

"For Love is as Strong as Death"

Taking Another Look at Levinas on Love

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Set me as a seal upon your heart . . .
For love is as strong as death.

Shir Hashirim [Song of Songs]

In "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," Luce Irigaray criticizes Emmanuel Levinas's conception of love by claiming that for Levinas, "to caress consists not in approaching the other in its most vital dimension, the touch, but in the reduction of that vital dimension of the other's body to the elaboration of the future for himself."¹ That is, Irigaray interprets Levinas's conception of love as that which needs to be redeemed by fecundity and which is only redeemed for the man. Levinas's work, she charges, does not account for the female experience in sexuality, degrades the woman by rendering her experience in sexuality as that which is devoid of the divine, and finally, it maintains a structure that privileges heterosexuality.

Irigaray's analysis of Levinas's work points to what might be considered the most damning elements of Levinas's thought, and her view needs to be taken seriously. However, I think there are alternative readings of Levinas's conception of the "feminine" in general and his description of love in particular. My goal in this essay is to re-examine Levinas's conception of love that we find in *Totality and Infinity*,² while being mindful of Irigaray's worries about this conception. This task is completed in part by taking seriously Levinas's claim in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* that Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* is "a work too often present in this book [*Totality and Infinity*] to be cited" (TI 28/xvi).³

The Labor of Love

In contrast to the ethical relationship, Levinas identifies the love relationship as a

return to the same. Yet for Levinas, the role the feminine plays in making transcendence possible extends beyond the dwelling and into the erotic relationship. Following a structure that we find in both Sartre and Rosenzweig, Levinas's description of the love relationship is a relationship wherein what the lover wants is not just to love the other [the beloved], but to have the Beloved love him back.⁴ Love both presupposes the exteriority of the other while also going beyond this exteriority of the other, of the beloved (TI 254/232).

Taking up the Aristophanes myth in Plato's *Symposium*, Levinas's view of love is a mixture of immanence and transcendence (TI 254/232). Levinas disagrees with the implication of fusion signaled by the myth.⁵ However, he does find compelling the ambiguous notion of love not only as a relation in which there is a return to the self, but also as a relation in which the self is transcended. The face of the other—of the beloved—reveals within it what is not yet. It reveals the future that is never future enough, a future that is "more remote than possible" (TI 254–55/232–33). Finally, the ambiguity of love lies in the possibility of the Other to appear as an object of need and yet still retain its alterity, "the possibility of enjoying the Other, of placing oneself at the same time beneath and beyond discourse." The love relation is ambiguous precisely because the ethical has not disappeared. Rather, the face of the Other is hidden by the erotic, by the intimacy of love.

In the "Phenomenology of Eros" Levinas tells us that "love aims at the other; it aims at him in his frailty [*faiblesse*]" (TI 256/233). Love aims at the tenderness of the Beloved. For Levinas, the tenderness is not something

added to the Beloved. Rather, the Beloved “is but one with her *regime* of tenderness” (TI 256/233).⁹ Levinas’s analysis continually uses language that presents the image of the Beloved cast below while the lover is taken to new heights. The Beloved is “dark,” “nocturnal,” “clandestine,” “deep in the subterranean dimension” (TI 257/234). The Beloved equivocates between virginity⁷ and profanation (or solicitation), between modesty and immodesty (TI 257–58/234–35), between hiddenness and exposure. The lover’s movement before this frailty, which Levinas terms *femininity* (TI 257/234), is “absorbed in the caress” (TI 257/234). The caress, though it is like sensibility, transcends the sensible. It seeks the not-yet.

The relation with the Beloved resembles a relationship with a child who does not have responsibility, that is, a child who is carefree, coquettish, and “a bit silly” (TI 263/241). It is of an order lacking seriousness. While the language of justice identifies the ethical relationship with the other, language turns to cooing and laughter in the erotic relationship. The erotic profanes because it makes possible the equivocation of the hidden and the not hidden. The face of the Other is both exposed and clandestine. Nonetheless, it appears that because of her, he—the lover—can transcend. It is the woman who makes such transcendence possible. In the name of sexual difference and the preservation of alterity, Levinas appears to have cast each player in this love scene in a different role. Eros, for Levinas, is like all other enjoyments insofar as it is to be relished in itself. But Eros differs from all other enjoyments, in that other enjoyments like eating and drinking can be solitary. Eros affirms for Levinas an exceptional place for the “feminine.”⁸

The description of the “feminine”—of the Beloved, or what Levinas refers to as voluptuousness in love—facilitates our seeing the way in which the face in Eros distinguishes itself from the face in the ethical relation. At the very least Levinas’s framework, evi-

denced by his claim that “the principle, ‘you shall not commit murder,’ the very signifyingness of the face, seems contrary to the mystery which Eros profanes” (TI 262/240), questions the relation between the erotic and the ethical. The lovers are sealed as a society of two, outside the political, excluding a third party. It is closed. It is non-public (TI 265/242–43).⁹ It is the child—the future—that allows for the transcendence of love. The sealed society the lovers construct is interrupted by the birth of the son who is, according to Levinas, “both me and not me.” The child, unique in himself, is also part of me. Thus, love escapes itself, escapes a return to the same, when it escapes the present and embodies the future, when it engenders the child.¹⁰

The focus on fecundity frames “The Fecundity of the Caress,”¹¹ Irigaray’s remarkable essay on Levinas’s conception of love. Irigaray, though indebted to Levinas for the influence his ethics has had on her work,¹² still takes issue with the way Levinas’s ethics, radical as it might be, nonetheless, remains blind to its own faults. In her view, Levinas characterizes voluptuousness such that it can be fulfilled only in the marriage bed with the intent to produce a child. However, Irigaray also undermines this assumed relation, or unification. According to her, when the erotic relation comes to an end or is fulfilled temporarily,¹³ the lover is “left to his solitary call to his God” (FC 202), while “the beloved woman is relegated to an inwardness that is not one because it is abyssal, animal, infantile, pre-nuptial” (FC 202). In her analysis, the lovers are “withdrawn to opposite poles of life, they do not marry” (FC 202). Thus, in spite of themselves, lover and beloved are not unified in life. Each plays a different part in the erotic drama. He, as lover, is the subject who acts on the beloved, the passive woman who waits and receives him. And while the woman gives to the man a son, it is he, the lover, who achieves transcendence. The birth of the son renders the return incomplete, but incomplete only for

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the man. The beloved woman, through eros, maternity, and birth, makes the son possible, but it is the man who reaps this benefit as “the seduction of the beloved woman serves as a bridge between Father and son.”¹⁴ Through her—the beloved, who is only an aspect of himself—the male lover goes beyond love and pleasure toward the ethical” (FC 203). Thus, here again, the woman provides the means by which the man’s entry into the ethical world is made possible. But the beloved woman is left without subjectivity, without access to the ethical, and without any relation to God. For the man to engage in voluptuosity and bring about the birth of a son, he—the lover—must mingle with the wrong side of transcendence (FC 194); he must risk the “loss of self in the wrong infinity” (FC 204).

Irigaray is correct, in my view, to claim that the Other cannot be thought of without thinking it in terms of sexual difference.¹⁵ However, I am less inclined than Irigaray is to say that Levinas is unsuspecting of what he is doing, even though he does claim to want an ethics that will be neutral with regard to sexual difference.¹⁶ The problematic account of the “feminine” and the questions concerning its relation to ethics arise precisely because Levinas did take account of sexual difference. Moreover, I think Irigaray is mistaken when she assumes the Beloved is always the woman.

Levinas’s reading of love is remarkably similar not only to the *Song of Songs*, but to Rosenzweig’s reading of this poem. If we read the “Phenomenology of Eros” carefully, we find that Levinas often refers to the Beloved with a masculine pronoun. One might first assume there is a typo or possibly sloppy writing. But another look might give us a different reading. In the *Song of Songs* the two speakers, a man and a woman, take turns speaking. At one point, the woman says, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me.” The Beloved in the *Song of Songs* moves between male and female.

Rosenzweig’s reading of the *Song of Songs* makes use of this point, demonstrated by his own characterization of the roles of lover and Beloved.¹⁷ For Rosenzweig this movement is significant for his description of love, a description that identifies the role of the lover as giver and the Beloved as the receiver, regardless of the sex (or gender) of who is in that position. Another way to characterize this point would be to say the Beloved is called, or elected, while the lover is active. The logic here is less a logic of “genders” than it is a logic of “positions.”¹⁸

For Rosenzweig, and Levinas seems to follow his lead, the lover is significant because it is the lover who initiates the relation. The lover approaches the Beloved without knowing if the Beloved will return her love. In this role, the lover takes the larger risk. The lover gives herself over to the Beloved, who, as Beloved, is loved unconditionally. But by accepting the gift of love, the Beloved gives a return gift. The reason for the privileging of the lover over the Beloved lies in the assumptions made about each. The one who is the lover, it is assumed, recognized his/her own insufficiency in his/her solitude, hence the approach to the Beloved. But the Beloved, precisely by being the Beloved, did not think of himself (or herself) in terms of complacent self-sufficiency, one that is interrupted by the love given to him/her. The Beloved, by definition, admits of this lack and returns the love. However, this speaker, the Beloved, only speaks because he/she is now being loved. The love bestowed back on the original lover is not unconditional. But these roles are fluid and lover and Beloved swap positions. At various moments each says to the other Love me! Contrary to Kant, both Rosenzweig and Levinas claim that not only that love can be commanded, it is only love that can command love. But to be clear, this love is not to be confused with the Christian *agape*! It is not merely to be subsumed under social relations. Love in the “Phenomenology of Eros” is not the purified love of

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Beatrice, the object initially of Dante's carnal affection but whose guidance allows Dante to "overcome" this affection in exchange for something "purer."¹⁹ Nor is it like an account that would claim that as we are all narcissists at heart, sexuality is merely a seeking of our own pleasure. Love, for both Levinas and Rosenzweig, is an event that begins with the other. The ambiguity of love is precisely that the face of the Other is concealed in the erotic. That is, the erotic is not a discrete relation, but one that is doubled. As such, there is the possibility of transcendence for both, but this transcendence does not discount the very real, very carnal act of love. As Edith Wyschogrod writes, "it is sexuality, and neither pleasure nor power, that founds the multiplicity of human existence."²⁰

This point, the relationship between the erotic and the ethical, is worth dwelling on for a moment, since this is precisely the issue for Irigaray—the erotic relation is not ethical. For Levinas, this relationship is more complex than that for which Irigaray has accounted. For Levinas, the erotic conceals the ethical and the reason the erotic looks void of ethics lies, I think, in love's relationship to the present and the future. Love, according to Rosenzweig, and again appropriated by Levinas, lives in the present. It sees its own urgency. For Rosenzweig, this urgency and this immediacy is represented in the command I cited above: "Love me!" We do not ask to be loved in the future; we want to be loved now. Love, as an event, is something we desire in the present. Love demands that the love be returned. If at some point the person whom we loved—erotically—stopped loving us, we would have to consider taking our love elsewhere. The same is not the case for the ethical. For Levinas, the ethical obliges us to respond to the other and we cannot demand anything in return. If we are going to condemn Levinas for separating the erotic from the ethical—for descriptive purposes—we must remember what both the erotic and the ethical look like for him. We

should be mindful of how Levinas defines the ethical. The ethical demands that we give ourselves to the other without expecting anything in return. The ethical relation is asymmetrical. We should ask ourselves if that is really how we do conceive or wish to conceive erotic love? Is it not the case that Rosenzweig and Levinas have described the erotic more accurately than we think? Is it not the case that erotic love is jealous and does demand the love of the beloved to be returned, that it is not an asymmetrical relation—i.e., that it is not, as such, an ethical relation? Moreover, we must remember that for Levinas, the erotic conceals the ethical, the ethical hides behind the erotic. The ethical is not absent.

But in spite of its existence in the present, love—the couple—wants to declare itself; it wants to be eternal. Though they exist in the moment of the pleasure of each other, the lovers yearn for a love that is eternal. This eternity no longer grows in the I and thou, but longs to be founded in the presence of the world (SR 204). The Beloved, as Rosenzweig reminds us, "pleads with her lover to descend to her so that she might set herself like an eternal seal upon his ever-beating heart." For Rosenzweig, "matrimony is not [merely] love. Matrimony is infinitely more than love. Matrimony is the external fulfillment which love reaches out after from her internal blissfulness in a stupor of unquenchable longing" (SR 205). But it is precisely this lack of sense of eternity that love longs for a way to make itself eternal, to live not only in this moment, but beyond this moment. Love as that which goes beyond the moment is the eternal victory over death (SR 164), and one way this victory is achieved is through fecundity.

Thus, to respond to Irigaray's concern posed at the beginning of my essay, the caress for Levinas does not mean an unsummated love. For Levinas, the caress does not know what it seeks. He does not mean that physical touch does not occur, nor that it should not occur. His point is that eros, in

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some ways, actually eludes the physical touch. In this sense, the caress becomes an anticipation of the future, the father's relationship to the child. Though the child is like the father, the child is more than the father. The child cannot be reduced to the father's own ego or identity. Just as the Beloved will elude some aspect of "being known," so to, will the child elude that same attempt at totalization.

The Ethics of Fecundity

But if Levinas's conception of love sparked excitement in his commentators, his discussion of fecundity aroused then even more. In spite of this positive reading of love, there seems to be little doubt that, that voluptuousness, at least in his analysis in *Totality and Infinity*, is fulfilled if it issues in a child. In "Judaism and the Feminine" he writes, "this dimension of the romantic in which love becomes its own end, where it remains without any 'intentionality' that spreads beyond it . . . is foreign to Judaism."²¹ And he reminds us that the meaning of the erotic, conjugal relationship between a man and woman is not as an end in itself; "the meaning of love does not, then, stop with the moment of voluptuousness, nor with the person loved" (DF 36/DL 60). Citing the rabbinic tradition he writes:

In the rabbinic interpretation of love, maternity is subordinate to a human destiny which exceeds the limits of 'family joys': it is necessary to fulfil Israel, 'to multiply the image of God' inscribed on the face of humanity. Not that conjugal love has no importance in itself, or that it is reduced to the ranks of a means of procreation, or that it merely *prefigures* its fulfillment, as in a certain theology. On the contrary the ultimate end of the family is the actual *meaning* and the joy of this present. It is not only prefigured there, it is already fulfilled there. This participation of the present in this future takes place specifically in the

feeling of love, in the grace of the betrothed, and even in the erotic. The real dynamism of love leads it beyond the present instant and even beyond the person loved. This end does not appear to a vision outside the love, which would then integrate it into the place of creation; it lies in the love itself. (DF 36–37/ DL 59)

Levinas's remarks in both texts indicate that he wants to affirm the value of the erotic relation independently of the birth of the son. However I think his intention here is not to say that love must be redeemed or "saved" by the birth of a child. Rather, he is trying to say that love cannot help but extend beyond itself. The bringing about of a child is not necessarily linked to sex itself. It is sexuality that characterizes love; but the issuing of a child results from the love of the couple. Levinas's discussion is not intended to refer to the "mere" biology of love. Levinas appears to be emphasizing the futural aspect of love. Its need to make itself permanent, as we saw in Rosenzweig's view, is not a moral component of love. In other words, love does not need to be purified. Rather, love reaches out beyond itself to make itself permanent.

In spite of this reading, I wish to be clear that the role of fecundity in Levinas's work should not be taken lightly. Any emphasis on fecundity may run the risk of suggesting the oppressive image of barefoot and pregnant women. Additionally, it runs the risk of undermining his own view of sexuality by implying it is "dirty" unless redeemed by its attachment to procreation. Thus, I think it would help us to remember that the title of the section that precedes Levinas's discussion of fecundity is the phenomenology of eros. We must remember that Levinas is describing, not prescribing, the erotic relation. Moreover, we should remind ourselves of the Jewish context out of which Levinas and Rosenzweig write.

While it is not possible for us to perfect the world within our own individual life-

times, we have a responsibility to make every attempt to repair the world [*tikkun olam*]. We have a responsibility to feed the hungry, to take care of our elderly, to house the homeless, and to clothe the naked. In short, we have a responsibility to respond to the call of the stranger, the widow, the poor, and the orphan. Because we die, we can ensure the continuation of *tikkun olam* by not only having children but by rearing them to be responsible.

Levinas's point in stressing fecundity is the emphasis on the asymmetrical responsibility that is characteristically unique to the parent/child relation. The movement of these essays, which are contained in the section entitled "Beyond the Face," parallel the movement in *The Star of Redemption*: love brings us out of ourselves through the desire that cannot be fulfilled but which longs for eternity. A parent's love for a child is a very particular love. The birth of the son according to Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Judaism, represents this eternity. But aside from being my responsibility, the child is also my teacher. Insofar as the child is unique, the child teaches me, the child instructs me to be attentive to his/her own growth. And so the hope I have that our children will be responsible to others opens onto the hope that others will be responsible for other others.²² This movement from love to fecundity opens finally into fraternity and community. Thus, the first moment of the ethical relation is found within this familial relation. Through my child, I am able to be responsible for the

other, even after my own death. Procreation, for Levinas, is not about self-redemption. It takes me out of myself and allows me to transcend because of the ethical responsibility which attaches to it. It is about redeeming the world.

To disjoin fecundity from sexuality in its moral tone is to recognize that sex does not need to be purified by children and that fecundity happens in a multitude of ways. Parents adopt, teachers teach students, and volunteers transform others by working in and on the world. To realize this non-relation, that is to realize that it is not sex that Levinas is trying to purify through procreation, is also potentially to realize that Levinas's framework is not contingent on heterosexuality. Though clearly for Levinas, heterosexuality is important, and having real children the "old fashioned way" is also significant.²³ However, if we recognize the multitude of ways in which fecundity can occur, the interruption of the lovers by the child does not have to be biological—if it were, there would be serious problems, even for heterosexual couples. To realize the disjuncture between sexuality and fecundity in a moral sense opens up the relation with regard to other possibilities. For Levinas, like Rosenzweig before him and Judaism even earlier, love is as strong as death. Sexuality is now an expression of love, a seeking to give pleasure to another and a vehicle by which we open ourselves to the world. It is our victory over death.²⁴

ENDNOTES

1. Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 179.
2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961), p. 28/xvi. Hereafter cited as TI followed by the English and then the French page number.
3. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970). Hereafter cited in the body of the text as SR, followed by the page number.
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Books, 1953); *L'Être et néant* (Paris: Gallimard 1954). Spe-

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- cifically, this theme can be found on p. 491 of the English text, although the theme is present in the entire subheading "First Attitude Toward Others: Love, Language, Masochism" contained within the larger section "Concrete Relations with Others."
5. For Levinas separation is actually better than the initial fusion for it is only with the separation that one can be in relationship with another. See Levinas's discussion in *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgth: Duquesne University Press, 1987).
 6. We should be sure to note the similarity in the descriptions of the lover in the Phenomenology of Eros and the "feminine" in the Dwelling. For more on the role the feminine plays in the dwelling see my essay, "Re-inhabiting the House of Ruth: Exceeding the Limits of the Feminine in Levinas," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Tina Chanter (University Park: Penn State Press, 2001), pp. 145–70.
 7. Although "virgin" and "virginity" are certainly correct translations of *vierge* and *virginité*, I think we could also think of these words in terms of their connotation of purity rather than of sexual inexperience.
 8. Levinas, reiterating Sartre, tells us that "if to love is to love the love the Beloved bears me, to love is also to love oneself in love, and thus to return to oneself" (TI 266/244). Voluptuousity in love does not transcend itself. It is in this description, that we see what Levinas means by a return to the self. As a dual solitude it remains sealed unto itself. The love relationship in Levinas's analysis is directed toward a future. Levinas makes this point repeatedly. We find a similar analysis in *Time and the Other*: the love relation is the juncture between present and future. It is being that is also a "being not yet" (TI 257/234). "It manifests itself at the limit of being and non-being" (TI 256/233).
 9. This characterization further removes the erotic from the ethical. Levinas is specific, even in *Totality and Infinity*, that the third, a signification of the political, always accompanies him. That is, though Levinas needs to separate the ethical from the political for purposes of the analysis, he acknowledges the intimate relationship the ethical has to the political. In his description of the erotic, he is clear that the erotic is closed off from public space. As such, it would be difficult then to make the case that it, by itself, without the birth of the child, the son, is ethical.
 10. Derrida takes up this point in his essay "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchely, eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 11–48. Though it is a discussion devoted primarily to *Otherwise Than Being*, it also comments on this problem in *Totality and Infinity*. In Derrida's view, the assumed sexual difference, and demarcation, in this text is striking. Derrida essentially asks, with regard to fecundity and the birth of a son, in particular, "why should a 'son' better represent, in advance, this indifference? This unmarked difference?" Essentially, Derrida is asking, why can the future not be a daughter? By organizing the analysis as he has, Levinas has assumed sexual difference and made it work as such. The future cannot be a daughter because the author writing the analysis is a man. In his own response to the question, Derrida notes parenthetically his comment cited in a footnote to "Violence and Metaphysics," his essay on *Totality and Infinity*: "Let us observe in passing that *Totality and Infinity* pushes the respect for dissymmetry to the point where it seems to us impossible, essentially impossible, that it could have been written by a woman. The philosophical subject of it is man" (Derrida, "At this Moment," p. 40). In Derrida's view, Levinas assumes the stance of the male subject without acknowledging this position. Moreover, that Levinas subordinates an alterity marked by sexual difference indicates that Levinas thinks of himself as presenting a neutral Other, one not marked by sexual difference. Levinas claims in an interview with Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger that he is not subordinating woman, but sexual difference, to alterity. See "*Que dirait Eurydice? What would Eurydice Say?*" in *Eurydice, Oeuvres de Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger 1992–1996*. However, in light of the stance Levinas takes as author, the other is marked by sexual difference, and then disguised as a neutral other. The wholly other who is not supposed to be marked by sexual difference, is found already to be marked by masculinity (Derrida, "At this Moment," p. 40).
 11. Luce Irigaray, "The Fecundity of the Caress," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell, 1993). Hereafter cited as FC followed by the page number.
 12. For a detailed discussion of the relationship with and the debt to Levinas that Irigaray has, see Tina

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- Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York: London, 1995).
13. Irigaray also underscores the ambiguity of the erotic as a relation that is at once sated and insatiable and therefore resembles both finite need and the infinity of ethics.
 14. One cannot help but notice, with the capitalization of "Father," the allusion to Christianity's trinity and the role Mary played as bridge between God, the Father, and the birth of Jesus Christ. And it is precisely this reading of Levinas, one that implicitly assumes a Christian perspective, that I want to confront. That is, I do not claim that Irigaray is necessarily mistaken in her criticism of Levinas. Rather, I want to call attention to the way Irigaray might be overlooking elements of Levinas's thought by viewing him through Christianity, even if unintended.
 15. And Derrida is correct that Levinas left us little choice but to think the Other as not woman—or at least not a woman anchored to a home and a man.
 16. For example, in *Time and the Other*, the "feminine" is claimed as radical alterity, and it is as the "feminine," as this radical alterity, that the subject moves out of the *il ya* and contracts its existence. Sexual difference plays a fundamental role in providing the motivation for the ethical relation.
 17. Rosenzweig, to be sure, is not a feminist. He believed in gendered relations and he believed that gendered behavior was fundamental to culture. But he also believed that with regard to love, the roles of the giver and receiver of love, go back and forth. For phenomenological purposes, Levinas separates the two.
 18. To be sure, gender is not to be underestimated, particularly for Rosenzweig—women hold a special privilege in Rosenzweig's view of revelation. One theme in Judaism claims that women are not required to study Torah because they are already ethical, they are already closer to God. See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, p. 326. Clearly, there are problems with this kind of valorization of women, and one can see both the positive and negative in this view. Historically, women have been denied both rights and privileges because they were thought to be more moral. Ironically, women in the United States were initially denied the vote because politics was deemed too dirty for them to touch; women then acquired the vote because it was thought their moral character would improve the lot of politics. Unfortunately, the non-requirement to study Torah was transformed into a prohibition among the more Orthodox segments of the Jewish religion. My point is to indicate that for Rosenzweig, and Levinas following him, women do have a relationship to G-d, even if it is construed differently than the one between men and God.
 19. But Levinas's connection should not necessarily be an indication that he thinks every sexual act ought to end in maternity, or even be intended to end in maternity. We must be careful to avoid a logic that reverses the necessary relation between sexuality and fecundity. Factually, fecundity requires sexuality, though sexuality does not require fecundity. In terms of his ethical analysis, however, Levinas does privilege sexual activity that ends in fecundity. Yet, even if we acknowledge the privilege Levinas gives to love which issues in a child, we must additionally acknowledge that Levinas allows for a sexuality that intends pleasure for its own sake; if we are to pay heed to Levinas's Jewish roots, then we must contend with the remarks Judaism makes about sexuality.
 20. Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 2nd. edition (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 133.
 21. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 37. Translated from *Difficile Liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), p. 60. Hereafter cited as DF/DL followed by the respective page numbers. The *Keubah*, the Jewish marriage contract, states that a husband is responsible to his wife for three things: food, clothing, and sexual gratification. Though a marriage that issues in no children after ten years is grounds for granting an annulment, a childless couple is not required to dissolve their marriage. Though certainly children are an important part of a Jewish marriage, their role is not "purify" the act of sexual intercourse. Sexuality in the Jewish tradition, though certainly a complex topic, was/is seen as an important part of the relationship between the married couple, independently of the children that may issue from it. Children are important because they are viewed as the future, as the continuing of the Jewish people. This point, according to Levinas, is not intended to mean that woman are to get pregnant and be confined to the home; nor is it intended to characterize Judaism as having a prudish attitude toward sexuality. Rather,

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Levinas tells us, this view of love is due to “the permanent opening up of the messianic perspective—of the immanence of Israel, of humanity reflecting the image of God that can carry on its face” (DF 37/DL 60). Ironically, using the Judaic influence, while giving us a different framework in which to understand his position and appreciate the positive features of his analysis on the erotic, simultaneously, opens up other avenues through which to criticize Levinas’s work. Thus, this approach yields an account that further illustrates the complex relation between the “feminine” and the ethical.

22. Robert Gibbs, *Correlations between Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 238.
23. I do not know that Levinas would agree with this reading. I think that for him heterosexuality may be necessary—both with regard to the erotic relation and the child that issues from it. I think that for Levinas there is something very particular about a parent’s love for a child that is not easily translatable to other relationships. However, I do think we can extend Levinas’s framework to include a sense of fecundity that would not have to be limited to the parent/child relation.
24. See Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Willaim Hallo (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1970), p. 164.

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