

LEVINAS AND THE LANGUAGE OF PEACE

A RESPONSE TO DERRIDA

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Without the prohibition war would be impossible and inconceivable.

Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*¹

The theory that war is original has long been upheld in one form or another in the Western tradition of philosophy, from Heraclitus and Callicles to Machiavelli and Hobbes, to Hegel and nineteenth century liberalism (not to forget Nietzsche). If today the theory provokes a less vociferous polemic, this is probably attributable not so much to a profound post-metaphysical skepticism, or the conviction of undecidability, but more to the fact that a century of two world wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, killing fields and terrorism, has provided the theory with an empirical seal (which it perhaps never lacked) and the dubious comfort of the final word. One notable exception here, however, is Emmanuel Levinas, not merely in his reopening the debate, but in his uncompromising insistence on the originality of peace.

That peace is primary, war secondary, is stated in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) as follows:

The face threatens the eventuality of a struggle, but this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word. War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first event of the encounter.²

How are we to read this statement, so circumspect as to be almost impenetrable? What

does it mean to say that the “face threatens [*menace*]” the possibility of war? How can this threat in part comprise the “epiphany” of the face and yet not belong to its primary expression? The difficulty is further compounded by the realization that the latter, according to Levinas, is the absolute prohibition against killing, the *You shall not commit murder* of the Decalogue (TI199/Ti173). By designating this as the “first word” of ethics, has not Levinas precisely conceded what *eo ipso* he was seeking to disclaim, namely, the preliminary threat of war? Does not the word forbidding murder bespeak an intention already to commit murder? “What no human soul desires stands in no need of prohibition,”³ says Freud.

That the ethical relation, or peace, is not simply opposed to war, nor simply presupposed by war, but that it also presupposes war, was a conclusion drawn by Derrida in his 1964 seminal study, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas.”⁴ Derrida reached this conclusion through an examination of the intrinsic connection between ethics and language. Arguing that language comprises an innate tendency towards violence, Derrida repeatedly denied that ethics could sustain the system of priorities Levinas sought to organize in its favor. In the following essay we will address Derrida’s criticism of Levinas in detail, and will attempt to show—as dangerous a hermeneutical principle it might seem—that it is governed by a partial, and consequently flawed, reading of the major work

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available at that time, *Totality and Infinity*. In so doing, we will undertake to defend the founding priority Levinas attaches to ethical peace, while remaining sensitive to what is undoubtedly a decisive lesson to be learned from Derrida's reading, namely that any such founding, should it exist, confounds any straightforward logical or chronological ordering of terms or events.⁵

I

A predominant strategy in "Violence and Metaphysics" is to show that the declared intentions imputed to Levinas the author may not be reconciled with the philosophical discourse comprising his text. For the most part this is fulfilled in connection with Levinas' attempt in *Totality and Infinity* to go beyond the tradition of philosophy, an attempt frustrated, according to Derrida, owing to its dependence on the very language of philosophy. To choose a standard example: it is seen that when Levinas seeks to convey the sense of transcendence through the employment of key terms such as "exteriority" and "infinity," both of which participate in a binary logic, he "cannot designate the (infinite) irreducible alterity of the Other except through the negation of (finite) spatial exteriority [or interiority]" (WD114/Ed168). This would suggest that "the meaning of this alterity is finite, is not positively infinite" (WD114/Ed168), constituting the very opposite of transcendence.

The strategy of separating authorial intention from textual implication is again operative when Derrida turns to an examination of Levinas' assertion of the primacy of peace over war. In this instance, however, attention falls not so much on the use of language to describe ethics, as on the description of language itself as ethics, the ascription of language to ethics. Taking as his point of departure the central thesis from *Totality and Infinity* that the ethical relation is "originally

enacted as discourse" (TI39/Ti9, modified translation), Derrida argues that since language is universal ontological, the medium of comprehension, conceptualization and thematization, all of which, according to Levinas' own analyses, constitute a reduction of alterity, then Levinas must remain this side of his intentions in the cited work, "directed toward apperceiving in discourse a non-allergic relation with alterity" (TI47/Ti18). Not that Derrida here has simply refused the important distinction Levinas makes in *Totality and Infinity* (anticipating the vocabulary of *Otherwise Than Being* thirteen years later)⁶ between "saying [*dire*] to the Other" (TI48/Ti71) and that which "is said [*dit*] and hence can be a theme" (TI98/Ti71), such that all dialogue *with* the Other is construed as dialogue *about* the Other. The apparent overriding force behind his argument rests with Levinas' claim that thought is language, that "thought consists in speaking" (TI40/Ti10). Derrida repeatedly draws on this claim (e.g., WD99; 100; 115; 116/Ed147; 149; 169; 171), since the question for ethics then becomes how both to think and not think about the Other, how to have any relation with someone (peace) which isn't mediated by reflection on her or him and *ex hypothesi* language (violence). In Derrida's own words:

How to think the other, if the other can be spoken only as exteriority and through exteriority, that is, nonalterity? And if the speech which must inaugurate and maintain absolute separation is by its essence rooted in space, which cannot conceive separation and absolute alterity? If, as Levinas says, only discourse (and not intuitive contact) is righteous, and if, moreover, all discourse essentially retains within it space and the Same—does this not mean discourse is originally violent? And that the philosophical logos, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by

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war? (WD116/Ed171)

The question arises to what extent Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* was already aware of the problems that the essay “Violence and Metaphysics” would later pose, and what level of awareness, in turn, Derrida could be seen to have of this awareness. There can be no doubt that Levinas was altogether aware of the violent distortion involved in discoursing on ethical discourse, even if he did see this as a restitution of the object discourse. We read, for example: “the very utterance by which I state it and whose claim to truth, postulating a total reflection, refutes the unsurpassable character of the face to face relation, nonetheless confirms it by the very fact of stating this truth - of telling it [*le dire*] to the Other” (TI221/Ti196). Remarks such as this would give substance to Derrida’s repeated claim that the questions he is posing to Levinas are in fact questions posed by Levinas to us and “already belong to his own interior dialogue” (WD109/Ed161; cf. also WD84;152/Ed125;226). They would also help explain why the author of “Violence and Metaphysics” deems it appropriate to confide: “We are not denouncing, here, an incoherence of language or a contradiction in the system” (WD111/Ed164)—indicating that it would be inappropriate to read the essay as purely critical, in the negative sense of fault-finding.

When we turn, however, to Levinas’ assertion of the originality of non-violence, over which he shows no readiness for compromise, things appear in a less conciliatory light. Derrida claims the thesis “would be entirely coherent if the face were only a glance, but it is also speech” (WD147/Ed219). Accordingly, “pure non-violence is a contradictory concept . . . beyond what Levinas calls ‘formal logic’” (WD146/Ed218). Are not these remarks precisely critical? Do they not suggest an incoherence at another level than the “purely

abstract and formal contradiction” (TI50/Ti20) Levinas himself associates with metaphysics in its attempt to express transcendence? To read them as such would enable us to make sense of Derrida’s seeming “correction” of Levinas’ thinking, when he states that the latter “doubtless” would be better served were it “in a certain way, to become classical once more, and find other grounds for the divorce between speech and thought” (WD151/Ed224).

Still, it is far from evident that Levinas did eschew these grounds, only to fall prey to incoherence and contradiction in the way that Derrida suggests. First we must become clear as to what “speech” and “thought” taken in conjunction refer in *Totality and Infinity*, for it will be seen that both these terms are given different registers on different occasions. Indeed, has not Derrida interpreted Levinas’ assertion that “thought consists in speaking” too narrowly? Derrida considers this at one with the teaching that “there is no thought before language” (WD115/Ed149). Levinas does say as much, though not without important qualification—qualification pretermitted by Derrida. We read: “Language thus conditions the functioning of *rational* thought: it gives a commencement in being” (TI204/Ti179). Leaving aside for the moment the basis of such an operation, what may not be overlooked is the suggestion here of a thought which isn’t simply reducible to reason (or understanding), a language not simply reducible to ontology. Hence Levinas goes on to say in the same passage:

Language conditions thought—*not language in its physical materiality*, but language as an attitude of the same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to an intention of thought, irreducible to consciousness of . . . language as an *attitude of the mind*. (TI204/Ti179, my emphasis)

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“Would such a language still deserve its name?” (WD147/Ed219). Not if we remain within the Greek understanding of *logos*, volunteers Derrida, who credits Plato with having shown that language is bound to predication (implying the verb *to be*) (WD147/Ed219). In which case, Levinas’ dissociation of “language as an attitude of the mind” and “language in its physical materiality,” might be reinterpreted from a classical point of view as none other than the dissociation of thought and language (*logos*) as such, precisely the schema Derrida considered him to have “entirely abandoned” (WD151/Ed224).

But the predominant classical schema invoked by Levinas, as a reader familiar with *Totality and Infinity* will know, is not that separating thought and language, but that which separates sensibility and understanding. The decisive figure here is not so much Plato or Descartes (according to Derrida, the sole philosophical legacies to which Levinas subscribes [WD98/Ed146]), as Kant. Levinas is unequivocal: “The role Kant attributed to sensible experience in the domain of the understanding belongs in metaphysics to interhuman relations” (TI179/Ti151). True, Kant would not call “blind” intuition an *experience*, which, grounded in the transcendental unity of apperception, presupposes the synthetic application of the categories. But in affirming, if only by way of an abstraction, the independence of the manifold of representation with regard to the operation of the understanding, “at least he does recognize that of itself the sensible is an apparition without there being anything that appears” (TI136/Ti109). This appearing without there being anything that appears—a formulation Levinas will in later works take up in connection with the notion of “trace”⁷—is constitutive of ethics as “an experience that is not commensurate with any a priori frame-

work—a conceptless experience” (TI101/Ti74). Surprisingly, Derrida, though he does briefly address, and criticize, what he calls the metaphysical pretensions of “empiricism” (“renunciation of the concept, of the a priori and transcendental horizons of language” [WD151/Ed224]), doesn’t follow further this decisive path taken by Levinas when, having redressed the classical subordination of language to thought, he appears to undercut any formal distinction altogether by retaining a notion of experience which, constituted in sensibility, is that of pure feeling—pure *Desire*.⁸

Can this sensible experience, whether it be understood as immaterial (silent) language or non-representational thought, maintain itself in strict isolation from language and thought as speech and violence? It is this that Derrida most emphatically denies in “Violence and Metaphysics.” Pure non-violence, according to Derrida, would amount to language in its “pure intention” (WD148/Ed219), a language of “pure invocation” (WD147/Ed218), where the Other is invoked without anything being predicated (said) of her or him. He rightly asks: “if one remains with Levinas’ intentions, what would a language without phrase, a language which would say nothing, offer to the other?” (WD147/Ed219)

Incontrovertibly, Derrida’s essay, focussing as it does on problems relating to theory, tends to obscure the many passages in *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas insists that the ethical relation is enacted with “full hands” (TI205/Ti179). This is not a criticism. It is offset by Levinas’ likewise repeated claim that language proper is “a primordial dispossession,” “a primordial donation” (TI173/Ti148) to the Other, by which he means the linguistic gift makes possible the material gift since through it “things receive a name and become concepts” (TI174/Ti149), and henceforth exist in com-

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mon between the self and the Other. As Derrida interprets Levinas, then:

the origin and the possibility of the concept are not the thought of Being, but the gift of the world to the other as totally-other. In its original possibility as offer, in its still silent intention, language is non-violent (but can it be language, in this pure intention?). It becomes violent only in its history, in what we have called the phrase, which obliges it to articulate itself in a conceptual syntax opening the circulation of the same, permitting itself to be governed [. . .] by “ontology.” (WD148/Ed219)

While Derrida does indeed go on to broach the possible charge of “ahistoricism” (WD148/Ed220) here, significantly it is not made with any real conviction, for two reasons. First, he acknowledges that Levinas never sought to avoid the charge if this meant imputing to him the view of ethics as “beyond history,” which is how Derrida intends it. And second, Derrida is typically cautious as regards fostering any preconceived view of history, determined ontico-empirically or teleologically, such as would dissimulate a more profound sense of history, of which it would be but a moment (as argued by Heidegger). Indeed, despite his falsely attributing to Levinas the view that the totality is finite (WD107/Ed158),⁹ Derrida asks whether Levinas’ notion of the beyond of history is not precisely to be identified with this more profound history (WD149/Ed222).

This is not to say, however, that Derrida finds unproblematic the thesis he imputes to Levinas separating the original possibility of language in its silent (non-violent) intention from language necessary for the gift in historical actuality, thus conceding the absolute primacy of peace over war. Not at all. So all pervasive does Derrida take violence to be that he considers it present even in connection with ethics as the silent origin of (finite)

history, even within what might provisionally be called non-history. Indeed, it is this violence that he calls the “worst violence,” and that the violence of historical language is itself to curb. Continuing the passage cited earlier, he queries:

But why history? Why does the phrase impose itself? Because if one does not speak, then the worst violence will silently cohabit the idea of peace? Peace is made in a *certain silence*, which is determined and protected by the violence of speech. . . . One never escapes the *economy of war*. (WD148/Ed220, Derrida’s emphasis)

Although he doesn’t use the formulation in his essay on Levinas, Derrida here gestures towards the origin of language as a “double origin,”¹⁰ an origin not isolable in a specific temporal or spatio-temporal moment, and so irreducible to a present recuperable by memory or transcendental analysis.¹¹ If the silent non-violent origin of language cannot be separated from silence as violence—a violence language itself is called to suppress while itself exercising violence—then language shows itself to be both conditioned by and the condition for the ethical relation considered as peace.

Derrida, we believe, is right to see in the original possibility of speech the threat of violence. Yet we do not consider the exigency of language to derive from the necessity to avoid this threat as the “worst violence,” however this is understood. We consider it rather to derive from the concern with what is called *justice*, the necessity to escape violence injurious of *the third party (le tiers)*. Arguably, this thesis was more than implicit in *Totality and Infinity* and serves as the key to interpreting Levinas’ assertion of the primacy of peace. We hope to show this in the second part of this essay.

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II

The ethical relation has recourse to speech and language, and therefore violence, according to Derrida, because without them the “worst violence” (WD117; 130; 148; 152/Ed173; 191; 220; 226) would obtain. This is crucial to his argument. In one passage he writes:

Discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only do itself violence, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the *war which institutes it* without ever being able to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse. Necessarily without appropriating it, for if it did so, the horizon of peace would disappear into the night (*worst violence as pre-violence*). This secondary war, as the avowal of violence, is the least possible violence, the only way to repress the *worst violence*, the violence of the primitive and prelogical silence, of an unimaginable night which would not even be the opposite of day, an *absolute violence* which would not even be the opposite of nonviolence: *nothingness or pure non-sense*. (WD130/Ed190–1, my emphasis)

We quote this passage at length because it contains the bulk of what Derrida has to say about “worst violence.” Where does Derrida find this problematic notion in Levinas’ work? Would Levinas subscribe to Derrida’s descriptions here? Can we not feel certain that his principal objection would lie with the claim that it is “war which institutes” discourse? Derrida himself must have had more than an inkling, for earlier in “Violence and Metaphysics” he had quoted Levinas from *Totality and Infinity* as saying that the ethical relation “alone institutes language” (TI42/Ti12, modified translation; quoted by Derrida WD96/Ed142).

It is tempting to assimilate Derrida’s account of the silent night here with Levinas’

interpretation of Descartes’ “First Meditation” and the hypothesis of an evil genius.¹² In the section of *Totality and Infinity* entitled “Truth Presupposes Justice,” Levinas asks what it would be like to inhabit a world governed by the possibility of illusion. The first thing to strike us—or strike one, since this world is “solitary” (TI90/Ti62)—would be that it is “absolutely silent” (TI90/Ti63). It would be a world of “pure spectacle” (TI90/Ti62), a world of appearances, and thus an “absurd” world in the Kantian sense, for nothing, no object, could be divined as appearing behind these appearances. It would be at the limit of “non-sense” (TI93/Ti66), according to Levinas, “an-archic, without principle, without a beginning” (TI90/Ti63). These claims, however, are not assertoric. They are problematic and provisional. Levinas subsequently retracts many of them, without thereby seeking to maintain their opposites. What is crucial to Descartes’ meditative concern is that it is merely an hypothesis. One doesn’t know whether this world exists. One precisely doubts that one knows it doesn’t. This solitary silent spectacular world is “equivocation” (TI91/Ti63) *par excellence*. It is not illusion pure and simple; it is the possibility of illusion—an illusion perhaps about illusion (without thereby assuming veridicality). The most important retraction is that this world is in fact “absolutely silent” (TI94/Ti66). It is between silence and speech, conversing with both, as it were. It is not the silence of the desert, but the silence where speech is deserted, not the silence of language but the language of silence. Levinas calls it “antilanguage” or “inverse language” (TI91/Ti64), by which he does not mean ante-language or non-language, but language which is against language, the language of concealment and deceit, which nonetheless betrays its own betrayal and thus exposes itself. It is a language without words (“physical materiality”), but

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not without intention (“attitude”): “It proceeds as though from a mocking intention . . . as though in this silent world a lie were perpetrated, as though silence were but the modality of an utterance” (TI91/Ti63-4). Thus the second important retraction, which is in fact a corollary of the first: Descartes’ imaginary world is not *absolutely* solitary at all. Even in solipsism the I maintains a relation with the Other:

The silent world is a world that comes to us from the Other, be he an evil genius. (TI91/Ti64)

Just how far Derrida’s account of the “worst violence,” the violence to which the violence of speech is to respond, corresponds with Levinas’ account of the silent world of the evil genius is unclear. Nowhere does Derrida refer to the latter explicitly, which is consistent with his general neglect of Levinas’ remarkable reading of Descartes (the exception is WD106/Ed156–7). Certainly, Levinas would not accept the claim that the silent world is “pure non-sense” (it is at the “limit of non-sense”), nor the claim that it is “nothingness” (Levinas repeats: “What appears is not degraded into nothing” (TI91/Ti63)). Perhaps the most discrepant feature in Levinas’ account—and this alone might serve to distinguish it from Derrida’s altogether—is the lack of any mention of “violence,” let alone “absolute violence.”

Leaving aside for the moment the question as to what “absolute violence” could mean such that “it would not even be the opposite of non-violence” (and who, after Hegel, has underlined the difficulty of absolving absolutism from relativism more than Derrida—not least in his essay on Levinas?), will it not be argued that an undercurrent of violence is implicit in Levinas’ account? The Other governing the silent world is after all described as “evil” and “mendacious” (TI90/Ti63). Still, this would suggest that the same is the

target of violence, and Levinas rarely uses the term “violence” to describe the Other’s relation to the same. When he does, it is used figuratively to describe the sense in which the thought or idea of the Other, like that of numerical infinity, is inadequate (“violence for the mind, consists in welcoming a being to which it is inadequate” [TI25/Ti xiii]). It is precisely the attempt at adequation all the same that constitutes “violence” in a literal sense against the Other. Thus Levinas can write, without contradiction, that ethics “is imposed upon the I beyond all violence by a violence that calls it entirely into question” (TI47/Ti18).

In fairness, Derrida does on occasion in “Violence and Metaphysics” call into question his own description of the “worst violence” as “absolute,” as violence pure and simple. Twice he asks whether it is meaningful to speak of “preethical violence” (WD125;128/Ed184;188). No doubt he would agree with Levinas’ assertion in *Totality and Infinity* that “War . . . can be produced only where discourse was possible” (TI225/Ti200). But he would also want to reverse the claim, as we know. It is time to reconsider this reversal, even if in doing so we choose a path which Derrida, for whatever reason, refused to follow.

We have seen that Levinas describes the Cartesian world of doubt as not only silent but “solitary.” To be sure, the “being that is alone” (TI90/Ti63), the I of the *cogito*, finds itself, according to Levinas, in relation with the Other, “be he an evil genius.” Yet the external world of others, like the order of being behind appearances, has been suspended. The relation shows itself to be similar to that which exists between lovers, “a society without language” (TI265/Ti242), “at the same time beneath and beyond discourse” (TI255/Ti233), “in the shadow of non-sense” (TI264/Ti242), “equivocal” (TI260/Ti237), “laughter” (TI260/Ti238),

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“refractory to the light, a category exterior to the play of being” (TI264/Ti242). Without being able here to take up the myriad similarities between the evil genius and the feminine (“master superiorly intelligent” [TI264/Ti241]), suffice it to say that the silent night of the evil genius, like the “night of the erotic” (TI258/Ti236), *excludes the third party*.

Who is the third party? What is the significance of the third party for the account of the origin of language as found in *Totality and Infinity*? The third party is introduced midway in the cited text as follows:

In order that multiplicity be maintained, the relation proceeding from me to the Other—the attitude of one person with regard to another—must be stronger than the formal signification, to which every relation risks being degraded. This greater force is concretely affirmed in the fact that the relation proceeding from me to the other cannot be included within a network of relations visible to a third party. (TI121/Ti93)

Notice that Levinas here preferences a description of the ethical relation in terms of “attitude”—not spoken language. The preference is due to the fact that the third party who stands empirically outside the relation, while in a position to gauge what is said, cannot gauge the intention underlying what is said, which is structured on the basis of separation (the difference between the self and Other). Beyond all theory (*theoria*, f. *theoreo*, to look at), the ethical relation is invisible to an external observer, whose synoptic gaze would conceive of the relata as members of a genre, as participants in a totality.

And yet, although the ethical relation is invisible to the third party, the third party is made visible from within the ethical relation, which may thus be said to include the third party. In the important section in *Totality and*

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Infinity entitled “The Other and the Others,” Levinas declares:

The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other—language is justice. (TI213/Ti188)

Language is justice. The proposition is to be interpreted literally: “It is not that there first would be a face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice” (TI213/Ti188). Language, the manifestation of the Other, is already an expression of this concern. It is so because, inseparable from language as speech, it belongs to the order of universality (“The relation with the Other does not only stimulate, provoke generalization . . . but is this generalization itself. Generalization is a universalization” [TI173-4/Ti149])—an order which derives from the relation with the third party. This remains to be shown.

An essential moment of ethics is “my partialness [*partiellité*], my position before the other as a face” (TI214/Ti189). But this is only a moment. For the Other is not unique in her or his proletarian condition: “His equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the third party” (TI213/Ti188). Who therefore merits most concern? Whose needs are the most pressing? In privileging one person, do I not in turn risk not only ignoring, but also injuring another?¹³ The meditation is Kantian: “Complaisance towards those with whom we are concerned is very often injustice towards others who stand outside our little circle.”¹⁴ Hence, the necessity to resort to reason and (reflective) judgment, *a necessity of justice*, according to Levinas, which founds the order of rationality and universality, concretized by the legal and institutional practices of the state. In the “Conclusions” to *Totality and Infinity* we read:

In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the meta-

physical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. (TI300/Ti276)

It would be more precise to say that “the source of universality,” rather than state institutions and laws, which are constitutive of universality, is the relation with the Other made complex by the relation with the third party. Thus “society precedes the apparition of these impersonal structures, [...] universality reigns as the presence of humanity in the eyes that look at me” (TI208/Ti183).

This reign, of course, is also in danger of becoming a tyranny. Universality, or universal “ontology”

ends up at the state in the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against *the violence from which this non-violence lives*, and which appears in the tyranny of the state. Truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously. Universality presents itself as impersonal; and this is another inhumanity. (TI46/Ti16, modified translation; my emphasis)

Nevertheless, “the violence from which this non-violence lives,” a formulation preemptive of Derrida’s notion of “economy,” is to be seen not as a consequence of escaping the “worst violence” (whatever that means), but as a consequence of escaping ethical violence itself, which might be redescribed as *certain* peace I have with the Other, a peace that nevertheless forsakes, possibly injures, the third party. The violence corresponding to the necessity of the logos (speech, universality, ontology and so on), although neither chronologically nor logically posterior to the non-violence of ethics, could thus be said to presuppose that non-violence. It could be said to presuppose it because, made possible by the overcoming of violence that that non-violence incurs with respect to the third party, it derives from ethical responsibility.

Derrida—and this we consider the most serious pretermission in his long essay on Levinas—fails to take up the issue of the third party. He mentions the latter only once, and then only in passing, in a footnote: “For there is also in Levinas’ thought, despite his protests against neutrality, a summoning of the third party” (WD314n37/Ed156n). Arguably, had he given closer attention to the crucial significance of the third party overall within Levinas’ discourse, he might have reflected further on his own reflections when concluding “Violence and Metaphysics” as follows:

one must reflect upon the necessity in which this experience [of the Other] finds itself, the injunction by which it is ordered to occur as logos, and to reawaken the Greek in the autistic syntax of its own dream. The necessity to avoid the worst violence. (WD152/Ed226)

Further reflection would perhaps show that it is the concern with justice which gives rise to the necessity of speech as *logos*. It is concern with the third party, injured by an otherwise singular erotic concern with the Other, which reawakens the Cartesian *cogito* hitherto suspected of dreaming. The silent world of the evil genius, a world which breaks with silence inasmuch as it breaks with solitude—and here we should recall once more the title of the section in which it appears: “Truth Presupposes Justice”—thus becomes significant, meaningful. No longer belonging to the order of “mere appearance” (“*bloss Erscheinung*”), such as would give rise to the possibility of illusion (*Schein*), it becomes a phenomenon, an appearance of something, some being disclosed in its being. “Speech introduces principle into this anarchy” (TI98/Ti71)—and speech is born of third party justice.

Needless to say, the anarchy of the spec-

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tacle is a fiction and “not a personal adventure that happened to Descartes” (TI90/Ti63). But it is a useful fiction, as Levinas presents it, for it enables us to see that it is through the necessities of justice that the world has order and a beginning. Levinas has offered an account of the origin of language (*logos*) which presupposes not two, but three personages: the Other, the same—and the third party. This is why there can be *no* simple origin. There can be no simple origin because there is no first relation (inter-subjectivity) which would take place as it were in a vacuum. There is no first relation which would not already stand in relation to another relation, be it only in the manner of an attempted withdrawal from the rest of society. (“Everything that takes place here ‘between us’ concerns everyone, the face [...] places itself in the full light of the public order, even if I draw back from it to seek with the interlocutor the complicity of a private relation and a clandestinity” [TI212/Ti187].) The notion of an “economy” might be reintroduced at this point, on the understanding that the originary non-violence and originary violence, to which the violence of speech is to respond, are inseparable only in the sense that they are modalities of one another. Non-violence in relation to the Other would in turn be violence (negligence at least) against the third party and vice versa. Were this not the case, were the ethical relation seen as a relation from which *every* violence were excluded (a view that Derrida on occasion seems to attribute to Levinas), no satisfactory account, it would appear, could be offered of the origin of language at all. Language would

remain as silent intention. Were one to affirm the double originality of language without reference to the third party—as Derrida himself does—arguably one would have to abandon the idea of establishing an order of priority between peace and violence altogether. True, one would have shown that the origin of language is anarchic, is somehow conditioned by that which it conditions (peace as the condition for violence and vice versa), but then neither condition, neither peace nor violence, could call itself primordial (only equiprimordial). Some readers of Levinas, including Derrida, might find this acceptable. Levinas himself, we know, is not one of them: “The face to face remains an ultimate situation” (TI81/Ti53)—even when it amounts to a privilege of one person (peace) to the detriment of another (violence). Hence, in *Otherwise Than Being*, where the theme of third party justice will become crucial, Levinas speaks of

goodness despite itself, goodness always older than choice . . . whose value alone is able to counterbalance (and more!) the violence of the choice. (Levinas’ emphasis)¹⁵

If indeed there is an “economy of war,” it is not to avoid the “worst violence,” but to “counterbalance” the violence of always finding oneself in a situation (and this would include the historical situation) where one is more or less close to one person (the Other) as opposed to another (the third party). If there is an economy, perhaps its currency is that of peace. Perhaps, after Derrida, we would do better to talk in terms of an economy of peace.

ENDNOTES

1. Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. M. Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), p. 64.
2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis

(Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969). Henceforth TI. (*Totalité et infini* [The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1961]. Henceforth Ti.) Quotation cited English p. 199;

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- French p. 174.
3. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death," in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 12, trans. J. Strachey (Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1985), p. 85.
 4. Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 79–153. Henceforth WD. (*L'Écriture et la différence* [Paris: Seuil, 1967]. Henceforth Ed.) This essay first appeared in two parts in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (1964). Some minor changes were made for its republication in 1967. Derrida has since published a second essay on Levinas, entitled "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici," in *Textes Pour Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. F. Laruelle (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1980), pp. 21–60. Owing to the nature and scope of the following study, further reference to this essay has been precluded.
 5. For a concise discussion of Levinas and Derrida focussing on the issue of ethical primacy, see R. Bernasconi, "Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. R. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 181–202. For a more general discussion of Levinas and original war theory, see S. Watson, "The Face of the Hibakusha: Levinas and the Trace of the Apocalypse," in *Writing the Future*, ed. A. Benjamin & D. Wood (London, Routledge, 1989), pp. 155–73.
 6. E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1981). (*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* [The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1978].) In this his second major work on ethics, appearing in 1974, Levinas does display evidence of seeking to integrate some of the questions raised in "Violence and Metaphysics" within his own problematic. The integration, however, is implicit rather than explicit, and should not be over-emphasized—as is often the case.
 7. Levinas first introduced the notion of the "trace" in an article published in 1963, entitled "The Trace of the Other," trans. A. Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. M. Taylor (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 345–59. While Derrida was aware of this essay at the time of "Violence and Metaphysics," he notes that its publication came too late for him to make use of it beyond "brief allusions" (WD311n1/Ed117n).
 8. Although the description of the ethical relation as "Desire" is prevalent throughout *Totality and Infinity*, a rigorous and sustained analysis of the relation as constituted within sensibility is not undertaken until chapter three of *Otherwise Than Being*, entitled "Sensibility and Proximity." It is to be emphasized, however, that this analysis serves to complete the earlier description and does not constitute an innovation, so much as a derivation.
 9. See the "Preface" to *Totality and Infinity*, where Levinas, having informed us that the peaceable relation with alterity is "beyond the totality or beyond history," beyond all totalizing conceptions of identity and difference (governed by the logic of genre), cautiously remarks:

This 'beyond' the totality and objective experience is, however, not to be described in a purely negative fashion. It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. (TI23/Ti xi, Levinas' emphasis)

What Levinas is here seeking to establish is that "infinity" (the order of the infinite-ly other person, the Other) is not simply related to the historical totality in the manner of opposition, but also somehow expresses itself in the latter, as if the prefix 'in-' of infinity were to signify both the *non* and the *within* of the finite. Certainly, traditionally the relation has tended towards that of opposition (empirically through war, tyranny and universal regimes). Nevertheless, this does not preclude the Other from having certain interests invested in the totality, interests that the totality is thereby in a position to reflect. We will attempt to show this in part two of the present study.
 10. A term Derrida first introduced in an essay on Edmond Jabès, entitled "Ellipses," appearing in 1967 in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 294–300 (p. 299).
 11. Derrida will again try to establish the double originality of language three years later, when analysing Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages," in *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), part two, chapter three.
 12. See R. Bernasconi, "The Silent Anarchic World of the Evil Genius," in *Collegium Phaenomenologicum: the First Ten Years*, ed. G. Moneta, J. Sallis & J. Taminiaux (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1988), pp. 257–72, where Derrida's reading of Levinas is also developed alongside Levinas' reading of Descartes, though in a far more conciliatory fashion than we are proposing here. We have nevertheless found this essay useful in clarifying many of the issues at stake.
 13. While Levinas' account of the ethical relation as informed by "partiality" and "privilege" (TI72; 86; 88/Ti44; 59; 60), terms which in *Totality and Infinity* are mostly associated with love outside of justice (see TI254/Ti232), does indeed serve to indicate a tension between responsibility for the Other and concern for the third party, it should be noted

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that this particular issue is the central focus of study in an earlier essay by Levinas, "The Ego and the Totality" (1954) (in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis [Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff, 1987], pp. 25–45), and does not again come into proper focus until chapter five of *Otherwise Than Being*.

14. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. J. T. Goldthwait (London: University of California Press, 1960), p. 59.

15. *Otherwise than Being*, English p. 57 modified translation; French p. 73.

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