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# From Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas\*

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Has it ever been noted? Although there the word is neither frequently used nor emphasized, *Totality and Infinity* bequeaths us a vast treatise of hospitality.

This is borne out less by the occurrences of the word “hospitality,” which are in fact rather sporadic, than by the links and discursive logic that lead to this vocabulary of hospitality. For example, in the concluding pages, hospitality becomes the very name of what opens itself up to the face, or more precisely, of what “welcomes” it. The face always lends itself to a welcome and the welcome welcomes only a face, the face that should be our theme today, but that, as we know from reading Levinas, must resist all thematization.

This irreducibility to a theme, this exceeding of all thematizing formalization or description, is precisely what the face has in common with hospitality. Levinas does not simply distinguish hospitality and thematization; as we will hear in a moment, he explicitly opposes them.

When he completely redefines intentional subjectivity, when he submits subjection to the idea of infinity in the finite, he multiplies in his own way propositions in which a noun defines a noun. The substantive-

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subject and the substantive-predicate might then exchange places in the proposition, which would upset at once the grammar of de-termination and the logical writing of the tradition, right up to its dialectical affiliation. For example:

It [intentionality, consciousness of] is attention to speech or welcome of the face, *hospitality* and not thematization.<sup>1</sup>

If I was here tempted to underscore the word *hospitality* in this sentence, I must now—so as to efface it—go back on this pedagogical or rhetorical concern. For all the concepts that are opposed to “thematization” are at once synonymous and of equal value. None of them should be privileged, and thus underscored. Before going any further in the interpretation of this proposition, it should thus be noted what silently justifies such an apposition. It seems to follow a sort of *élan*, content simply to explicate, to unfold. It appears to proceed, indeed to leap, from one synonym to the next. Though it appears as such only once, the “or” (*vel*) of substitution could be inscribed between each noun—excluding, of course, “thematization”: “It [intentionality, consciousness of] is attention to speech or welcome of the face, *hospitality* and not thematization.”

The word “hospitality” here translates, brings to the fore, re-produces, the two words preceding it, “attention” and “welcome.” An internal paraphrasing, as well as a sort of periphrasis, a series of metonymies that bespeak hospitality, the face, welcome: tending toward the other, attentive intention, intentional attention, *yes* to the other. Intentionality, attention to speech, welcome of the face, *hospitality*—all these are the same, but the same as welcoming of the other, there where the other eludes the theme. This movement without movement is effaced in the welcoming of the other, and since it opens itself up to the infinity of the other, to infinity as the other that, in some sense, precedes it, the welcoming of the other (objective genitive) will already be a response: the *yes* to the other will already be responding to the welcoming of the other (subjective genitive), to the *yes* of the other. This response is called for *as soon as* the infinite—always of the other—is welcomed. We will follow its trace in Levinas. But this “as soon as” does not mark the moment or threshold of a beginning, of an *archē*, since infinity will have been pre-originarily welcomed. Welcomed in anarchy. This responsible response is surely a *yes*, but a *yes to* that is preceded by the *yes of* the other. One should no doubt extend without limit the consequences of what Levinas asserts in a passage where he repeats and interprets the idea of infinity in the Cartesian *cogito*: “It is not I, it is the other that can say *yes*.”<sup>2</sup> . . . If the word “hospitality” occurs relatively

infrequently in *Totality and Infinity*, the word “welcome” is unarguably one of the most decisive and frequently used words in the text. This could be verified, even if, to my knowledge, it has not been done. More operational than thematic, this concept operates everywhere, in fact, in order to speak of the first gesture in the direction of the Other.

But is this welcome even a gesture? It is rather the first movement, an apparently passive movement, but the *good* movement. The welcome cannot be derived, no more than the face can, and there is no face without welcome. It is as if the welcome, just as much as the face, just as much as the vocabulary that is co-extensive and thus profoundly synonymous with it, were a first language, a set made up of quasi-primitive—and quasi-transcendental—words. It is necessary first to think the possibility of the welcome in order to think the face and everything that opens up or is displaced with it, namely, ethics, metaphysics or first philosophy, in the sense that Levinas gives to these words.

The welcome determines the “receiving,” the receptivity of receiving as the ethical relation. As we have already heard [in a passage of *Adieu* preceding the present selection]:

To approach the Other in discourse is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I . . .

This ‘to *receive*’, a word that is here underscored and proposed as the synonym of to *welcome*, receives only to the extent, an extent that is beyond all extent, that it receives beyond the capacity of the I. As we will see, this dissymmetrical disproportion will later mark the law of hospitality. But here, in an unexpected proposition in the same paragraph, reason is itself *interpreted* as this hospitable receptivity. The long line of the philosophical tradition that makes use of the concept of receptivity or passivity, and thus, it was thought, of sensibility as opposed to rationality, is here reoriented at its most basic level.

It is a question of the acceptance of reception.

One can apprehend or perceive the meaning of ‘to *receive*’ only on the basis of the hospitable welcome, the welcome that is opened up or offered to the other. Reason itself is a *receiving*. Another way of saying, if one still wishes to speak according to the law of the tradition, though against it, against the inherited oppositions, that reason *is* sensibility. Reason itself is a welcome inasmuch as it is a welcome of the idea of infinity—and the welcome is rational.

Is it insignificant that Levinas speaks in this place of the *door* [*porte*]? Is the place that he designates in this way simply a trope in a rhetoric of hospitality? If the figure of the door, situated on the threshold that

opens the at home [*chez-soi*], were a "manner [*façon*] of speaking," then this would also suggest that speech is a *manner* of speaking, a manner of doing or *managing* [*faire*] with one's hand held out, addressing oneself to the Other so as first of all to give him something to eat or drink or allow him to breathe, as Levinas so often recalls elsewhere. The open door, as a manner of speaking, calls for the opening of an exteriority or of a transcendence of the idea of infinity. This idea comes to us through a door, and the door that is passed through is none other than reason in teaching.

In the same passage of "Transcendence as the Idea of Infinity," the meticulous precautions of the "but" and the "yet" sharpen the originality of this *receiving* and this *welcome*. This open door is everything but a simple passivity, everything but an abdication of reason:

To approach the Other in discourse is to *welcome* [my emphasis] his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* [Levinas' emphasis] from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. *But* this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Discourse, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; *but* inasmuch as it is *welcomed* [my emphasis again] this discourse is a teaching. *But* [third "but," my emphasis, a *but* within a *but* [*mais dans le mais*], *magis*, but even more, even better] teaching does not come down to [*ne revient pas à*] maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. [It does not come back, or come down to—it comes, and comes from elsewhere, from the exterior, from the other.] In its non-violent transitivity the very epiphany of the face is produced. The Aristotelian analysis of the intellect, which discovers the agent intellect *coming in by the door* [my emphasis here and in the following], absolutely exterior, and *yet* constituting, *without* in anywise compromising, the sovereign activity of reason, already substitutes for maieutics a transitive action of the master, since reason, without abdicating, is found to be in a position to *receive* [Levinas' emphasis].

Reason *in a position to receive*: what can this hospitality of reason give, this reason as *the capacity to receive* [*pouvoir recevoir*] ("in a position to receive"), this reason under the law of hospitality? This reason as the law of hospitality? Levinas underscores the word "receive" for a second time in the same paragraph. It is in this vein, as we know, that the most daring analyses of receptivity, of a passivity before passivity, will be undertaken, the stakes of which will become more and more decisive at precisely the point where the terms seem to get carried away and become disidentified in a discourse that opens each signification to its other (relation *without* relation, passivity *without* passivity, "passivity more passive than every passivity,"<sup>3</sup> etc.)

The word "welcome" comes up once again on the same page. It designates, along with the "notion of the face," the opening of the I, and the "philosophical priority of the existent over Being."<sup>4</sup> This thought of welcoming thus also initiates a discreet but clear and firm contestation of Heidegger, indeed of the central theme of gathering oneself, of recollection [*recueillement*], or of gathering together (*Versammlung*), of the collecting (*colligere*) that would be accomplished in recollection. There is of course a thinking of recollection in Levinas, particularly in the section of *Totality and Infinity* entitled "The Dwelling." But such recollection of the "at home with oneself [*chez soi*]" already assumes the welcome; it is the *possibility of welcoming* and not the other way around. It makes the welcome possible, and, in a sense, that is its sole destination. It could then be said that it is the welcome to come that makes possible the recollection of the at home with oneself, even though the relations of conditionality here seem impossible to straighten out. They defy chronology as much as logic. The welcome also, of course, supposes recollection, that is, the intimacy of the *at home with oneself* and the figure of woman, feminine alterity. But the welcome [*l'accueil*] would not be a secondary modification of the collecting [*cueillir*], of this *col-ligere* that is not without link or ligature, precisely, with the origin of religion, with this "relation without relation" for which Levinas reserves, as he says, the word religion as the "ultimate structure."

For the relation between the being here below and the transcendent being that results in no community of concept or totality—a relation without relation—we reserve the term religion.<sup>5</sup>

The *possibility* of the welcome would thus come, so as to open them up, *before* recollection, even *before* collecting, before the act from which everything nonetheless seems to be derived. It is said elsewhere that "to possess the idea of infinity is to have already welcomed the Other"<sup>6</sup> or that "to welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom."<sup>7</sup>

Among the numerous occurrences of the word *welcome* in *Totality and Infinity*, let us recall for the moment the one at the beginning of the chapter on "Truth and Justice" that defines nothing less than Discourse: Discourse as Justice. Discourse is presented as Justice "in the uprightness of the *welcome* made to the face."<sup>8</sup>

With this word Justice are announced all the formidable problems that we will try to address later, notably those that arise with the third. The third arrives without waiting. Without waiting, the third comes to affect the experience of the face in the face to face. Even though this interposition of the third does not interrupt the welcome itself, this "thirdness [*tertialité*]" turns or makes turn toward it, like a witness (*terstis*)

to bear witness to it, the dual [*duel*] of the face to face, the singular welcome of the unicity of the other. And the illeity of the third is nothing less, for Levinas, than the beginning of justice, at once as law and beyond the law, in law beyond the law. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* speaks of this “*illeity*, in the third person, but according to a ‘thirdness’ that is different from that of the third man, from that of the third interrupting the face to face of the welcome of the other man—interrupting the proximity or approach of the neighbor—from that of the third man with whom justice begins.”<sup>9</sup>

Earlier, a note had specified that justice is “this very presence of the third.”<sup>10</sup> In pages where I always thought I could make out a certain distress of the aporia, the complaints, attestations, and protestations, along with the remonstrations or objections, of a Job who would be tempted to appeal not *to* justice but *against* it, we can hear the desperate questions of a just man. Of a just man who would like to be more just than justice. Another Job, or perhaps the other of Job, wonders in fact what he has to do with justice, with just and unjust justice. These questions cry out a contradiction, one that is without equal and without precedent, the terrible contradiction of the Saying by the Saying, Contra-Diction itself:

The third is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow. What then are the other and the third for one another? What have they done to one another? Which passes before the other? . . . The other and the third, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third. “Peace, peace to the neighbor and the one far-off” (Isaiah 57:19)—we now understand the point of this apparent rhetoric. The third introduces a contradiction in the Saying. . . . It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of conscience, of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneity, assembling . . .<sup>11</sup>

Levinas then takes on the daunting task of analyzing the consequences of this “is necessary.” It reintroduces us, as if by force, into the places that ethics should exceed: the visibility of the face, thematization, comparison, synchrony, system, co-presence “before a court of justice.” In truth, it does not re-introduce us in a secondary way into these places but calls us back to them from before the day before. For the third does not wait; it is there, from as early as the “first” epiphany of the face in the face to face.

The question, then, is the third.

The “birth of the question” is the third. Yes, the *birth*, for the third

does not wait; it comes at the origin of the face and of the face to face. Yes, the birth of the *question as question*, for the face to face is immediately suspended, interrupted without being interrupted, *as face to face*, as the dual of two singularities. The ineluctability of the third is the law of the question. It is the question of a question, as addressed to the other and from the other, the other of the other, the question of a question that is surely not first (it comes after the *yes* to the other and the *yes* of the other) though nothing precedes it. No thing, and especially no one.

The question, but also, as a result, justice, philosophical intelligibility, knowledge, and even, announcing itself gradually from one person to the next, from neighbor to neighbor, the figure of the State. For as we will hear, all this *is necessary*.

The same logic, the same sentences, often the literal repetition of these statements, lead Levinas in "Peace and Proximity" to deduce from this ineluctability of the third *at once* the origin of the question itself (and, thus, the origin of philosophical discourse, whose status is governed and signature legitimated by the question: almost the entirety of Levinas' discourse, for example, almost the entire space of its intelligibility for us, appeals to this third)<sup>12</sup> and justice and the "political structure of society." The leap without transition, the rupturing mutation of the "without question" at the birth of the "first question," defines at the same time the passage from ethical responsibility to juridical, political—and philosophical—responsibility. It also indicates the move out of immediacy:

Doubtless, responsibility for the other human being is, in its *immediacy*, *anterior to every question*. But how does responsibility obligate if a third troubles this exteriority of two where my subjection of the subject is subjection to the neighbor? The third is other than the neighbor but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply their fellow. What am I to do? What have they already done to one another? Who passes before the other in my responsibility? What, then, are the other and the third with respect to one another? *Birth of the question*.

The first question in the interhuman is the *question of justice*. Henceforth it is *necessary to know*, to become consciousness. Comparison is superimposed onto my relation with the *unique* and the incomparable, and, in view of equity and equality, a weighing, a thinking, a calculation, the *comparison of incomparables*, and, consequently, the neutrality—presence or representation—of being, the thematization and the visibility of the face . . .<sup>13</sup>

The deduction proceeds in this way right up to "the political structure of society, subject to laws," right up to "the dignity of the citizen,"

where, however, the distinction should remain sharp between the ethical subject and the civic one.<sup>14</sup> But this move out of purely ethical responsibility, this interruption of ethical immediacy, is itself immediate. The third does not wait, its illeity calls from as early as the epiphany of the face in the face to face. For the absence of the third would threaten with violence the purity of ethics in the absolute immediacy of the face to face with the unique. Levinas surely does not say it in exactly this way, but what is he doing when, beyond or through the dual of the face to face between two “uniques,” he appeals to justice, affirming and reaffirming that justice “is necessary,” that the third “is necessary”? Is he not trying to take into account this hypothesis of violence in the pure and immediate ethics of the face to face? A violence that is potentially unleashed in the experience of the neighbor and of absolute unicity? The impossibility of discerning here between good and evil, love and hate, giving and taking, the desire to live and the death drive, the hospitable welcome and the egoistic or narcissistic closing up within oneself?

The third would thus protect against the vertigo of ethical violence itself. For ethics could be doubly exposed to such violence: exposed to undergo it but also to exercise it. Alternatively or simultaneously. It is true that the protecting or mediating third, in its juridico-political role, itself also violates, at least potentially, the purity of the ethical desire devoted to the unique. Whence the terrible ineluctability of a double constraint. . . .

These infinite complications do not change anything about the general structure from which they are, in truth, derived: discourse, justice, ethical uprightness have to do first of all with *welcoming*. The welcome is always a welcome reserved for the face. A rigorous study of this thought of welcoming should not only point out all the contexts in which this word recurs in a regulated way.<sup>15</sup> Already a huge task. It would also have to take into account the chances or opportunities offered to it by the French idiom: the idiom, an ambiguous chance, the *shibboleth* of the threshold, the preliminary chance of hospitality, one for which Levinas was grateful, a chance for his writing but also a chance granted by his philosophical writing to the French language. These chances multiply places favorable to the crypt; they also increase the difficulties one would face in translating the vocabulary of welcoming into other languages, as when, for example, this analysis of hospitality (hospitality of a language and welcome extended to a language, language of the *hôte*, of the host, and language as *hôte*, as guest) allows us to recognize, in the collection or recollection of meaning, the extremely significant play between *recueillement* [*recollection*] and *accueil* [*welcome*].



As we noted a moment ago, Levinas always opens recollection upon welcoming. He recalls the opening of recollection by the welcome, the welcome of the other, the welcome reserved for the other. "Recollection [*recueillement*] refers to a welcome [*accueil*]," he says in a passage from "The Dwelling" that would call for a long interrogative analysis. Levinas there describes the intimacy of the home or of the 'at home' [*chez soi*]: these are places of gathered interiority, places of recollection, certainly, but a recollection in which the hospitable welcome is accomplished. After an analysis of an inapparent phenomenon, namely, *discretion*, which combines manifestation and withdrawal in the face, Woman is named:

... the other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the *hospitable welcome par excellence* which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation.<sup>16</sup>

What *bearing* [*portée*] does this recollection have? In principle, of course, as we have just heard, it "refers to a welcome." It is on this that it bears; this is its *ferance*, its rapport or relation. But it is *apparently*, in the figure of the Woman or the Home, in the I-Thou of "a silent language," of "an understanding without words," of "an expression in secret," in what Levinas here calls "feminine alterity," but one modality of welcoming.

This feminine alterity first seems marked by a series of lacks. A certain negativity is implied in the words "without," "not," and "not yet." And what is lacking here is nothing less than an eminent possibility of language: not language in general but the *transcendence* of language, words and teaching from the height of the face:

The simple living from... the spontaneous agreeableness of the elements is *not yet* habitation. But habitation is *not yet* the transcendence of language. The Other who *welcomes* in intimacy is *not* the *you* [*vous*] of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the *thou* [*tu*] of familiarity: a language *without* teaching, a silent language, an understanding *without* words, an expression in secret. The I-Thou in which Buber sees the category of interhuman relationship is the relation not with the interlocutor but with feminine alterity.<sup>17</sup>

If this feminine alterity thus seems to be lacking the "height" of the face, the absolute verticality of the Most-High in teaching, it nonetheless speaks—and speaks a human language. There is nothing of the animal in this feminine alterity, even if certain signs in the description might seem to point in this direction. It's just that this language is "silent," and if there is hospitality here, "a land of asylum or refuge,"

it is because the dwelling goes beyond animality. For if the at home with oneself of the dwelling is an "at home with oneself as in a land of asylum or refuge," this would mean that the inhabitant dwells there also as a refugee or an exile, a guest [*hôte*] and not a proprietor. That is the humanism of this "feminine alterity," the humanism of the other woman, of the other (as) woman. If woman, in the silence of her "feminine being," is not a man, she remains [*demeure*] human. The familiarity of the home does not bring separation to an end, no more than proximity in general does, and no more than love or eros implies fusion. Familiarity accomplishes, on the contrary, "the *en-ergy* of separation":

With it [that is, with familiarity] separation is constituted as dwelling and inhabitation. To exist henceforth means to dwell. To dwell is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality of a being cast into existence like a stone one casts behind oneself; it is a *recollection*, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a *land of asylum or refuge*, which answers to a *hospitality*, an expectancy, a *human welcome*. In *human welcome* the language that keeps silence remains an essential possibility. Those silent comings and goings of the feminine being whose footsteps reverberate the secret depths of being are not the turbid mystery of the animal and feline presence whose strange ambiguity Baudelaire likes to evoke.<sup>18</sup>

This is, it would appear, one of the contexts for the discussion of Buber's I-Thou relation. (Despite all the reservations Levinas has regarding Buber's discourse on "thou-saying" [*tutoiement*], he sometimes acknowledges in "thou-saying" an "exceptional uprightness.")<sup>19</sup> But how can one think that this is just one context among others? How can one believe that this modality of welcoming remains simply a locatable modality of hospitality concerning the home, the dwelling, and especially the femininity of woman? Levinas' formulations would be enough to warn us against such a restriction. Or at least they complicate the logic in a singular way. For they insistently and explicitly define "Woman" as "hospitable welcome par excellence," "the feminine being" as "the welcoming one par excellence," "welcoming in itself."<sup>20</sup> They underscore this essential determination in a movement whose consequences we will not cease to measure. In at least two directions.

On the one hand, it would be necessary to think that "the welcoming one par excellence," "the welcoming in itself," welcomes within the limits that we have just recalled, that is, within the limits of inhabitation and feminine alterity (*without* the "transcendence of language," *without* the "height" of the face in teaching, etc.). The danger here is that these limits separate not the ethical from the political but, even before this, the pre-ethical—"inhabitation" or "feminine alterity" before

the transcendence of language, the height and illeity of the face, teaching, etc.—from the ethical, as if there could be here a welcoming, indeed a welcoming “par excellence,” “in itself,” *before* ethics. And as if the “being feminine” as such did not as yet have access to the ethical. The situation of the chapter “The Dwelling” and, even more, the place of the entire section to which it belongs (“Interiority and Economy”) would thus pose serious architectonic problems, that is, if architectonics were not an “art of the system” (Kant) and if *Totality and Infinity* did not begin by calling into question systemic totality as the supreme form of philosophical exposition. Add to that, it might be said, the fact that architectonics perhaps always leads philosophy back into the habitability of habitation: it is always the interiority of an economy that already poses the problems of welcoming that confront us here.

Is it on the basis of this abyss that we must now interpret the writing, language (languages) and composition of this singular book, and, within it, the exposition of welcoming, of welcoming par excellence on the basis of sexual difference? We have not yet exhausted these questions. Especially since they would also concern the section “Beyond the Face,” beginning with “The Ambiguity of Love” and with everything that touches upon femininity in the analysis of the caress (“Phenomenology of Eros”).

We cannot take up these questions here. Let us simply note, for now, that “Phenomenology of Eros” remains first of all, and only, *turned*, so to speak, toward the feminine, oriented, therefore, from a masculine *point of view*, but from a *point of view* that goes blindly (with no view [*point de vue*]) in this place of non-light that “The Feminine” would be insofar as it is “essentially violable and inviolable.”<sup>21</sup> This inviolable violability, this vulnerability of a being that prohibits violence at the very place it is exposed to it without defense, is what, in the feminine, seems to have the countenance of the face itself, even though the feminine “presents a face that goes beyond the face,” there where *eros* “consists in going beyond the possible.”<sup>22</sup>

We should never minimize the stakes—or the risks—of these analyses. They seem, in 1961, still to be borne along by the *élan* of analyses Levinas had already devoted to *eros* in 1947 in *Existence and Existents*<sup>23</sup> and *Time and the Other*.<sup>24</sup> The feminine there names that which allows one to transcend, in a single movement, at once the ego and the world of light, and thus a certain phenomenological domination extending from Plato to Husserl. Hence the feminine, which in *Totality and Infinity* will be “the welcoming one par excellence,” is here already defined, in 1947, as “the other par excellence.”

The world and light are solitude. . . . It is not possible to grasp the alterity of the Other, which is to shatter the definitiveness of the ego, in terms of any of the relationships which characterize light. Let us anticipate a moment, and say that the plane of *eros* allows us to see that the other par excellence is the feminine . . . *Eros*, when separated from the Platonic interpretation which completely fails to recognize the role of the feminine, can be the theme of a philosophy which, detached from the solitude of light, and consequently from phenomenology properly speaking, will concern us elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

During that same time period, in *Time and the Other*,<sup>26</sup> an analysis of sexual difference (which Levinas reminds us with insistence is not one difference among others, one type or species of the genre "difference": neither a contradiction nor a complementarity) leads to analogous propositions. The feminine is a "mode of being that consists in slipping away from the light," a "flight before light," a "way of existing" in the "hiding" of modesty.

If these remarks of 1947 in effect announce *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas will revisit certain of these propositions several years later in 1985. We will come back to this later.

Levinas must in fact begin by distinguishing, in short, between hospitality and love, since the latter does not accomplish the former. But he nonetheless acknowledges that "the transcendence of discourse is bound to love." Since the transcendence of discourse is not transcendence itself, this makes for a tangle that is rather difficult to undo. Certain threads go at once *further* and *less far* than others. Just as with architectonics, an objective topology would remain powerless in sketching out the lines, surfaces and volume, the angles and cornerstones. It would seek in vain to make out the lines of demarcation, to measure the distances. What sort of extent are we talking about here? That which goes "further" than language, namely love, also goes "less far" than it.

But it cannot be denied that all the threads pass through the knot of hospitality; it is there that they are tied together and there that they come undone:

The metaphysical event of transcendence—the *welcome of the Other, hospitality*—Desire and language—is not accomplished as Love. But the transcendence of discourse is bound to love. We shall show how in love transcendence goes both *further and less far* than language.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, we would thus be reminded of this implacable law of hospitality: the *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who

considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers *in* his own home; he receives it *from* his own home—which, in the end, does not belong to him. The *hôte* as host is a guest. The dwelling opens itself up to itself, to its “essence” without essence, as a “land of asylum or refuge.” The welcoming one is first of all welcomed in his own home. The one who invites is invited by the one whom he invites. The one who receives is received, receiving hospitality in what he takes to be his own home, or indeed his own land, according to the law that Rosenzweig also recalled. For Rosenzweig emphasized this originary dispossession, this withdrawal by which the “owner” is expropriated from what is most his own, the *ipse* from its ipseity, thus making of one’s home a place or location that one is simply passing through:

... even when it has a home, this people [the eternal people], in recurrent contrast to all other peoples on earth, is not allowed full possession of that home. It is only “a stranger and a sojourner.” God tells it: “This land is mine.” The holiness of the land removed it from the people’s spontaneous reach. . . .<sup>28</sup>

While the relationship between these propositions of Rosenzweig and those of Levinas might appear forced or arbitrary, I believe it necessary, and I will continue to put it to work, at least implicitly. I will continue to relate, on the one hand, this divine law that would make of the inhabitant a guest [*hôte*] received in his own home, that would make of the owner a tenant, of the welcoming host [*hôte*] a welcomed guest [*hôte*], and, on the other, this passage on the feminine being as “the welcoming one par excellence,” as “welcoming in itself.” For Levinas defines in this way welcoming in itself, the welcomer himself, or rather first of all *herself* (and thus that on the basis of which a welcoming itself can be announced in general), at a precise moment: at the moment when he deems it necessary to emphasize that the home is not owned. Or at least it is owned, in a very singular sense of this word, only insofar as it is already hospitable to its owner. The head of the household, the master of the house, is already a *received hôte*, already the *guest* in his own home. This absolute precedence of the welcome, of the welcoming, of welcoming [*accueilance*], would be precisely the femininity of “Woman,” interiority as femininity—and as “feminine alterity.” As in the story by Klossowski, assuming that this reference to a scene of perversion is not too shocking in this place, the master of the house becomes the guest of his guest because, first of all, the woman is there. The experience of perversity of which we spoke above, which at once calls for and excludes the third, here appears indissociably linked to sexual difference.

More than one reading could be given of the few lines I am about to cite. It would be necessary to linger awhile in their vicinity. One approach would be to acknowledge, so as then to question, as I once did in a text to which I do not wish to return here,<sup>29</sup> the traditional and androcentric attribution of certain characteristics to woman (private interiority, apolitical domesticity, intimacy of a sociality that Levinas refers to as a "society without language,"<sup>30</sup> etc.). But another reading of these lines might be attempted, one that would not oppose in a polemical or dialectical fashion either this first reading or this interpretation of Levinas.

Before situating this other orientation, let us listen again to the definition of the "hospitable welcome par excellence," "the welcoming one par excellence," "welcoming in itself," that is, "the feminine being."

The home that founds possession is not a possession in the same sense as the movable goods it can collect and keep. It is possessed because it already and henceforth is *hospitable for its owner*. This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it *before every inhabitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcoming in itself—the feminine being*.<sup>31</sup>

The other approach to this description would no longer raise concerns about a classical androcentrism. It might even, on the contrary, make of this text a sort of feminist manifesto. For it is on the basis of femininity that this text defines the welcome par excellence, the welcome or welcoming of absolute or absolutely originary or even pre-originary hospitality, which is nothing less than the pre-ethical origin of ethics. This gesture would reach a depth of essential or metempirical radicality that takes sexual difference into account in an ethics emancipated from ontology. It would go so far as to confer the opening of the welcome upon "the feminine being" and not upon the *fact* of empirical women. The welcome, the anarchic origin of ethics, belongs to "the dimension of femininity" and not to the empirical presence of a human being of the "feminine sex." For Levinas anticipates the objection:

Need one add that there is no question here of defying ridicule by maintaining the empirical truth or countertruth that every home *in fact* presupposes a woman? The feminine has been encountered in this analysis as one of the cardinal points of the horizon in which the inner life takes place—and the empirical absence of the human being of "feminine sex" in a dwelling nowise affects the dimension of femininity which remains open there, as the very welcome of the dwelling.<sup>32</sup>

Need one choose here between two incompatible readings, between an androcentric hyperbole and a feminist one? Is there place for such

a choice in an ethics? And in justice? In law? In politics? Nothing is less certain. Without stopping for the moment at this alternative, let us simply keep in mind the following for the trajectory we are trying to sketch out here: no matter what we might be speaking about later, and no matter what we might say about it, it would behoove us to remember, even if silently, that this thought of welcome, there at the opening of ethics, is indeed marked by sexual difference. Such sexual difference will never again be neutralized. The absolute or absolutely originary welcome, indeed, the pre-original welcome, the welcoming par excellence, is feminine; it takes place in a place that cannot be appropriated, in an open "interiority" whose hospitality the master or owner first receives before then himself wishing to give it.

Hospitality thus precedes property, and this will not be without consequence, as we will see, for the taking-place of the gift of law, for the extremely enigmatic relationship between refuge and the Torah, the city of refuge, the land of asylum, Jerusalem, and the Sinai.

## NOTES

1. *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 299, my emphasis. Hereafter *TI*, followed by page number.
2. *TI*, 93.
3. In the section of "No Identity" entitled "Subjectivity and Vulnerability," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 146.
4. *TI*, 51. "The notion of the face . . . signifies the philosophical priority of the existent over Being, an exteriority that does not call for power or possession, an exteriority that is not reducible, as with Plato, to the interiority of memory, and yet safeguards the I who welcomes it."
 

Such a "safeguard" of course becomes the name and the place of all the problems to follow, just as much as the welcoming, the an-archy, the anachrony, and the infinite dissymetry commanded by the transcendence of the Other. What about the "I," safe and sound, in the unconditional welcoming of the Other? What about its survival, its immunity and its safety in the ethical subjection of this other subjectivity?
5. *TI*, 80.
6. *TI*, 93.
7. *TI*, 85.
8. *TI*, 82. My emphasis. "We call justice this face to face approach, in discourse [Lingis: conversation—Trans.]," says Levinas (71), who underscores this sentence and thus seems to define justice *before* the emergence of the third. But is there here a place for this "before"?
9. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 150, hereafter *OTB*, followed by page number. *Totality and*

*Infinity* already welcomes, with such words, the “ineluctable” occurrence of the third as “language” and as “justice.” Cf., for example, 213, 305, etc. We will return to this below.

10. *OTB*, 67, 191 n. 2.
11. *OTB*, 157. This “contradiction in the Saying” perhaps stems from this inevitability (both fortunate and unfortunate), from this Law of substitution, from substitution as Law: the third party interrupts (distances) without interrupting (distancing) the face to face with the irreplaceable singularity of the other. That is why Levinas speaks here of distancing (“the other and the third . . . put distance between me and the other and the third”)—and this is justice—though he had written in *Totality and Infinity*, “We call justice this face to face approach, in discourse” (71).
12. This is one of the recurrent themes in the two essays I have devoted to Levinas’ work (“Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79–153, and “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am,” translated by Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 11–48.)
13. “Peace and Proximity,” translated by Peter Atterton and Simon Critchley, in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 168. Levinas underscores only the word “unique.”
14. “In its ethical position, the self is distinct from the citizen born of the City, and from the individual who precedes all order in his natural egoism, from whom political philosophy, since Hobbes, tries to derive—or succeeds in deriving—the social or political order of the City” (“Useless Suffering,” translated by Richard Cohen in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood [New York: Routledge, 1988], 165.)
15. For example, *TI*, 51, 82, 85, 88, 89, 93, 100, 155, 300, etc.
16. *TI*, 155. My emphasis.
17. *TI*, 155. *You* and *thou* are the only words underscored by Levinas.
18. *TI*, 155–56. My emphasis.
19. “The absoluteness of the presence of the other, which has justified our interpreting the exceptional uprightness of thou-saying as an epiphany of him, is not the simple presence in which in the last analysis things are also present” (in the section of “Meaning and Sense” entitled “The Trace,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 106). It has to be recalled that this text situates beyond being an *illeity*, a “third person that is not definable by the oneself, by ipseity.” The “il” of this “illeity” is marked by irreversibility and by an “unrectitude” that here seems to have no negative connotation. A certain “rectitude,” on the contrary, might reduce the transcendence of this *illeity*. See 103–4.
20. *TI*, 157.
21. *TI*, 258.
22. *TI*, 260–61.
23. *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978).
24. *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987).
25. *Existence and Existents*, 84–85.
26. *Time and the Other*, 84–87.
27. *TI*, 254. My emphasis.
28. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (Notre Dame:



Notre Dame University Press, 1985), 300. Levinas also cites this verse (25:23) from Leviticus in the section of "No Identity" entitled "Foreignness to Being," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*: "No land will be alienated irrevocably, for the earth is mine, for you are but strangers, domiciled in my land" (148). [*New Revised Standard Version: The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991): "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants"—Trans.]

Dhormes (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade): "La terre ne se vendra pas à perpétuité, car la terre est à moi, tandis que vous êtes des hôtes et des résidents chez moi."

Chouraqui translation: "La terre ne se vendra pas définitivement. Oui, la terre est à moi! / Oui, vous êtes avec moi des métèques et des habitants."

29. "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am." As noted above, Levinas will come back much later to the logic of these propositions, in particular in 1985: "At the time of my little book entitled *Time and the Other*, I thought that femininity was a modality of alterity—this 'other genre'—and that sexuality and eroticism were this non-indifference to the other, irreducible to the formal alterity of the terms taken as a whole. I today think that it is necessary to go back even further and that the exposure, the nakedness, and the "imperative request" of the face of the Other constitute a modality that the feminine already presupposes: the proximity of the neighbor is non-formal alterity" (remarks recorded in 1985 in the weekly *Construire* [Zurich] by L. Adert and J.-Ch. Aeschlimann). But already in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* a new phenomenology of the skin, of its exposure to being wounded or caressed, situates a "responsibility before eros" (192 n. 27).
30. "The relationship established between lovers in voluptuousity . . . is the very contrary of the social relation. It excludes the third, it remains intimacy, dual solitude, closed society, the supremely non-public. The feminine is the other refractory to society, member of a dual society, an intimate society, a society without language" (*TI*, 264–65).
31. *TI*, 157. My emphasis.
32. *TI*, 157–58.