



EMMANUEL LEVINAS ON HOSPITALITY: ETHICAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

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Walls

Without reflection, without mercy, without shame,
they built strong walls and high, and compassed me about.
And now I sit here and consider and despair.
My brain is worn with meditating on my fate:
I had outside so many things to terminate.
Oh! why when they were building did I not beware!
But never a sound of building, never an echo came.
Out of the world, insensibly, they shut me out.

C. P. Cavafy

(Translated from the Greek by J. C. Cavafy)

ABSTRACT

The current refugee crisis poses the crucial question of hospitality [or hos(ti)pitality in Derridean terms] as the complex ethico-political question of welcoming the stranger in a globalized world. For Emmanuel Levinas, hospitality means ethical and by extension political responsibility for the absolute Other. Without doubt, this is the quintessence of the Levinasian ethical and political thought. It is noteworthy that this sui generis metaphysical ethics does not concern conventional moralism or charity either in the case of personal ethics or in the case of political ethics. In both cases, it chiefly concerns the foundation of world as a refugium, i.e. a threshold of unconditional justice. In a nutshell, this article try in the final analysis to indicate the critical fact, according to Emmanuel Levinas's ethical argumentation, that a public policy on refugee question should mainly be determined by the ethics of hospitality in the sense of the pure welcoming of the absolute Other. Undoubtedly, this form of ethico-political justice is worthy of the name.

Keywords: hospitality, generosity, sanctity, responsibility, exile, political theology;

INTRODUCTION: LOVE, GENEROSITY, OTHERNESS

In Emmanuel Levinas, *hospitality* (hospitalité) is essentially identified with the ambiguity of love and is embodied in the undoubtedly paradoxical and always intense relationship of the one beloved with the one who loves. Hospitality, as the metaphysical incidence of transcendence, as the spectral phenomenology of exteriority itself, ultimately as the welcoming of the Other man, resides in the language of desire, and as a transcendent speech is associated with love. Love, therefore, goes to the Other man, leading hence to immanence (the Spinozian *conatus essendi*). From this Levinasian point of view, love for fellow human beings as a hospitality and welcoming of the Other involves the element of



ambiguity, to the extent that it is placed between immanence and transcendence. In this sense, hospitality, as defined by the fellow friend and student (*lato sensu*) of Emmanuel Levinas (and of course, loving person at the same time), Jacques Derrida, may well be understood as the Platonic *Khôra* (this announcement of the Other man - this imminent stranger), as a *sui generis* place that is and constantly subject to coming (*à venir*), without, however, actually bearing a hypostasis, such as the coming Godot, by Samuel Beckett. Reasonably so, Jacques Derrida decided, in order to demonstrate this radical ambiguity of love/hospitality, to name this place with the paradox term *hostipitality* (*hostipitalité*)¹.

The Levinasian beloved is not simply a lost human soul, but the stranger *per se*, in whose transcendence is structurally inherent, as a negative ontology or negative immanence, the human state of strangeness itself as an erotic desire to the Other. In contrast, however, to the conventional Freudian *libido*, which is purely of a biological nature and is rushed by the loving person to the object of desire (where the Other as a fallen angel is finally and irrevocably depersonalized), the Levinasian erotic desire of hospitality, welcoming of the stranger, of the strangeness, is a particularly ethical relationship, where love is directed, paradoxically, inversely and therefore unconventionally, from the beloved one to the loving person (this paradox of *hostipitality*), reversing the terms of the erotic game in a way that, as Jacques Derrida claims², the host/loving person becomes ultimately a *hostage* (*otage*) to the love of the beloved/visitor stranger, canceling destructively every prospect of possessive possession. Through this powerful Levinasian point of view, the beloved always remains, as Abi Doukhan points out, *verginal* and permanently out of range and thus in an infinite exile³. As a first conclusion here, with the very words of Emmanuel Levinas, we can say that hospitality/erotic desire is always in “an interminable movement toward a future never future enough”⁴.

For many special scholars of Levinasian ethical thinking, this explosive concept of hospitality is a function of Jewish exile. Emmanuel Levinas himself was a stranger throughout his life on a foreign land (at the same time a violent and promised land). A strange Camus-like guest/stranger, who loved those who hosted him, but without never renouncing his Jewishness (that is, his strangeness) through religious assimilation. The guest/stranger, reminding us all that although we are living together on this earth, we come from somewhere out there - from a *Khôra* of transcendence and exteriority. If we accept this Levinasian *amor mundi* (according to Hannah Arendt)⁵, then the world does not belong to anyone. We are strangers/visitors of a residence we are called to love, without ever really desire it, and without having to suffer at the same time the violence of possession and

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality”, in: *Angelaki. Journal of the theoretical humanities*, No. 3, Vol. 5 (2000), pp. 3-18; Spiros Makris, “Politics, Ethics and Strangers in the 21st Century. Fifteen critical reflections on Jacques Derrida’s concept of hos(ti)pitality”, in: *Theoria & Praxis. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Thought*, No. 1, Vol. 5 (2017), pp. 1-21.

² Spiros Makris, “Jacques Derrida and the Case of Cosmopolitanism: ‘Cities of Refuge’ in the Twenty-First Century”, In: Darren O’Byrne and Sybille De La Rosa (eds), *The Cosmopolitan Ideal. Challenges and Opportunities*, Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd., London, 2015, pp. 177-194.

³ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, London, Bloomsbury, N. Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2014, p. 5.

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Boston, London, 1979, p. 254.

⁵ Spiros Makris, “Aristotle in Hannah Arendt’s Republicanism. From homo faber to homo politicus”, in: *Annuaire International Des Droits De L’ Homme*, 2015-2016, Issy-les-Moulineaux Cedex, Paris: L.G.D.J. lextensoéditions, Volume IX (2017), pp. 535-563.



possessiveness. It is really well known that the philosophical view that man is an exile and stranger in the world comes from the Gnostics. This concept of, sometimes frightening, earthly *thrownness* (Geworfenheit) and loneliness will transform, from the late Antiquity to Martin Heidegger in the 20th century, into a basic pattern of phenomenological ontology and existentialism. The American sociologist Richard Sennett argues that the city/world is a foreign society; a place/shelter where strangers meet⁶. Hospitality is, by definition, a temporary shelter⁷. Hospitality, as an ambiguous love/hostageship, is for Levinas essentially a philosophy of exile, without beginning and end. In other words, it is a hymn to strangeness as ethics and *human condition* (again in Arendtian terms)⁸.

Emmanuel Levinas likens this residence as a place where *intimacy* dominates. To the extent that exteriority is not, as he brilliantly emphasizes, the spatial space, this movement of hospitality in/out, like Martin Buber's in-between field (which was also exploited by Hannah Arendt as world/public sphere), shows that the strangeness starts from an intimacy, which, however, in turn always opens out. Thus hospitality looks like the Levinasian *visage* with *double face*, where the inside and the outside lose their commonplace spatial structure and are transformed into the endless erotic desire of hospitality, which eventually with an extraordinary feminist reversal, Emmanuel Levinas identifies with feminine otherness. Hospitality is *feminini generis*: that is, the residence of the eternal stranger is defined as *femininity*. The woman, as the dimension of interiority par excellence, opens, in terms of Martin Heidegger, the transcendence through the ambiguous hospitality/love, as an erotic game that is not entrapped in the narcissistic and hysterical libidinal economy of the Freudian oedipus complex, but outflanking the Lacanian Name of the Father and of power as violence and barbarism, escapes to this intermediate residence; in this refuge, where the symbolic power of the language, which submits the desire of the transcendent relationship with the Other man in the reification of the erotic desire, i.e. in the sexual object, crumbles, like the Lacanian mirror (the mirror stage), in front of the Levinasian *face to face ethics*, where this Other is definitely an ambiguous beloved/loving person stranger⁹.

Emmanuel Levinas ultimately rescues the strangeness through hospitality, though naively some have argued that with this paradoxical metaphysical ethics, he alienates the humans once and for all. As Abi Doukhan emphasizes, the Levinasian concept of hospitality is a hymn to otherness¹⁰, which, although we desire earnestly, we can never acquire as a simple sexual object, which we have, for example, through capitalism, devalued and prostituted entirely. Only when we can comprehend, in these terms of Emmanuel Levinas, our lasting and endless exile in the world, in a world that we desire deeply but it does not belong to us, only then we will be able to grasp in-depth and thoughtfully the ethical meaning of hospitality, in the sense of a generosity¹¹, which undoubtedly has many features in common with the notion of unconditional *gift* to Derrida¹². The world therefore ceases to exist as a set of possessions and conquests, as it

⁶ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York & London, 1992, p. 47.

⁷ Spiros Makris, "Jacques Derrida and the Case of Cosmopolitanism: 'Cities of Refuge' in the Twenty-First Century", In: Darren O'Byrne and Sybille De La Rosa (eds), *The Cosmopolitan Ideal. Challenges and Opportunities*, pp. 177-194.

⁸ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, pp. 13-14.

⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 152-155.

¹⁰ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 32.

¹¹ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 34.

¹² Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Derrida Dictionary*, Continuum, London and New York, 2010, pp. 63-65.



exists, mainly, through the narrative of *cultural imperialism* and Orientalism¹³, and becomes an intermediate field of welcoming and hospitality of the Other. The world can only be understood as the *ultimum remedium* of the Other. The world does not belong to anyone exclusively because every moment, especially the moments of humanitarian crisis and long exile, it belongs to the stranger, to this always coming Other¹⁴.

It is no coincidence that Emmanuel Levinas in the Preface of his seminal work *Totality and Infinity* sums up, almost aphoristically, as follows: “This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated. Hence intentionality, where thought remains an *adequation* with the object, does not define consciousness at its fundamental level. All knowing qua intentionality already presupposes the idea of infinity, which is preeminently *non-adequation*”¹⁵. The Levinasian hospitality, supplanting the barrier of immanence, brings to the world the miracle of the idea of infinity as an overflow of exile in every corner of the earth. The hospitality, as an ethics of the welcoming of the Other, tends for Emmanuel Levinas to become the very work of justice¹⁶, or, as Jacques Derrida repeated on the day of his funeral, the work of mourning for the friendship and the transcendence of the stranger itself¹⁷. We must not forget that in 1996, one year after Levinas’s death, Jacques Derrida transubstantiated this *work of mourning*, as a lecture in Sorbonne for his friend and teacher Emmanuel Levinas (this eternal Socratic stranger: “Sometimes the foreigner is Socrates himself”¹⁸), in a process of the welcoming of the Other and the hospitality¹⁹. Here, now, Derrida refers to a *politics of hospitality*, inaugurating not only his own political turn (the late phase of his work: 1996-2004), which was captured in 1997 in his great essay on cosmopolitanism²⁰, but also a process for a political reading of the Levinasian ethics of hospitality as a philosophy of exile on the residence of femininity that is of mother-earth²¹.

1. PROXIMITY, SANCTITY, RESPONSIBILITY

The feminist and ecological readings of Levinasian hospitality bring to light the political Levinas. Hospitality is not just an ethical category in Levinasian thinking, but also the vehicle or, more appropriately, *the passage* to enter the political field. The welcoming of the Other (or the Other man) is thus displaced from the field of femininity to the field of politics. Enrique Dussel argues that this Levinasian politics of hospitality (to use again Jacques Derrida’s cherished term) is, if anything else, a *liberating act*²². As Abi Doukhan points out²³, the act of hospitality constitutes for Emmanuel Levinas the transition from the ethical to the political. Consequently, here too we have a significant finding in the relevant

¹³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1994; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994.

¹⁴ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 35.

¹⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 28.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1999.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality. Anne Dufourmantelle invites Derrida to respond*, Stanford California Press, Stanford, California, 2000, p. 13.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 15.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001.

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, The Athlone Press, London, 1999, p. 18.

²² Enrique Dussel, “‘Politics’ by Levinas: Towards a Critical Political Philosophy”, in: Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz (ed.), *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2006, p. 80.

²³ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 38.



bibliography on the political Levinas, the crucial link between ethics and politics is not the Levinasian third person/*the Third* (Tiers)²⁴, as many special scholars perceive the presence of multiplicity in interpersonal relationships²⁵, but the stranger. In this regard, the danger lies in the fact that through the Third, through justice in other words, that we owe to people beyond our neighbor, politics can be absorbed by ontology, totality and Totalitarianism. The Third, thus, while appearing in Levinasian phenomenology in order to implement the question of justice, at the same time, putting a limitation on the occurrence of *proximity*, it actually puts at risk the very act of hospitality as a constitutional expression of face-to-face ethics. For Levinas, politics always involves the element of violence. In order to avoid this possible ugly development, which historically led to the crisis of modernity, the French Jewish philosopher refers to a *new politics*²⁶, where the transition takes place without the disruption of the ethics of proximity. On the contrary, this new Levinasian politics, which in essence marks the rejection of the Hobbesian liberal modern state, is based on the field of strangeness or, otherwise, as an experiential continuity with the ultimate ethical act or act of hospitality, with the act of ethical encounter with the face of the Other. In contrast to the liberal and capitalist politics of possession and conquer in the world, which by definition is a weak, imperfect and fragile form of society, Emmanuel Levinas, in the sense of a new politics, does not face the highest moment of justice and of the law as a break with the field of ethics, but as a continuation of ethics or, as Abi Doukhan writes aptly, as a tangible trace of the *anarchical moment of ethics*²⁷.

It is obvious, therefore, that the Levinasian new politics is a direct function of the hospitality, of the stranger and even of the eternal and endless exile of the man in the world. While the Hobbesian political society is formed by excluding the stranger, the political society of Emmanuel Levinas is articulated around the question of the strangeness²⁸. For the French Jewish thinker, hospitality is the only and unique political and social bond that can highlight what Anya Topolski defines as a Levinasian *ethical politics*²⁹. To understand sufficiently, this complete reversal of politics of modernity on the part of Levinas, and hence the political dimension of hospitality, it must be placed within the framework of the Levinasian new politics that we could, like Howard Caygill, define as *politics of anarchy* or political anarchy³⁰. Levinas lays anarchy as an ethics beyond and before politics; as an act of the trace and resistance to Totalitarianism, which is aimed outside the conventional power field of modern state sovereignty, in the Khôra of exteriority, where the stranger bothers and disturbs the totality as an exteriority of anarchy³¹.

If the *Otherwise than Being or beyond essence (Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence)* came as a follow-up to the *Totality and Infinity* to explore something further, then it is not but this situation beyond that of the Heideggerian ontological Being, there, in the field of interpersonal ethics, where the Other cannot be incorporated into the Self and in the

²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 57.

²⁵ William Paul Simmons, "The Third. Levinas' theoretical move from an-archical ethics to the realm of justice and politics", in: *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, No. 6, Vol. 25 (1999), pp. 83-104.

²⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, Continuum, London and New York, 2007, p. 180.

²⁷ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 38.

²⁸ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 38.

²⁹ Anya Topolski, *Arendt, Levinas and a Politics of Relationality*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London & New York, 2015, p. 145.

³⁰ Howard Caygill, *Levinas & the Political*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 138.

³¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1997, p. 99.



Same; where the alien and disturbing characteristics of the face of the Other man cannot be assimilated and neutralized in any way. From this point of view, the Levinasian hospitality as a new politics reveals through the absolute exteriority the ethical awakening of singularity towards the otherness, which is the prospect of a strong and prudent social bond³². So if the Third means the neutralization of the Other in the Hobbesian modern state, the stranger illuminates the way of a chance to achieve an ethical politics. This heretical reading of Abi Doukhan actually preserves the quintessence of the Levinasian ethics of the stranger from the risk of absorbing the Third within the authoritative universe of a, if anything else, typical legal system that does not tolerate the strangeness as a rule of justice but attempts, with what Jacques Derrida names as *force de loi* (force of law)³³, a balancing leveling of the otherness. When Derrida emphasizes that law is not justice, he obviously means this incalculable element of the infinite hospitality of this Other that comes from far away, beyond the Being (the Levinasian metaphysical ethics as the first philosophy), that we can never exclude, but never assimilate and transform it into a property and object of possession. For Levinas, Jacques Derrida clarifies, this infinite law is not the man in general, but the Other man; the stranger; the absolute stranger; this, in other words, that falls outside of all proportionality, since he conveys the absolute asymmetry of the face. This infinite hospitality is characterized by Levinas once as *Jewish humanism*³⁴ and sometimes as *sanctity* (holiness, sainteté)³⁵.

The Levinasian act of hospitality as a fulfillment of society is essentially an act of generosity: hospitality as a gift and *vice versa*, which, however, to the extent that it aims at an ethical politics, is not built in coexistence with the Other, but at the welcoming of exile. The world is given as a gift to the Other man. As soon as its face appears, the act of hospitality immediately becomes an unconditional gift of the world, a process of generosity. The politics of hospitality in this way in Emmanuel Levinas is implied as a politics of generosity. The political and social bond is based on a liberating act in which the Same is redeemed by the narcissism of singularity and spreading beyond the Being in the Platonic Khôra of transcendence, without preconditions and without expectations, only as a risky jump, chasing the miracle of a common world, a public sphere that does not belong absolutely to anyone, because all the tenants are by definition strangers. In the Levinasian politics of hospitality, immanence and transcendence, inside and outside, I and Thou³⁶, the Same and the Other, the host and the guest, the native and the stranger, are losing henceforth their conventional content, setting up a world-threshold, a favorite term of Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben³⁷, where, at the same time, at the very same topological point, we come and go as hosts and guests by treaty, but essentially as endlessly strangers, i.e. exiles continuously, and, in the Cavafy's way, forgotten: “*Out of the world, insensibly, they shut me out*”.

Consequently, the political constitutes for Emmanuel Levinas a public space we share as strangers in the same world. Without implying the coexistence or assimilation,

³² Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, p. 42.

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010, p. 228.

³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1990, p. 273.

³⁵ B. C. Hutchens, *Levinas. A Guide for the Perplexed*, Continuum, London and New York, 2004, p. 112.

³⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2013.

³⁷ Spiros Makris, “Jacques Derrida and the Case of Cosmopolitanism: ‘Cities of Refuge’ in the Twenty-First Century”, In: Darren O’Byrne and Sybille De La Rosa (eds), *The Cosmopolitan Ideal. Challenges and Opportunities*, pp. 177-194.



without eliminating differences and contradictions, the political in the new Levinasian politics is a pluralistic and explicitly open system of foreign and innumerable faces, who appear on the threshold of the world or on the world-threshold, in order to put the process of generosity on the ground³⁸. Hospitality as generosity finally establishes the Levinasian political world as a liberating act, that is, as an act of self-undermining of the Ego. This *difficult freedom* of the subject, according to the title of Emmanuel Levinas' book³⁹, constitutes a widening of the sublime in the Being, bringing to the field of politics the miracle of accountability and absolute *responsibility* (responsabilité) towards the face of the Other. The politics of hospitality and generosity is now set as a politics of absolute responsibility face-to-face in the absolute strangeness: to the absolute Other. Paraphrasing the French Jewish thinker, it can be argued that the Ego before the Other is infinitely responsible. Not only the poverty and the impoverishment of the Other concern me, but nothing that happens to this Stranger can leave me indifferent. The Ego conquers its highest existential rank just interested for everyone and for everything. Caring for the other person is the lever for the transformation of the dominion of the Same from the self-power to responsibility. But taking on the encumbrance of the Other implies, at the same time, its deeper recognition that puts him higher than me⁴⁰. This is undoubtedly a definition of politics, the political and citizen that challenges, perhaps, as inadequate even the most radical republican projects of late modernity.

2. HOMELAND, WORLD, EXILE

Although the Levinasian concept of hospitality is a function of the long Jewish exile, the ethical and political connotations of strangeness compose a first philosophy where the Being is not revealed from now on as an ontological hinterland of the subject, but as the very human state of responsibility towards the Other man, the neighbor, especially the stranger⁴¹. The Levinasian hospitality is thus understood, apart from its clear historical references (see, above all, the Jewish Exodus and Shoah), as love, generosity and responsibility before the face of the Other man, particularly in relation to mortality and his (violent) death. It is precisely this critical Levinasian meaning of hospitality that Jacques Derrida described as a work of mourning: the moment when the death of the Other blames and degrades me as Ego, highlighting the (deathly) loneliness as an endless and difficult exile which renders me a hostage of the nudity of the face as a pure otherness. So, as far as Levinas is concerned "the other man's death calls me into question, as if, by my possible future indifference, I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed; and as if, even before vowing myself to him, I had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other in his mortal solitude. The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question. Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. Or more exactly, as if I had to answer for the other's death even before being. A guiltless responsibility, whereby I am none the less open to an accusation of which no alibi, spatial

³⁸ Abi Doukhan, *Emmanuel Levinas. A Philosophy of Exile*, pp. 43-48.

³⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*.

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Indiana University Press, USA, 1996, pp. 11-32.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, p. 97.



or temporal, could clear me. It is as if the other established a relationship or a relationship were established whose whole intensity consists in not presupposing the idea of community. A responsibility stemming from a time before my freedom - before my (*moi*) beginning, before any present''⁴². Nothing now is considered as natural and given.

The Levinasian hospitality upends the essentialist conventions of Western modernity, especially the atavistic fundamentalism of selfish and autistic domination and possessiveness of racism, nationalism and imperialism⁴³. Through hospitality, the homeland, the world and the exile are henceforth almost related and similar concepts. "Nothing", emphasizes the French Jewish philosopher, in his aphoristic and sometimes staggering writing, "is stranger or more alien than the other man, and it is in the light of utopia that one touches man outside of all rootedness and domestication. Homelessness becomes the humanity of man—and not his degradation in the forgottenness for Being and the triumph of technique. In this adventure where the I dedicates itself to the poem so as to meet the other in the non-place, it is the return that is surprising—a return based not on the response of the summoned relation, but on the circularity of the meridian—perfected trajectory of this movement without return—, which is the "finality without end" of the poetic movement. As if in going toward the other, I were reunited with myself and implanted myself in a soil that would, henceforth, be native; as if the distancing of the I drew me closer to myself, discharged of the full weight of my indentity—a movement of which poetry would be the possibility itself, and a native land which owes nothing to rootedness, nothing to "prior occupation": a native land that has no need to be a birthplace. Native land or promise land? Does it spew forth its inhabitants when they forget the course of one who goes off in search of the other. Native land on the meridian—which is to say: a *here* which also the *everywhere*, a wandering and expatriation to the point of depaganisation. Is the earth habitable otherwise?"⁴⁴

The hospitality in Emmanuel Levinas is, above all, beyond the context of Jewishness, the circular journey of strangeness in a typical native land, in a homeland without frontiers and separating lines, without rootedness, where every time we get trapped in narcissistic and arrogant forgetfulness of possession and conquer, is vomiting us in a new wandering, renewing, sometimes in a very tragic way, the perpetual circular journey of this human nomadic procession of the Benjaminian pariahs in the world. The Levinasian hospitality is the common and inevitable fate of all humans, the common destiny, to the extent that the strangeness on the supposed native land or the Promised Land is the very facticity of the *human condition*. The world is a permanent exile. The *longue durée* of Fernand Braudel. A long circle of strangeness, rootlessness and statelessness without beginning and end. Intimacy only arises through the understanding of this sui generis ethical and political condition, which makes the human freedom difficult and permanently beyond worldliness: exile, exotic, external, without limits, without margins, without borders and roots. Hospitality abolishes all forms of earthly and planetary property, opening up the Ego to the proximity of the Other.

The bond of hospitality is a highly ethical and political bond, in the sense of intimacy and proximity to the face of the Other man, that at the same time that I welcome it, I become overwhelmed by the Socratic fury of hostipitality and the corrosive ambiguity of

⁴² Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, Basil Blackwell (Edited by Seán Hand), Oxford, 1989, pp. 83-84.

⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 2004.

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, "Being and the Other: On Paul Celan", in: *Chicago Review*, No. 3, Vol. 29 (1978), pp. 16-22, pp. 19-20.



love. Bond of hospitality (or “the institution of society”) means for Emmanuel Levinas generosity and responsibility in a circular state of endless exile and absolute risk⁴⁵. As it is well known, the French Jewish thinker names this bond *religion*, not, of course, in the conventional sense of a relationship between God and man, but as a relation without relation: “We propose to call ‘religion’”, he writes in *Totality and Infinity*, “the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality”⁴⁶.

The bond of hospitality is therefore not a holistic bond, but a relation without relation; a circular trace of interiority/exteriority, where the Hegelian bipolarity of the master/slave is continuously recycled, without polarity, being an amphoteric relationship of hostageship. Hospitality as a strangeness liberates and introduces in the field of difficult freedom. The ethics of hospitality constitutes the field of political ontology and political theology and at the same time the field of epistemology as a common truth between othernesses, beyond the Cartesian method of a cognitive subject (*cogito*), which is at the center of the world. “The absolutely foreign alone”, says Levinas, “can instruct us. And it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me—refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every characterology, to every classification. [...] The strangeness of the other, his very freedom! Free beings alone can be strangers to one another. Their freedom which is ‘common’ to them is precisely what separates them”⁴⁷, but also what unites them, according to the example of the ‘table-threshold’ (or the ‘metaphor of the table’), as Hannah Arendt repeats many times, that at the same time and at the same point separates us and unites us⁴⁸. The Levinasian bond of hospitality is not a common ethical and political bond, such as those who form the Hobbesian (egoism) or Lockean (consensus) social contracts of the euphemistically liberal modernity. Here, in the world-threshold, in the world-exile, at the zero point of existence, to paraphrase the famous phrase of Roland Barthes, freedom is the metonymy of strangeness, resistance, disruption and non-assimilation. Consequently, the ‘joint’ freedom of hospitality, of ethical and political community, or *ethical polis*, as Anya Topolski defines the Levinasian *civitas*⁴⁹, can ultimately only advance in an explicit and inevitable acceptance of this unconquered strangeness; as an anarchical relationship, that is, as a defiantly difficult freedom.

Strangeness leads hospitality, through the unlimited responsibility, care and justice, to a state of charity, indulgence and forgiveness⁵⁰. This new ethical and political philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, which sometimes contradicts, as in many thinkers of the so-called Jewish renaissance in Weimar Germany (the case of Leo Strauss is probably the most indicative), Jerusalem with Athens⁵¹, marks a new form of *sociability*⁵², beyond the Aristotelian citizenship, where the bond within the city is, above all, a bond of strangeness and not of common origin or common education. Perhaps, at this point, it would be worth a possible correlation with the role of the *metic* in the political writings of Aristotle (we must

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1994, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 40.

⁴⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1994, p. 52.

⁴⁹ Anya Topolski, *Arendt, Levinas and a Politics of Relationality*, p. 169.

⁵⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 50 & p. 77 respectively.

⁵¹ Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1983, p. 147.

⁵² Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1988, pp. 37-45.



not forget that even the Greek philosopher himself was a metic: the ideal stranger at the threshold of the ancient city). The world is earthly only to the extent that it is a common world between absolutely strangers, hosted, temporarily and cyclically, on the fluid and dual nature threshold of the Earth⁵³.

This hospitable house that the world is rendered by the hospitality, Levinas points out, is the product of a nomadic civilization⁵⁴. The world, which looks like given, at the moment when the stranger appears at its threshold as exteriority without any array of the I and the inside, ceases to be a world and transforms into this Platonic Khôra, this dark Levinasian *existence* (il y a), which again sinks the bond of hospitality in the night of absolute otherness⁵⁵. “The rustling of the *there is ...*”, Levinas whispers, “is horror”⁵⁶: the moment when the amphoteric hospitality becomes as a miracle hostipitality. Consequently, strangeness as the term of the Levinasian *il y a* means that the bond of hospitality is a void space, empty of every being, of every identity, a negative promised land, a denial that always affects itself, a state of negative dialectics without any way out or a vain hope of totalization⁵⁷. Hospitality in Levinas is not just something tangible and positive, nor something that emerges from the conventional house. It levitates in a secular threshold, which is constantly recycled and activated as an ambivalent war of love (hostipitality) between othernesses. Hospitality comes from the Other, but we can never be sure who the Other really is, since the field of this circular strangeness is dark and essentially depersonalized (il y a) in the sense that it exists as the field of an ambiguous Ego/otherness/exteriority, constantly sliding on the threshold of an anarchy of the impersonal⁵⁸.

This, therefore, radical Levinasian ethical and political heteronomy, as the rival awe of Cartesian and Kantian autonomy, or, otherwise, as a metaphysical inspiration of an ethical allegiance to the face of the Other man, which resists its thematization⁵⁹ and is ultimately embodied, as an easily comprehensive example, to the anarchical and impersonal bond of hospitality, essentially reveals the constant structural oscillation between the ethical and the political in the work and the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. From this point of view, we have already pointed out above that the political Levinas cannot be exhausted one-dimensionally in the consideration of the Third. If we assume, then, that there is a Levinasian *state*⁶⁰, this will only exist as an anarchical state, that is a state, which will continually set the terms of its self-abolition with urgency, so that it tends every time, a version of the justice of the coming ideal state. For Levinas, the liberal state is not, of course, the same as the fascist state, but by definition this as well, even though it is a *rule of law*, it is not a just state⁶¹. The conclusion of his famous text on Hitlerism (1934) is indicative of Levinas’s attitude towards the tergiversations of modernity: “racism”, he

⁵³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 37-45.

⁵⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 37-45.

⁵⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 46-64.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 46-64.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 46-64.

⁵⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 85-96.

⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, p. 35.

⁶⁰ William Paul Simmons, “The Third. Levinas’ theoretical move from an-archical ethics to the realm of justice and politics”, in: *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, No. 6, Vol. 25 (1999), pp. 83-104, p. 98.

⁶¹ Levinas Emmanuel et al., “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas”, in: Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas. Rethinking the Other*, Routledge, London & New York, 1988, p. 172.



writes, “is not just opposed to such and such a particular point in Christian and liberal culture. It is not a particular dogma concerning democracy, parliamentary government, dictatorial regime, or religious politics that is in question. It is the very humanity of man”⁶².

By the term humanity, the French Jewish philosopher does not mean a certain essential feature of human nature, nor some Kantian categorical imperative, but the strangeness of human, this element, which by definition, ensures hospitality at the earthly threshold. Levinas’s reference to a dog named Bobby, which kept him company, as a human presence, during the years of his imprisonment at a Nazi concentration camp, is very characteristic. “This dog”, he states, “was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany”⁶³. Here, from a phenomenological point of view, the meaning and value of Kantian mankind is first and foremost highlighted as the meeting with Other: as the look and the nod with the face of the Other, not with the power of a will that logically universalizes ethical imperatives, but with the power of *sensibility*. As Hannah Arendt showed in *Origins of Totalitarianism* and then in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the world did not become inhospitable because of Nazi violence alone, but because early and systematically throughout the 19th century the West set up the planetary realm as an inhospitable system of imprisonment, control and ultimately fall of human otherness. The work of Enzo Traverso is an excellent kaleidoscope of this earthly desert in modernity⁶⁴.

CONCLUSION: HOSPITALITY AS POLITICAL THEOLOGY AT THE THRESHOLD OF ETHICS AND POLITICS

The relationship, the transition or the gap and the discontinuity between an ethics of hospitality (i.e. a ‘face-to-face’ ethics) and a politics of hospitality (something like the Kantian diplomatic hospitality under conditions (see especially the ‘Third Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace’)⁶⁵, all these versions or aspects of the complex issue of hospitality, set forth a series of relevant theoretical concerns and adjunctive interpretive readings about the very sophisticated and constitutionally eclectic thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. The proposal for a transition from the ethics to politics or to a relation beyond the conventional contradictions of ethics/politics that the French Jewish philosopher himself has set up throughout his lifetime and throughout his work, which we can finally adopt here, to solve with a positive sign the riddle of a political Levinas, concentrates on what Miguel Abensour defines as an anarchical *disturbance of politics*⁶⁶ and which Simon Critchley further defines as a *post-political moment in politics*⁶⁷, in the sense of an ethics that is not exhausted in its metaphysics, but through proximity and *substitution*⁶⁸, it seriously distorts politics and, above all, the state or, in Levinasian terms, the totality, which by definition is tyrannical. I

⁶² Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”, in: *Critical Inquiry*, No. 1, Vol. 17 (1990), pp. 62-71, p. 71.

⁶³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, p. 153.

⁶⁴ Enzo Traverso, *The End of Jewish Modernity*, Pluto Press, London, 2016.

⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace. A Philosophical Essay*, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London, 1917, p. 137.

⁶⁶ Miguel Abensour, “An-archy between Metapolitics and Politics”, in: *Parallax*, No. 3, Vol. 8 (2002), pp. 5-18, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Simon Critchley, “Five Problems in Levinas’s View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them”, in: *Political Theory*, No. 2, Vol. 32 (2004), pp. 172-185, p. 182.

⁶⁸ Philip J. Maloney, “Levinas, substitution, and transcendental subjectivity”, in: *Man and World*, 30 (1997), pp. 49-64.



get in the position of the Other, I become a hostage to the Other, I bear his suffering, and only in this way, I find my lost self, no longer with the illusion of autonomy and selfish freedom.

The ethics, consequently, of Levinas, can be perceived as a post-political disturbance of ethics towards the Hobbesian modern state (the Self-Leviathan) so as not to allow it, as happened in the 20th century with the hegemonic wars and the Shoah and continues to happen around us with the abysmal massive violence and sometimes the genocidal extermination of entire nations (as it is obviously the case of Syria), to degenerate completely into the extreme state of Totalitarianism⁶⁹. In this way, disappear as well, the clouds of an approach to the Levinasian ethics of Other, which attributes to the French Jewish thinker a moralistic formalism, which collapses in the face of the cynical political realism of modern Zionism⁷⁰. In other words, it offers to us the possibility of an alternative relation on the threshold of ethics and politics, beyond the two dominant stereotypes of a nationalistic Chauvinism and an abstract cosmopolitanism⁷¹.

The traditional tension between ethics and politics, that the threshold of Levinasian hospitality may resolve, lies in the fact that the well-known political and largely state justice is nothing more than the metonymy of the primary violence itself, which is a direct violation of ethics. From this point of view, Levinasian ethics is not yet another ethical approach of the political, but the morality *per se*. In particular, Levinas's ethics is a straight resistance to the Heideggerian ontology of the Being, which, as a metaphysics of the presence (though it blames the ontological oblivion), places the infinity of the Other under the possession of violence of the Name. Therefore, the French Jewish thinker's response to the dilemma of ethics or politics is a metaphysical ethical politics, where Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology is replaced by another fundamental event: the face of the Other. Ontology gives its place to religion, without a trace of mysticism and theology. That is, in an interpersonal relationship without a relation, in the sense of a relationship that has no subject and cognitive comprehension, that is, no authoritarian violence. In the place of ontological knowledge, the Other himself is placed as the authentic field of metaphysical sensibility. Thus, paraphrasing the famous saying of Edmund Husserl: "back to the things themselves", we would say that Emmanuel Levinas's threshold of ethical politics highlights the major phenomenological demand for a total return to the face as such. We should not forget, however, that the Levinasian face is not an aesthetic face, formed exclusively with the elements of vision (eyes, skin, etc.), but a strong sense, a meeting with the infinite, beyond the knowledge, a sensitive effect that deconstructs the power of possession and conquer and which as the *epiphany* of the face is finally found in the language and verbality of the Other man.

The face invites us, calls us and speaks to us, in its impersonal infinity, refusing to submit. The Levinasian im-personal face, by inhibiting every form of pre-understanding and power, is placed face-to-face on the threshold of ethics and power; on the world-threshold or on the threshold of the world, addressing the word of an infinite and unconditional heteronomy. The power of the house and the Name and the narcissistic freedom of the *Same* (la même) lose every basis of identity and are transformed into a field of ambivalent love,

⁶⁹ Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, The New Press, New York and London, 2003, p. 63.

⁷⁰ Simon Critchley, "Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them", in: *Political Theory*, No. 2, Vol. 32 (2004), pp. 172-185, p. 175.

⁷¹ Cecil Eubanks & David Gauthier, "The politics of the homeless spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on dwelling and hospitality", in: *History of Political Thought*, 32(1) (2011), pp. 125-146.



where the recovery of a certain freedom and an identity is a function of a difficult encounter and an absolute risk. The Hegelian dialectic of master and slave collapses. Emmanuel Levinas's new politics more closely resembles Michel Foucault's concept of microphysics of power⁷², where *human condition* is reflected in the image of an action/reaction. Nothing is given and sure. Hospitality, as an asymmetry of responsibility, is a struggle for exposing the Other's call, whose face is im-personal and infinite. The host subjectivity and the visitor hosted, very quickly, within the threshold of hospitality, the threshold of ethics and politics, are transformed into a game of substitutions, where hostage and allegiance towards the life and death of the Other is the new fundamental treaty. The Levinasian altruism of hospitality shows both the constant passion of Christ and the endless exodus of Abraham⁷³. The nomadic nature of hospitality cannot therefore be squeezed into the logic of the Third and a liberal rule of law. The encounter of ethics and politics or Jerusalem and Athens or Jews and Greeks in Emmanuel Levinas's thinking is an amphoteric meeting of absolutely and irreversibly strangers, discovering, through a Nietzschean eternal recurrence, the world constantly as a *refugium*⁷⁴.

This sui generis Levinasian ethical politics of hospitality is not a politics on the agenda. It is a predominantly *discursive politics* with no *agenda* where the communication with the Other is neither the Kantian universality nor the Habermasian deliberation⁷⁵, but an open meeting of absolute strangers; a questionable, difficult, asymmetric and precarious encounter at the verge of ethics and politics, in a topological space where the pluralism of infinite singularity redefines the world as a nomadic *ethos*⁷⁶. Simon Critchley, with an à la Claude Lefort view of the anarchical singularity in Levinas, sets the nomadic people beyond the state; as an empty space; as a borderless demos; i.e. a synonym of a continuous disruption of modern power; in the final analysis, as an expression of an infinite *dissensus*⁷⁷. This uncomfortable coexistence of singularity and multiplicity is the locus classicus of Levinasian ethical and political hospitality: a nomadic threshold that takes the hypostasis of democracy as an empty place⁷⁸; or a topology of the Other; or an ambiguous civic love, which, as Jacques Derrida showed us by reading the etymologies of Émile Benveniste⁷⁹, stranger, strangeness, hospitality, hostility and ultimately intimacy are not more than superfluous meanings of the Latin term *host*: an ambiguous word; a word-threshold, whose connotations express clearly the situations of the amphoteric discursive hostageship in the Levinasian threshold of hospitality. Enrique Dussel, the Argentinean Mexican philosopher and formidable scholar of Levinas, seeks the osmosis of ethics and politics of hospitality in a radical critique of the state and of the totality (i.e. the earthly Caesar's state), whether this

⁷² Stuart Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2017, pp. 114-115.

⁷³ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other", in: Marc C. Taylor (ed.), *Deconstruction in Context. Literature and Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1986, p. 348.

⁷⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End. Notes on Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2000, p. 24.

⁷⁵ Spiros Makris, "European Demos, Citizenship and Migrants in a Globalized World. Some Critical Reflections from a Habermasian Perspective", in: Marco Caselli and Guia Gilardoni (eds), *Globalization, Supranational Dynamics and Local Experiences*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018, pp. 87-107.

⁷⁶ Feng-Wei Wu, *Between Ethics and Politics - Reading Levinas Through Kant*, available in the web page: <http://tpa.hss.nthu.edu.tw/committee/tpaseminar/2007/5D.pdf>, 2007, pp. 13-14.

⁷⁷ Simon Critchley, "Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them", in: *Political Theory*, No. 2, Vol. 32 (2004), pp. 172-185, pp. 182-183.

⁷⁸ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 17.

⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality. Anne Dufourmantelle invites Derrida to respond*, p. 4.



is a form of political order (totalitarian state: Rome, a Hegelian state, a Nazi state, etc.) or a form of spiritual power (Christianity, Christian state, Jewish state, etc.). From an Augustinian viewpoint, he puts at the other extreme the concept of the Levinasian exteriority (the heavenly City of God), whether has a political form (a secular messianism, the state of David or a new state of liberation) or a spiritual form (a prophetic messianism, Christianity as a religion or Hebraism as a religious community)⁸⁰.

The Levinasian hospitality as the prime location of exteriority or, otherwise, of this sui generis ethical politics is by definition the dimension of politics that in late Levinas acquires gradually the characteristics of a *prophetic politics*⁸¹. In fact, this critical political shift in the ethical thinking of the French Jewish philosopher has been gaining substance from his transitive work *Otherwise than Being*⁸². Prophetic politics is placed as a counterpart to the ontological politics, where politics is based primarily on a egocentric Self, attempting to incorporate the Other into the Same. This situation, whether occurring physically or spiritually, identifies politics with violence. Instead, Levinas attempts, through his prophetic politics, to delimit the frantic testimony of infinite otherness⁸³. The return of the political, therefore, does not take place on an ontological basis, but through a political theology, which focuses on the concept of infinite responsibility for the infinity of the Other man, i.e. the falsification of singularity through the multiplicity. If we accept that the righteous state emerges in prophetic politics as an eclectic composition of Greek philosophical rationalism and of Jewish biblical sensibility, then the Levinasian new politics contains the elements of a pure political theology⁸⁴, where politics and religion constitute another version of *messianic eschatology*⁸⁵, which is the predominant cultural project of the European interwar period and of course the so-called Weimar (and indeed Jewish) renaissance⁸⁶.

However, Emmanuel Levinas's messianic and prophetic political theology is not exhausted in a formalistic ethical politics, which, as some have argued, is entrapped in a *fetishism of the other*⁸⁷. On the contrary, the Levinasian speech about rights from the early 1980s to the end of his life (the late Levinas) develops as a discursive formation where the *Rights of Man* are replaced by the *Rights of the Other Man* and ultimately by the tangible and concrete right to life. Politics and the state are now called, through science and

⁸⁰ Enrique Dussel, "'Politics' by Levinas: Towards a Critical Political Philosophy", in: Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz (ed.), *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, p. 87.

⁸¹ Philip J. Harold, *Prophetic Politics. Emmanuel Levinas and the Sanctification of Suffering*, Ohio University Press, Ohio, 2009.

⁸² Arjuna Weerasooriya, "Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95)", in: Jon Simons (ed.), *Contemporary Critical Theorists. From Lacan to Said*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, p. 45.

⁸³ Arjuna Weerasooriya, "Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95)", in: Jon Simons (ed.), *Contemporary Critical Theorists. From Lacan to Said*, p. 46.

⁸⁴ Gavin Rae, *The Problem of Political Foundations in Carl Schmitt and Emmanuel Levinas*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016, p. 139.

⁸⁵ Arjuna Weerasooriya, "Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95)", in: Jon Simons (ed.), *Contemporary Critical Theorists. From Lacan to Said*, p. 45.

⁸⁶ Graham Hammill & Gulia Reinhard Luplon (eds), *Political Theology & Early Modernity*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 2012; Leonard V. Kaplan & Rudy Koshar (eds), *The Weimar Moment. Liberalism, Political Theology, and Law*, Lanham, Boulder, Lexington Books, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, 2012; Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion. Political Theology and Early Modern Texts*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 2014.

⁸⁷ Arjuna Weerasooriya, "Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95)", in: Jon Simons (ed.), *Contemporary Critical Theorists. From Lacan to Said*, pp. 47-48.



technology, to tackle global starvation. The resolution of economic inequalities on a global scale calls for the institutionalization of the right to life, that is, what Arendt delimited as *the right to have rights*⁸⁸. Human rights presuppose human life. Nowadays, the critical question could be raised as follows: can the modern state (i.e. a rule of law) be transformed into a just state? Can it renounce the element of violence, abuse and power perversion? Prophetic politics occurs just like a realistically messianic and eschatological sword of justice, in order to make the question of the rights of the Other man, as a vigilant conscience, a point of reference for the new Levinasian politics⁸⁹.

In the field of the rights of the Other man, the osmosis of ethics and politics takes place as the world-threshold of the Levinasian new politics or political theology. In one of the first texts that constitute the new discursive of the Rights of the Other Man, the “The Prohibition against Representation and *The Rights of Man*” (1981), Levinas points out the following: “*The right of man, absolutely and originally*, takes on meaning only in the other; as the right of the other man. A right with respect to which I am never be released! Hence, infinite responsibility for the other: the radical impossibility of immanence! An affinity that “comes to mind” in the silent command of the face. The Word of God? In any case, the one that must *precede* Revelation in the positive religions if the men who listen to it want to know who is addressing them, and to recognize a voice that they have already heard”⁹⁰. The Other ceases to represent a simple numerical data of a species, as this is usually described by a demographic and accounting politics of counting. The Other henceforth consists in a uniqueness, a radical otherness, in a right of the Other man, where the plasticity and the expression of the face cannot be deducted to the alienating state of a libidinal object, to the extent that the theophany of the face is not merely an expressive *epiphany*, but the very expression of the otherness, resisting every virtualization, understanding, and therefore thematization. The order of the face/God, Emmanuel Levinas points out, penetrates the Cartesian cogito ergo sum, which is awakened by the oblivion of the Being, but not as in Heidegger, in order to return to the status quo ante, in an authentic form of interiority, but in order to emerge from itself to the exteriority, beyond the immanence, in the world-threshold of the ambiguous, equivocal and amphoteric hospitality. The infinite responsibility, thus, is revealed as the metonymy of a love without *lust*⁹¹.

In 1985, Levinas returns with a text under the title “The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other”, in which the prophecy becomes the conjunction of politics and ethics. In the conclusion of this great text, the French Jewish intellectual places the duty on the Other as the base of the difficult freedom. According to Levinas, through the right of the Other man, which ceases to be the natural right of an autistic subject, which is fooled to be free as *liberum arbitrium*, define myself as non-interchangeable: I get elected as unique and incomparable. My freedom and my rights, before appearing through my own question of the freedom and rights of the Other man [the Hobbesian ‘state of nature’] will appear exactly as a responsibility within the human fraternity. Therefore, the Levinasian responsibility is no doubt inexhaustible because we could not have settled our obligations to the Other man⁹². The Levinasian discursive formation of rights will be summed up in 1989 with a minor yet

⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 369.

⁸⁹ Arjuna Weerasooriya, “Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95)”, in: Jon Simons (ed.), *Contemporary Critical Theorists. From Lacan to Said*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, pp. 127-128.

⁹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, pp. 128-129.

⁹² Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, California, 1993, pp. 116-125.



important text with the related title “The Rights of the Other Man”⁹³, in which the ethical and political coupling is now clearly defined as the right of a stranger or, more correctly, as this new meaning of strangeness as a hospitality in the modern semiology of presence and violence. Initially, Levinas presents the human rights as natural rights in the Hobbesian field of *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Historically, we all know that the solution between the rival free wills came through the imposition of the modern state, which was self-glorified in the 20th century in the Totalitarianism.

On the contrary, there is always the Kantian model of a self-regulated free will, which reasonably and rationally tries to limit the natural freedom through consensus. The Kantian good will, even as a practical reason, can, Levinas underlines, to control a cogito by definition free and autonomous? This is where the ontological conflict reoccurs in the heart of modernity that is within the very structure of human rights. The Levinasian hospitality, as an alternative model of human rights, as a new metaphysics, thus attempts sanctifying the human passion (political theology), to resignify the religious concepts of mercy, charity, and love as a child’s eyes would see them within the perspective of sensibility. Many times, this technique of unconditional acceptance of the Other may hide surprises (see hospitality), but always, according to Emmanuel Levinas, highlights the strangeness as the Freudian *unheimlich*⁹⁴, as something, in other words, that is this intimacy and the proximity of the Other face that we have deeply lost in our collective unconscious. In order to paraphrase a Jacques Derrida’s saying, proximity means guarantee, and the moment when that proximity is accomplished at the threshold of hospitality, the transcendence of the foreign is conceived as the infinite distance of the Other. Contradiction? Obviously, not. This ambiguity is the very ambiguity of the language, which for Derrida is the essence of hospitality/hostipitality. It is this lasting and endless encounter of ethical/political or Greek philosophy and Jewish thought in the world-threshold⁹⁵, in a world that seems so earthy because it does not really belong to any of these creatures that, for thousands of years now, visit it as strangers, looking for hospitality or, rather, offering hospitality through the discursive call. As a concluding remark it could be argued that every refugee crisis, especially when it acquires the absolutely barbarous features of the humanitarian crisis, urges us to reflect on Emmanuel Levinas’s magnificent thoughts, recognizing that his difficult ethics is the only, perhaps, road to a liberating act from everything that depresses us, whether it is deep in our soul or in the palimpsest body of the Hobbesian Leviathan.

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⁹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, pp. 145-149.

⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 121.

⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*.



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