is the “non-Naught.”<sup>28</sup>

Two possibilities present themselves, although of course one should always be careful when the world divides itself so neatly. One possibility is that the different ways in which Levinas and Adorno interpret infinity define the difference in their projects. Levinas sees infinity in philosophical terms that demythologize an ancient religion. Infinity is a way of talking about a supreme non-being, an otherness so other that, like Moses, we cannot look upon its faceless face without being stricken. As close as we dare get is the face of the other, and even then we dare not notice the other’s features or qualities. For Adorno, infinity means the way in which objects always overflow their concepts, the world more diverse than any concept can know. Infinity is the profusion of particulars, as though the method of negative dialectics was itself the model for utopia.

The other possibility is that the differences in how Levinas and Adorno see infinity reflect some deeper divergence in their projects. I can find no deeper divergence, only different ways of expressing this same deviation. Not all refer to infinity, at least not directly. Most refer to the question of what is the opposite of totality? Is it particularity, as Adorno has it? Or is it the other, as Levinas has it, a category neither universal nor particular?

### **Nature and art**

We must urgently defend man against this century’s technology. Man will lose his identity and become a cog in a vast machine that chews up things and beings. In the future, to exist will mean to exploit nature: but in the vortex of this self-devouring enterprise there will be no fixed point. The solitary stroller in the country, who is certain of his belonging, will in fact be no more than the client of a hotel tourist chain, unknowingly manipulated by calculations, statistics, planning. No one will exist for himself (*pour soi*).

The statement might have been written by Marcuse, even Adorno, particularly the next to last sentence, the theme not so much about reconciliation with nature as critique of what nature’s rationalization

does to man. In fact, the statement was written by Levinas for the sole purpose of rejecting it.<sup>29</sup> The external seduction of paganism, says Levinas, is the filtering of the sacred through the natural world. Only the other's hunger is sacred, by which Levinas means not just physical hunger, but the other's need. To see nature in any terms but as means to alleviate human suffering is to turn nature into an idol.

Levinas's account has no room for the dialectic of enlightenment. There is no dialectic period. Technology demystifies nature, freeing us from pagan superstition. "Technology wrenches us out of the Heideggerian world and the superstitions surrounding Place."<sup>30</sup> Unlike the Frankfurt School, Levinas does not worry about re-mythification. Or rather, because he sees the danger of re-mythification everywhere, science is not unusual, or unusually dangerous in this regard, certainly less so than art.

For Adorno and the Frankfurt School, art represents a way of knowing that avoids the dialectic of Enlightenment, in which both science and philosophy are snared. Art is non-conceptual. Visual art is iconic, and so not an instance of identity thinking. Instead of subsuming the particular to the universal, art would represent the universal in the particular, all the while knowing, and showing by virtue of being art, of being semblance, that it cannot be done. This is particularly true of modern or "de-aestheticized" art, argued Adorno, but it is true of all art. The mimetic dimension of art, its implicit tribute to natural beauty, prevents it from coercing nature in the same way as theory does. Even at its most abstract, art copies nature, and so lets nature take the lead. In this regard, art represents an ideal relationship to nature, and to the other in general.<sup>31</sup>

Not for Levinas. For Levinas, art is the idol. We worship it, and so escape the world. "There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague."<sup>32</sup> As one moment of the dialectic, the Frankfurt School, especially Marcuse, would recognize this statement. An aspect of art always lies, granting beautiful form to the most ugly realities, and so suggesting they are not really so terrible.<sup>33</sup> But an aspect of art always tells the truth too, the "promesse de bonheur," the promise of happiness. It is in the play of these two aspects of art that one finds its emancipatory power. Adorno referred to this aspect as the "riddle-like" character of art, its status as uneasy mixture of mimetic and creative elements.<sup>34</sup> Not for Levinas, who sees all art as a statue, a thing frozen in time.

At first, Levinas's analysis of art seems strictly Platonic. Art is an illusion of an illusion, the "shadow of reality," Levinas calls it, a reality that is itself an illusion, shielding us with its sheltering sky from infinity. A second reading suggests quite a different perspective. Art is not an illusion of things. Art is frozen in thinghood. Art is trapped in itself, imprisoned in signs referring to signs, unable to get out, unable even to point to the larger world. Art points only to itself. Art is mock transcendence, directing us not toward the world, but back somewhere into our selves.

While the scholar and philosopher refer "unequivocally" (*sans équivoque*) to the object, the poet, says Levinas referring to Proust, "is concerned not to express but to create the object. Like images or symbols, reasoning is called on to produce a certain rhythm in which the reality that is sought will appear by magic. The truths or errors articulated are of no value in themselves. They are spells and incantations."<sup>35</sup> Rhythm is the language of the different parts of the soul calling to each other. As such, rhythm is as present in the literary as the musical arts, but in neither art form is it interesting.<sup>36</sup> Who cares what the different parts of my soul say to each other? "Saying" has nothing to do with what I say to myself, and almost nothing to do with what I say to the other. Saying is the doing of my becoming your hostage.

If art is so bad, then why does Levinas refer to literature so frequently? Maurice Blanchot, Rimbaud, Racine, and Shakespeare are among his favorites. A line from Dostoevsky serves as Levinas's motto. Even Proust is revealed to be covertly concerned to depict Albertine as the other.<sup>37</sup> Doesn't Levinas's practice deny his critique? In response, Levinas says that good art interrupts itself ceaselessly. Good art imitates a form of ethical discourse that like his own performs its own putting itself into question. The poet Paul Celan, for example, "interrupts the ludic order of the beautiful, of the play of concepts and of the play of the world."<sup>38</sup> Maybe, though what Levinas really seems to mean is that good art is art that is concerned with the themes he is concerned with, in roughly the same way he is concerned with them. Levinas's attempt to make this agreement a formal quality of art is not very persuasive, primarily because it doesn't allow us to distinguish, for example, Nietzsche from Dostoevsky. The former interrupts himself a lot more than the latter.

This raises the interesting question of form versus content, although of course to put it this way is misleading. The interpenetration of form

and content would put it more accurately, as long as we remember that interpenetration is not identity. In *Theologie im Pianissimo: Die Aktualität der Denkfiguren Adornos and Levinas*, de Vries finds great similarity between Adorno's negative dialectics and Levinas's "*alternierenden Reflexion*." At a high enough level of abstraction, what de Vries calls "formally considered," the comparison works. Levinas alternates between the "there is" (*il y a*), mere being, and the absolutely other, and one might even call this movement a negative dialectic insofar as there is no solution, no *Aufhebung*. In this regard Levinas's approach is similar to Adorno's negative dialectic, which also never achieves a conceptual synthesis between self and other, largely in order to protect the other. Similarly, Levinas's distinction between saying and the said resonates with Adorno's hesitance to name the other.<sup>39</sup> If, that is, one wants to find a harmony between the authors. But, why work so hard to find a formal similarity? The only reason I can imagine is to render what is so strange and unusual about Levinas more familiar, by translating him into a more familiar dialectic – that is, dialogue.

In fact, it doesn't work very well, and the reason is because Adorno's object, the non-identical, has little to do with Levinas's other, which is not just other than I, but other than being. That's a big difference, one that makes their methodological similarities pale by comparison. Frequently referring to the metaphor of the trace (*Spur*) in Adorno and Levinas, de Vries downplays that it is a trace of something quite different for each. For Adorno, like Marcuse, for whom it is a favorite phrase, the "*ganz Anders*" is a world turned upside down, relationships among man, woman, and nature seen from the standpoint of redemption. How exactly that would look remains obscure, but the basic idea is clear, a world of peace and contentment, where the lion lays down with the lamb. For Levinas, the trace of the "*ganz Anderen, d.h. des göttlichen Unendlichen*," as De Vries puts it, is not just a revelation, but the redefinition of human concerns in the light of infinity.<sup>40</sup> One might argue that redemption and redefinition in light of infinity have something in common. Nevertheless, the redemption that the Frankfurt School has in mind is spelled out strictly in human terms, the pacification of existence. This is not Levinas's project.

### **Odysseus and Abraham**

Even if it is misleading, one can understand and appreciate the great temptation to bring Levinas and Adorno together on the same page.

For instance, criticism of Homer's *Odyssey* serves as mottoes for both their projects. For both Adorno and Levinas, the *Odyssey* epitomizes the dubious legacy of the Enlightenment.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the myth explains why Enlightenment returns to myth. For all his cunning, Odysseus must deny his own nature to outwit the regressive forces of nature, such as the Circe and the Sirens. In the end, Odysseus's cunning is deployed against himself, as when he has himself tied to the mast, so that he cannot hear the Sirens' call. Like the good bourgeoisie, he can hear the deadly beauty of the song, but he is paralyzed, unable to respond. Their ears stuffed with wax, his men, like laborers everywhere, are deaf to the deadly beauty, which represents the desire for peace and satisfaction, an end to the labor of conquest, whose ultimate object is oneself.

The result of repression is rage (idealism as rage) against a nature that requires such terrible harshness against oneself, rage at what one must do to oneself to survive. One sees the rage in the casual way in which Odysseus hung the dozen servant women who consorted with Penelope's suitors (22:445–497). The cunning of instrumental reason finds its origins in the will to survive not just nature's dangers, but her temptations. Eventually cunning erupts in rage, using the instruments of science in the service of what are essentially mythic goals, such as the purification of *Blut und Boden* (blood and earth, a Nazi ideal). The dialectic of Enlightenment is not just an explanation of the Holocaust, but it is that too.

For Levinas, the *Odyssey* is metaphor for totalization, the reduction of the other to the same. As Odysseus struggles to return home, so Western philosophy struggles to reduce the other to the same, demonstrating that what appears distant and different is really an instance of human reason, finally come home to itself. Not Odysseus, but Penelope, is Levinas's hero of this tale, forever unraveling what she started.

If Penelope is Levinas's hero of the *Odyssey*, it is nonetheless Abraham who is Levinas's true hero, the one who leaves home and never looks back.<sup>41</sup> Nor does he allow his son Isaac to return. While a number of critics have commented on the contrast between Odysseus and Abraham, none, to my knowledge, has looked closely at the story of Abraham (*Genesis* 11.27–25.11). If Abraham is an exile, he is no ordinary one, for Abraham goes with God's blessing. Leave your home, and I promise you a greater one, above all nations. That is God's command

and promise. This Abraham does, and eventually the prosperous and powerful Abraham and his wife are buried together in land he purchases from the Hittites. Isaac, together with his wife, Rebecca, fetched from home by Abraham's servant, lives nearby, populating the land with descendants as numerous as the stars. Is it really leaving home when your father (even if He is in heaven) promises to give you a new and better one?

It will not do to be too crass, or too literal, about stories. Nothing in Levinas's philosophy or theology suggests a conventional view of god as a supreme being. On the contrary, Levinas's God is a supreme non-being. What I want to suggest is that the distinction between homecoming and exile, and with it openness to infinity, is not always so clear. It makes all the difference how one returns home: as Agamemnon does (to mix metaphors, or at least stories), in bloody triumph after wasting the lives of his men, as well as that of his lovely daughter? Or as one who tries to remember what home was really like, free of the grasping, clinging desire to regain it, trying to know it on its own terms, even if it was hell?

This is how Adorno and Horkheimer understand reconciliation with nature, that mysterious term. Not reconciliation with nature, but reconciliation with man's memory of nature, which if it is authentic knows that man and nature were never one. That is the Frankfurt School's project. Jay calls it the "reverential recollection of an object always prior to the remembering subject."<sup>42</sup> It is only by returning home that one knows for certain that one has already left. The result is increased insight into separateness. Not the separateness that is infinity, just the terrible, wonderful everyday separation of self and others, self and world. Isn't that enough?

Let's play with the *Odyssey* story a little more. Imagine that it is Levinas, tied to the mast. What does the mast represent? No, not that! For Horkheimer and Adorno, the mast represents the restraints of reason that prevent Odysseus from abandoning himself to the Sirens' promise of joy that comes too close to death, the pleasure of self-abandonment as self-obliteration, the loss of boundary and limit.

Why would Levinas need to be tied up? This is especially important because Levinas, like Adorno, stresses the virtues of passivity. For Adorno, passivity means mimesis, the method of negative dialectics, in which the subject responds to the object as it is, imagining that it

might be different in only the slightest degree. About this method of exact fantasy, as it is also called, Adorno says it “abides strictly within the material which the sciences present to it, and reaches beyond them only in the smallest aspects of their arrangement: aspects, granted, which fantasy itself must originally generate.”<sup>43</sup> For Adorno, passivity is the opposite of both instrumental reason and idealism.

For Levinas, passivity is not simply the opposite of activity. Passivity is opposed to spontaneity, the spontaneity of my ego and free will. Passivity is being open to possession by the other. Passivity makes me suffer by urging me to detach myself from my endless “desire to return to myself as ravenous center of the universe, avidly utilitarian, artistic, and practical.”<sup>44</sup>

From this perspective, the Sirens represent not the call of self-abandonment, but the false claims of the ego, evidently the opposite. It is this false reality that forever leads me around in circles trying to fulfill myself, trying to get back to the beginning, trying to find myself in everything and everyone I encounter. In tying himself to the mast, Levinas would tie himself to the other, becoming hostage, and thereby curtailing his spontaneity. Not reason but the binding claim of the other is what having himself tied to the mast represents for Levinas.

Adorno sees the ego as a too stern taskmaster, “O lastly over-strong against thy self.” Under pressure, this ego returns to its first principle, ritual sacrifice: first of nature, then others deemed closer to nature (servant girls, natives, Jews), and finally itself. “Though its irrationality makes the principle of sacrifice transient, it persists by virtue of its rationality...”<sup>45</sup> Levinas sees the ego as more akin to Plato’s leaky jar (*Gorgias*, 493b–d). The ego is caught in mythic time because it can never escape its desires, which lead it in circles. The only escape is in passivity, in which I abandon my ego for the other. For Adorno, there is no escape, only an exit from mythic time, in which I abandon not myself, but my quest for mastery over the world, and so come to enter the world as it is: me and a zillion other beings, in no particular order, and certainly no hierarchy.

### **An apartment in the Grand Hotel Abyss**

If I presume to put Levinas in Adorno’s story, shouldn’t I put Adorno in his? I will, but I will have to do it a little differently, telling a story

about an exile who never left home, a category that fits Adorno especially well.

Adorno criticizes Kierkegaard for confusing the existential condition of humanity under capitalism with the existential condition of humanity per se. One sees this, says Adorno, in the way Kierkegaard used the image of the bourgeois *intérieur*, the bourgeois apartment. Nothing gets in, and nothing goes out. Consider, for example, Kierkegaard's story of a father and son walking back and forth in the apartment, pretending they are strolling past exciting places in the outside world.<sup>46</sup>

Or consider Kierkegaard's use of the image of the mirror, employed not just to see one's own reflection, but positioned in bourgeois apartments of the nineteenth century "to reflect the endless streetlines of such rental apartments into the secluded bourgeois living space."<sup>44</sup> Called "spies," (a term Kierkegaard uses to describe himself), these mirrors were familiar furniture in the bourgeois apartment of the era. In them the external world is experienced from a space deep within the bourgeois interior, as the world is defined and bounded by this flat perspective, held in the image of a mirror. In fact, Kierkegaard was a rentier. That this exchange might be a more fundamental reality does not even enter his mind.

Adorno criticizes not just Kierkegaard, but Heidegger, who uses a similar example – the objects in his study. In attempting to define being, Heidegger writes of "equipment" (*Zeuge*), owned and manipulated by the bourgeois subject, as Adorno calls him, valuable only in terms of how they serve the interests of this man, never as they are for themselves. Unlike Kierkegaard's apartment, Heidegger's room lacks spies, mirrors that at least reflect the outside world.

One may think about Kierkegaard's apartment, or Heidegger's study, as versions of Plato's cave. The difference from Plato, of course, has to do with what it means to leave the cave. For Plato, it meant entering into an abstract reality, for Adorno it meant entering into the concrete reality of everyday life as it is lived under capitalism, where nothing is rent free unless you own it, and the things in the professor's study are generally made by men and women who have no time to study and no place to retreat.

From the perspective of Kierkegaard, what one most dreads is nothingness. "The presentment of something which is nothing" is how



Kierkegaard puts it in *The Concept of Dread* [Angst].<sup>48</sup> From the perspective of Levinas, what one most dreads is “there is,” mere being. We dread being some-thing. In an interview late in his career, Levinas speaks about “there is” as a “dread before being,” the “horror and panic” of being trapped in one’s own sack of skin, as Lacan puts it, unable to find a way out.<sup>49</sup>

This suggests what Adorno might say to Levinas, a man in love with infinity. Might the attraction of infinity depend on the prevailing historical circumstances? Do we naturally long for infinity, and how much? Or does that depend on how much we hate our particular way of being, one that drives us deep into the interior of ourselves in order to find any lasting satisfaction? How would we begin to answer this question if we could not compare ways of being, as well as non-being? The problem is not that Levinas does not answer this question, but he does not allow us to ask it, treating all being as though it were one. Isn’t that totalizing too? Once one begins to write in terms of totality and infinity, or being and the other, one has already made questions like these impossible to ask, questions that to be answered must refer to particular beings and others in all their concrete specificity. One must, in other words, notice the color of the other person’s eyes.

What might Levinas say of Adorno? Here we must be a little more imaginative, because Levinas does not write critique in the same style as Adorno. Levinas might say that Adorno never gets out of his apartment either. Negative dialectics is so turned inward, so afraid of “extorted reconciliation,” as Adorno put it when writing about Lukács, so dedicated to not going along (*nicht mitmachen*), that it becomes turned in on itself, a castle defending against the least misunderstanding that might be exploited by the powers that be. Certainly that criticism has been made before. Adorno, says an acquaintance, “never took a trip out of the simple desire to see.” Adorno took up residence in the Grand Hotel Abyss, says another.<sup>50</sup>

Adorno writes of the writer who sets up house in his text. “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.”<sup>51</sup> What a house, filled with sentences and paragraphs so obscure and paradoxical they can only be described as ramparts, or a warren of tunnels like that created by the Ceaușescus of Romania to evade their pursuers. Of course, the hermetic text describes not just Adorno’s home, but that of many postmoderns as well, as though obscurity could create security for those who live there. One could say the same

thing about Levinas, except that for all his obscurity, he desperately wants out.

It would be misleading to suggest that the *intèrieur* quality of Adorno's works stems from linguistic style alone. The interior quality stems from the method of negative dialectics itself (ultimately inseparable from his style), which breaks apart and rejoins the elements Adorno writes about in order to reveal the "sociocultural reality" they constitute. Adorno understands this method as opening the door a tiny crack to utopia, albeit strictly by contrast. "Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light."<sup>52</sup>

### **Exit and verse**

If Adorno would open his apartment door a tiny crack, Levinas would rip the door off its hinges. There's nothing quite like it in Adorno, for whom the messianic light is pale. For Levinas, the brilliance of infinity shatters my ego to pieces, releasing me from the prison of my being. But what if we thought about Levinas's experience in terms of Adorno's comment that "it is not the purpose of critical thought to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol. The purpose of critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy."<sup>53</sup> To be sure, Adorno's object is not Levinas's other, but one still needs to ask if the other does not risk becoming an idol in Levinas's thought.

The answer is almost certainly no. The other is not so much a being to be worshipped as one who shatters the complacency of my being, as though my ego was worth something. Far from being an idol, the other shatters the idol that is my ego and its projects. The question is whether my ego and its projects were merely an idol in the first place.

Are the pleasures I feel in my own existence, as well with my attachments to others, merely the pleasures of a contented cow? And what's wrong in being a contented cow, unless one drinks up someone else's milk? Is not a certain contentment at living and being a Siren call that we should give ourselves up to? While it is a Siren call that is readily confused with the ravenous ego, it is in fact something quite different, akin to the pleasure in being that I might feel lying out in the warm sun

after a cold winter. Levinas would make of that contentment a strictly narcissistic pleasure, but he does not distinguish between satisfactions that take from others without knowing or acknowledging our debt, and satisfactions that come to us merely by virtue of being separate beings. Are there not pleasures that fall between gluttony and servitude? In asking these questions of Levinas, I admit that I am thinking more of Marcuse than Adorno, and that is perhaps the problem.

Adorno can't get out of his apartment, and one reason is because he has too little eros, too little love of the world as it is. He's trapped in velleity, the weakest kind of desire, one that does not lead to the slightest action. Anything more would consume the object in fear and lust, or so Adorno seems to believe. Levinas comes closer to Plato's Socrates in *The Symposium*, writing of a purified desire that is based not on lack and need, and so moves from the love of beautiful bodies to the love of the infinite. Unlike Adorno, Levinas never loses his passion. Instead, his passion loses its object, attaching itself to nothing. But perhaps that was the object all along.

One could read all this and conclude "what else is new?" Only that Adorno is a little more of a materialist than is usually appreciated. Against the idealist Levinas (idealists come in many stripes), one would expect that Adorno would find the messianic light pale, whereas Levinas finds it strong. Substitute Benjamin for Adorno, and one would have theorists with more in common.

True enough, but it is hardly the whole story. If the messianic light is pale in Adorno, the impulse to reconciliation is stronger than in Levinas. Reconciliation is really not a Levinasian category, just as relationship isn't, at least not with the other. One might as well argue that the messianic light is absent in Levinas. Infinity is no more light than darkness. It is exit, a way out of the burden of being in this world, an opening to another worldless world. But exit is not redemption, at least not for Levinas. It creates a whole new series of obligations that tie us tightly to this world, more tightly than Odysseus was tied to the mast. But perhaps this was the point after all.

Let's play with the *Odyssey* one more time. In Horkheimer and Adorno's version, the mast to which Odysseus is tied represents rational self-control. In my version, the mast to which Levinas is tied represents hostage being. But is it clear that the Sirens represent the spontaneous ego? Have the Sirens not always represented something more, the

desire to give oneself over to a peace and satisfaction that comes frighteningly close to death? If so, then Levinas has himself tied so tightly to the mast of hostage being so that the attraction of non-being does not become overpowering. Levinas flirts with death, and it is the reality of the other that saves him, but only because Levinas would become the other's hostage, tied to the other with infinite threads, each representing an obligation so great it can never be met. But, that is good. Trying to do the impossible keeps one in this world one's whole life long.

Can one live in the world another way, one that does not require that I bind myself? Can there be an eros that does not consume its object as though it were prey? How can I live with the reality of other human beings? These are really the same questions. For all their brilliance, neither Adorno nor Levinas give us much guidance.<sup>54</sup>

Most likely there is no answer. There is, however, an interesting point at which Levinas comes close to what is best in Adorno, the Adorno who says "philosophy is the most serious of things, but then again it is not all that serious."<sup>55</sup> I refer to the most playful aspects of Adorno, those least trapped in the Grand Hotel Abyss, more willing to come outside and play. One finds this spirit of play, otherwise so lacking in Levinas, in a curious place, Levinas's discussion of Biblical interpretation, the hermeneutics of sacred texts. This is evidently because Levinas believes these texts are illuminated from within by inspired thought, and so resistant to the reifying powers of man. "We begin with the idea that inspired thinking is a thought in which everything has been thought, even industrial society and modern technocracy."<sup>56</sup>

Fortunately this does not lead Levinas toward literalism. On the contrary, it frees his imagination. In talking about the interpretation of sacred texts, Levinas sounds most like Adorno on exact fantasy, the method of negative dialectics, in which a paratactic style performatively disrupts the hierarchical subsumption of objects under concepts, loosening the bond between subject and object, interpreter and text. Or as Levinas puts it, "exegesis would come to free, in these signs, a bewitched significance that smoulders beneath the characters or coils up in all this literature of letters."<sup>57</sup>

Levinas compares his approach with Ricoeur's fusion of horizons, under which the horizon of the text blends with and extends the reader's horizon.<sup>58</sup> Conversely, the reader gives something of him or herself

to the text, so that it is never the same text. “Hermeneutic nihilism,” as Gadamer calls it, is always a risk, but it is minimized by the fact that serious interpreters work within a tradition. As Levinas puts it,

A distinction is allowed to be made between the personal originality brought to the reading of the Book and the pure play of the fantasies of amateurs (or even of charlatans); this is made both by a necessary reference of the subjective to the historical continuity of reading, and by the tradition of commentaries that cannot be ignored under the pretext that inspirations come to you directly from the text.<sup>59</sup>

You can play with the text, but not too much, and not too freely. A tradition restrains you, which means that it gives you fences within which to play, a playground. Still, for Levinas this is a great liberation.

What if we thought about the relationship to the other like the relationship to a sacred text? The relationship would be delicate, respectful, free to innovate and play, but only within limits. You would not be hostage to the other; you would serve the other in a way that comes close to the Frankfurt School’s project of speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves, the spiritually wounded and the dead. You could bring something new to the other, but only with the utmost care, as a mother presents a new toy to baby. This, the psychoanalyst Winnicott tells us, allows the other to create the object for him or herself.<sup>60</sup>

Here Adorno and Levinas converge, but only for a moment. Surprising is how much work it takes to get them this close. The reason is the difference between object and other. For Levinas, I turn to sacred texts for inspiration, but I turn to the other for an exit from being. There is really nothing quite like this in Adorno. It is actually Marcuse who comes closest to Levinas in the closing chapters of *Eros and Civilization*, which play with the conjunction of eros and thanatos.<sup>61</sup> Only for Levinas it is not play. Not the conjunction of eros and thanatos, but the assimilation of thanatos to eros is Levinas’s project, so that desire might seek infinity.

For Levinas, the love of infinity, non-being, sometimes sounds like love of death. Not the *Liebestod* of Marcuse, with its images of Orpheus and Narcissus, and its experiences of silence, peace, night, and death. For Levinas, the attraction of non-being has more to do with a release from the burden of being: not instrumental being, or egoistic being, or alienated being. Just being. “It is not a matter of escaping from solitude,” says Levinas, “but rather of escaping from being.”<sup>62</sup> About the

love of death in Levinas, Bloechl concludes that “ethics . . . has as much to do with limiting a desire beyond being as it does with keeping that desire in view.”<sup>63</sup> It is, I believe, the Frankfurt School’s commitment to the values of peace and satisfaction in this world as goods in themselves (that is, the School’s materialistic inheritance, impoverished as it sometimes seems) that sets this limit for both Adorno and Marcuse. The same limit is lacking in Levinas.

Both Levinas and Adorno were Jews who wrote in the shadow of the Holocaust. Adorno was half Jewish and escaped Germany. Levinas was interned in a prison camp for French officers and escaped with his life. Adorno was an exile. The same cannot quite be said of Levinas, though their situations were similar. Levinas left Lithuania to study in France at the age of seventeen, and remained there the rest of his life. His wife and children survived the Holocaust while hiding out in a French monastery. His family in Lithuania were all slain. Isn’t this the most important thing about Adorno and Levinas, one might well ask? Both are witnesses to the remains of a world on which God seems to have turned His back, but not to protect us from His glory.

Just as too much can be made of their formal methodological similarities, one can make too much of their parallel lives. What divides them is Adorno’s love of the world. To be sure, Adorno’s is the most cautious and broken love around, terrified of falsity and extortion. In fact, it takes a comparison with someone like Levinas, one more attracted to non-being than being, to see Adorno’s love of the world.<sup>64</sup> A little love for the world, resistant and shrunken as it is in Adorno, is necessary for social theory. In other words, social theory requires that one be more attracted to being than non-being. Not because Levinas cares less for the denizens of this world. He doesn’t. But because one must dwell in the details of this world in order to know it as a social theorist, and that Levinas does not, and I believe cannot, do. One might respond that it is no surprise to conclude that Levinas is not a social theorist, even as he is sometimes regarded as such. A recent book treats Levinas’s concept of the political.<sup>65</sup> It is surprising, however, to discover why Levinas isn’t a social theorist. He doesn’t love the world enough to dwell with and in it. That old misanthrope Adorno evidently did.

## Notes

1. "Violence and Metaphysics," by Jacques Derrida, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), posed the challenge to Levinas. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), was Levinas's eventual answer. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, by Derrida, trans. P-A. Brault and M. Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), is Derrida's eulogy.
2. Derrida elaborates that, while of course he expresses himself differently from Levinas, what he shares is the double tradition of phenomenology and Judaism. His interlocutor, André Jacob, is incredulous that Derrida would have no fundamental differences with Levinas. Simon Critchley, in *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd edition (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1999), 9-10, provides extended excerpts from Derrida's response in *Altéritiés*.
3. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), 141.
4. "The Other, Utopia, and Justice," in *Entre nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 223-233, 226.
5. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. R. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 60. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 5.
6. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 16.
7. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 22.
8. Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 116.
9. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 47.
10. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
11. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 61-65.
12. *Ibid.*, 43.
13. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 68.
14. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 85.
15. In *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 209-211, Susan Handelman argues that the face introduces the individual personality into Levinas's work. But Levinas says we should remember that the other (*Autrui*) shatters my ego only when the other "is not initially the fellow human being or the neighbor; but when it is the very distant, when it is Other, when it is the one with whom initially I have nothing in common, when it is an abstraction.... Consequently, it is necessary to avoid the words neighbor and fellow human being, which establish so many things in common...." In "Transcendence and Height," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. A. Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indiana: Indianapolis University Press, 1996), 11-31, 27.
16. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 46.
17. The term is from Eichendorff.
18. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), volume 1, 390. This is my translation from the German original, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), vol. 1, 523.

19. About Kant's view of the sublime, Iris Murdoch states "whereas beauty results from a harmony between imagination and understanding, sublimity results from a conflict between imagination and reason." In "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. P. Conradi (New York: Penguin Books), 208. Stuart Dalton reflects on the connection between the other in Levinas and the sublime in Kant in "Obligation to the Other in Levinas and the Experience of the Sublime in Kant," <http://uhavax.hartford.edu/~dalton/sublimeobligation.html>.
20. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 79–80.
21. Colin Davis, *Levinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 45.
22. Levinas, "Substitution," 90–91, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 79–96. A student of Levinas might respond that in characterizing his ethics in terms of persecution and becoming the other's hostage, I have confused realms, the ontological with the ethical. When he talks about ethics, Levinas is talking about a relationship with the infinitely other, the profoundly distant and different. When he talks about ontology, Levinas is talking about our day-to-day relationships with other people, relationships that run the gamut from erotic relationships to the institutions of law and justice. Have I not (the follower of Levinas might continue) falsely assumed that in talking about persecution and hostage-being Levinas is talking about attributes of real relationships, instead of infinite ones? Such criticism is relevant, but not decisive. First, Levinas often writes about ethical relationships as though they were real relationships with real people. The rhetorical, almost magical, power of his texts stems from this strategy. One moment the other is a person, the next a mirror whose face is infinity. Alphonso Lingis, translator of *Totality and Infinity*, says that with the author's permission he capitalizes the word "Other" when the word refers to another person, the "personal Other, the you," as it generally does (24, note). Most of the appearances of the term are capitalized. One might still argue that when he talks about the infinitely other, Levinas is referring to an aspect of our relationship with real others (that is, not every aspect), and that would be true. What is not true is that Levinas is talking about some Other more august and transcendent than real other people. That would miss the point Levinas is trying to make, that we know the infinite only through other people.
23. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 1, 512.
24. Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," discussion section, 28–29.
25. Peperzak, *To the Other*, 182.
26. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 13. On Adorno on non-being, see 57–59. "The inextinguishable color [of utopia] comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant..." (57).
27. Levinas, "There Is: Existence Without Existents," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), 29–36, 34.
28. In *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), Rosenzweig defines God in terms of His complete indefinability, but this is to come as close to the being of God as humans possibly can. God is the non-Nought, and "in front of us there lies as goal an Aught: the reality of God" (23–24).
29. Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 231. The statement is intended as a caricature of Heidegger, but it fits the Frankfurt School, which is not to say that Heidegger's view of nature is similar to the School's.



30. Ibid., 232–233. Levinas’s vehemence stems in part from his grave disappointment in Heidegger, his teacher. It is present on every page of the essay.
31. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 107–115.
32. Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow,” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 142.
33. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).
34. “Art is a refuge for mimetic behaviour . . . . Art is rationality criticizing itself without being able to overcome itself.” In Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 79–85. Richard Wolin explains Adorno’s aesthetic theory well in “The De-ästheticization of Art: On Adorno’s *Ästhetische Theorie*,” in *Telos*, 41 (Fall, 1979). Jay, *Adorno*, 157.
35. “The Other in Proust,” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Hand, 160–165, 161.
36. “Reality and its Shadow.” Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 75–90.
37. “The Other in Proust,” 164–165.
38. Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 66.
39. Hent de Vries, *Theologie im Pianissimo und Zwischen Rationalität und Dekonstruktion: Die Aktualität der Denkfiguren Adornos and Levinas’* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989), 271, 277. Part of the problem may be de Vries’s frequent use of Habermas as mediator between Adorno and Levinas, as though Habermas’s perspective could render them commensurable.
40. Ibid., 321. This difficult to translate phrase might be rendered “the entirely other, i.e., the infinity of God.”
41. Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1974), 188–191.
42. Jay, *Adorno*, 68.
43. “Die Aktualität der Philosophie,” 341, quoted and translated in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 86. Jay, in *Adorno*, discusses the complexity of mimesis, showing that it is constructive, not merely receptive (155–158).
44. Adriaan Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 185.
45. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 53–54.
46. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (Tübingen: Verlag J. C. B. Mohr, 1933), [republished 1966]. I draw heavily on Buck-Morss’s discussion of this example, and the similar example from Heidegger, in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 117–121.
47. Adorno, *Kierkegaard*, 78, Buck-Morss translation, 117.
48. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread [Angst]*, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 38. *Ethics and Infinity*, 47–52.
49. *Ethics and Infinity*, 47–52.
50. Hans Mayer, in Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 187. Georg Lukács is the source for the “Grand Hotel Abyss” remark, in *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 22. Quoted in Jay, *Adorno*, 18.
51. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974), 87.

52. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247. The quotation continues “To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought.”
53. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 181.
54. Levinas’s introduction of the third (*le tiers*) is, I believe, no answer, but I cannot go into my reasoning here, except to say that it is an impulse, not an argument. On the third see Levinas’s “Peace and Proximity,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 161–169.
55. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 14.
56. Levinas, “Messianic Texts,” *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, 59–96, 68.
57. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, trans. G. Mole (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 109.
58. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 109. Davis, *Levinas*, 115. I’ve relied heavily on Davis’s discussion of Levinas’s hermeneutics.
59. Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 135.
60. D.W. Winnicott, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1–25.
61. In his choice of Orpheus and Narcissus as the culture heroes of eros, Marcuse picks figures who in the end choose death over life. But this is hardly Marcuse’s last word. Opposing these characters to the usual culture heroes, Odysseus and Prometheus, Marcuse is playing with the conjunction of life and death. It’s a dangerous game, but Marcuse rarely slips. In *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 159–171.
62. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 59.
63. “Ethics as First Philosophy and Religion,” in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. J. Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 130–151, 149–150.
64. Levinas flirts with erotics in *Totality and Infinity*, devoting pages to the phenomenology of the (male) experience of the nude woman, 254–273. But eros is always separated from ethics, for eros is always self-indulgent, about pleasure not goodness.
65. Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2001).