

EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND THE PHENOMENON OF SUFFERING

ETHICS, VOICE, REPRESENTATION

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we call ethical a relationship between terms such as are united neither a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject or object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is

meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel.

it is this attention to the suffering of the other that... can be affirmed as very nexus of human subjectivity.

Emmanuel Levinas,
"Language and Proximity"¹

Emmanuel Levinas,
"Useless Suffering"²

towards a new encounter

SOCIAL SUFFERING, a recent collection of scholarly essays exploring the phenomenon of suffering across a vast array of times, histories and locations, makes no mention of Emmanuel Levinas. For the philosophically minded reader, the omission of Levinas in such an extended theoretical discussion of suffering should seem quite troublesome — the philosopher and theologian spent most of his career locating an ethics by which the self could come to respect the Other without reducing the Other to a simple and entirely comprehensible object of self-knowledge. Indeed, Levinas' persistent claims that the Other is partially ineffable and that any speech act bears an implicit address to the Other resonate with the statements repeated

throughout the collection. These essays describe how "suffering encompasses an irreducible nonverbal dimension that we cannot know," or that the utterance "I am in pain" is not a statement without referent human object but rather an "asking for an acknowledgment and recognition" from some Other.⁴

Given my hitherto implicit connection between the current academic understanding of suffering and the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, this paper seeks to explicitly facilitate a much needed encounter. To make the scope of my discussion more manageable, I will limit my treatment of Levinas and the phenomenon of "suffering" to that of the representation of social suffering by those who stand outside of its circumstances.

the ethical moment and the representation of suffering — finding a voice

What is the epistemology of suffering? That is, by what means do we come to know that someone has in fact suffered? More than just a purely juridical problem for those crafting international laws or establishing human rights committees, this question raises another, perhaps even more important, philosophical inquiry — that I take up here. Namely, what are the ethics — the responsibilities — entailed in representing (or *re-presenting*) suffering (whether this representation be through speech, writing, or the visual arts; whether it pertain to pain of the Self or that of the Other)? Should one adopt a highly personalized language in representing suffering, the absolute specificity of one's own or the Other's pain? If we answer yes, are we prepared to face the danger that this mode of discourse can pose — the tendency that it has in its less careful instantiations to lapse into a reverie of existence, a solipsism of the self — the political quietism that lies at the end of its inherent distrust of the collective? Is the only other alternative to speak of suffering entirely through the rhetoric of political ideology, the suffering of communities, cultures, histories — that is, should one speak in the fashionable language of the de-centered political — “oppressed” and “oppressor,” “colonized” and “colonizer” — despite the fact that this might annihilate the dignity and importance of each agent, of each Other that suffers?

After all, behind the seemingly harmless expression “ideology” lies the uneasy specter of the *ideologue* whose discourse, whatever its political positioning, inevitably enacts an absorption, a condensation of the individual agent that can only be characterized as an epistemic violence. As novelist Arundhati Roy hauntingly suggests, when “History and Literature... Marx and Kurtz [join] palms,” the individual subject is often crushed under the weight of the edifice, losing the right to utilize its most basic human capacity — the voice.⁵

This essay will not attempt to provide a definitive answer to these questions. These are, though, perhaps the most pertinent questions to pose in our days of methodological crisis. They are so tightly bound to the junction of over-abundant theories, over-burdened ideologies, that one can all too easily lapse into the self-congratulatory moral passivity of *pastiche*.⁶ All I can do is simply suggest that some possible “answers” to these interrogations can be formulated through a concerned reading of Levinas — specifically of, first, his discussion of the transition between the ethical realm of the Self and Other and the political realm of society, and second, the phenomenology of suffering offered in “Useless Suffering,” one of his briefer and less widely recognized essays. After articulating at least a provisional formulation of an ethics of representing suffering that lies between self and society, between the knowable and the ineffable, I will then proceed to problematize this very definition, to (as a Derridean might say) place it under erasure (*sous rature*) by questioning the extent to which speech acts can and should fall under the domain of representation.

Before embarking on this project, however, I must follow an important digression. Perhaps my opening address to the “philosophically minded reader” needs to itself be problematized. An aware “reader of philosophy” (and the two “readers” are certainly not the same) will have realized by this point that I intend to use Levinas in two decidedly non-Levinassian ways.

First, I am seeking to formulate a rule or norm of ethical representation,

where Levinas sees his project as elucidating an ethics that is before all norms, “the command prior to institutions.”⁷ Second and more importantly, I am assuming that one can *choose* to be ethical in the Levinassian sense, that is, that ethics is a way of being that one can either accept or reject. Levinas, however, denies such a sovereign choosing, thus exiling agency from the ethical act. He insists that the ethical “no longer has the structure of an intentional correlation.”⁸ In my defense, both Levinas scholar Simon Critchley and historian Dipesh Chakrabarty see Levinas' ethical register as important not as an exposition of underlying “truth” (as some dogmatic post-structuralists maintain) but as a way to interrupt or call into question our normatively defined political views.⁹ In this vein I also add that the need for a completely Levinassian reading of Levinas is unnecessary if we accept that the importance attributed to the sovereign author of any text should be subordinate to the extent to which the author's work might circulate in new contexts, the extent to which the text “[creates] a space into which the subject constantly disappears.”¹⁰ Accepting then the necessary infidelity of my project — the space of my reading of Levinas into which Levinas' authority evaporates, let me then move on and see where such a reading might lead.

the sociality of suffering

In “Useless Suffering,” Levinas proceeds in a typically elliptical fashion. He begins by asserting that “suffering is, of course, a datum in consciousness,” only to negate this proposition a few lines later in his equally sweeping, equally provocative decision that “it is as if suffering were not just a datum.”¹¹ The meaning that I take to rest between these elusive lines is that suffering is *double* — both phenomenal/noumenal and something else. It is partially an object of consciousness — akin to “color, sound, contact, or any other sensation”¹² — and yet it also contains a kernel that stands outside consciousness, ineffable to the rational conscious mind. This partial ineffability of suffering is that which disturbs any easy mimesis of suffering and its comprehension.¹³ Thus Levinas writes that the suffering which lies outside phenomenology is that which opposes “the assemblage of data into a meaningful whole.”¹⁴

Levinas characterizes this ineffability of suffering, the domain that is “in-spite-of-consciousness,” as ultimate and radical “passivity.”¹⁵ That is, when one attempts to apprehend this aspect of suffering by bringing it into the domain of consciousness, one cannot in fact move suffering from the ineffable to the knowable by any intentional means. Instead, this attempt engenders a submission; consciousness is overwhelmed by what is more passive than passivity.¹⁶ Levinas writes that this movement instantiates a passivity that lies in profound excess of

The other side of any activity... or sensorial receptivity correlative to the ‘ob-stance’ of the object that affects it and leaves an impression on it.¹⁷

The effect of this almost un-thematizable passivity is what Levinas characterizes as “precisely evil”¹⁸ — evil because it paralyzes the consciousness in a way that does not then allow for a healthy relationship towards the Other.¹⁹ For Levinas, the condition of suffering leads to a consciousness that cannot even attempt to understand the nature of that which paralyzes it. Thus, this suffering, which can produce no positive effects in the ego, is “useless: for nothing”; it represents “extreme passivity, helplessness, abandonment, and solitude.”²⁰

Yet this very suffering takes on meaning when examined from the perspective of the other man. In the case of this paper, that other man is myself. That is, when I attempt to comprehend the utter uselessness of the suffering of the Other, I suffer *for* the Other. This “justifiable suffering” — suffering for the useless suffering of the Other — “opens suffering to the perspective of the inter-human.” To substitute perspectives in a Levinasian fashion, the essay then also seems to posit that my own useless, meaningless suffering can only even begin to take on meaning when it is recognized by the Other. Thus, the “very nexus of human subjectivity,” the primary social bond, arises when I begin to both suffer for the Other and recognize that my suffering can only be realized through the Other. It appears that for Levinas suffering realizes sociality.²¹

Levinas then quickly turns from the phenomenology of suffering to a discussion of theodicy. Rather than use “theodicy” in the context of the age-old theological debates about the “problem of evil,” Levinas radically reconfigures the meaning of the term. For Levinas, the antiquated discourse of theodicy is manifest in the modern thought that suffering “temper[s] the individual’s character”²² in that it is “necessary to the teleology of community life, when social discontent awakens a useful attention to the health of the collective body.”²³ Following his distrust of political/historical discourses, Levinas finds that this revitalized theodicy ignores “the bad and gratuitous meaningfulness of pain...beneath the reasonable forms espoused by the social ‘uses’ of suffering.”²⁴ Ultimately, Levinas views theodicy, whether modern or ancient, as an attempt to make suffering comprehensible.²⁵ This comprehension, though, cannot but seek to reduce the enormity of the suffering of the Other.

What Levinas envisions instead is an inter-human relationship of suffering, where people *move towards* (not *arrive at*) an understanding of the suffering of the Other, while still realizing that suffering is “useless” and outside of any justification. As such, Levinas is concerned with the possibilities for compassion inherent in one’s proximity to suffering rather than with an ontology of suffering. In fact, for Levinas it is this very quest for ontology that characterizes traditional philosophy’s violence toward suffering; ontology implicitly attempts to render suffering comprehensible and justify its position within the domain of Being. Both of these tasks reduce suffering to a narcissistic object of self-knowledge.²⁶ Justifying (or seeking to totally comprehend) the pain of the Other in any way is for Levinas the “ultimate source of immorality.”²⁷ Instead, one should intimately understand the suffering of the Other, not narrate that suffering as a discourse which ultimately justifies and makes meaningful suffering that is in actuality useless at its very core.

a temporary formulation of the ethical imperative in representing suffering

So what, if anything, does Levinas’ essay contribute to formulating an ethics of representing suffering? Since Levinas does not explicitly address this issue in “Useless Suffering,” any “answer” to this question that I pose is necessarily an appropriation that might be characterized as violent. Nevertheless, I can “temper” this violence by extracting my “answer” to this question from both “Useless Suffering” and another of Levinas’ essays that more explicitly theorizes on the artistic, representative function. In “Reality and Its Shadow,” Levinas writes that art (or more generally, representation):

does not know a particular type of reality; it contrasts with knowledge. It is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow... art does not belong to the order of revelation. Nor does it belong to that of creation, which moves in just the opposite direction. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 3)

Looking at these deceptively simple lines more closely, it becomes apparent that, for Levinas, art and reality do not exist in a relation of easy mimesis — art is not an imperfect copy of reality. But neither is art explicitly productive of reality (as if in some quasi-Baudrillardian simulacral moment). Rather, art arrests the viewer precisely because it refers to what is neither object nor agent, but to what is ineffably Other.²⁸ It aims to represent, to varying degrees, precisely what it cannot

represent, the enigma of the Other. It is thus not concerned with the *Da-sein* of what it represents but with enacting a movement towards that which is, to appropriate one of Levinas' most celebrated phrases, "otherwise than being."²⁹

This may rightly seem impossibly vague and technical. When Levinas on art is read alongside Levinas on suffering, however, it is my conviction that a relatively clear ethics of representation begins to emerge. I hesitantly phrase the 'formulation' of this ethics as follows (with full knowledge of the betrayal to Levinas inherent in such a heuristic device):

What a representation of suffering should do (in order to be ethical) is to remain conscious of the fact that the exact nature of its subject of suffering is partially unknowable to it. That is, it should not attempt to comprehend the *Da-sein* of the suffering of the sufferer, but should represent suffering in its uselessness and unknowability precisely so that others can attempt to move toward an understanding of it, opening it up to the domain of the inter-human. Thus, the representation of suffering should incite in the viewer or reader a desire to suffer for the Other's useless suffering. It should not somehow make suffering clear and meaningful in order to be appropriated as an object of self-knowledge.

from the ethical to the political — some problems

Despite my attempt at a clear and decidedly non-Levinasian prose, my formulation of the ethics of representing suffering should cause some concern — outside of my previous discussion of an impossible fidelity to Levinas — and may in fact need to be revised. If to be ethical is to realize that suffering is "in essence" unknowable and specific to each enigmatic agent of suffering, can the suffering of a people be ethically mobilized within representative artifacts that seek to incite positive political change? Are activist novels that use their status as representative texts to reduce characters to fully knowable political types unethical even if their intent is to improve the conditions of the suffering Other? Furthermore, if the nexus of human subjectivity is indeed each person's desire to suffer for the specific Other in proximity, how can one ever forge a collective and active awareness of the suffering that one group is subjected to because of the actions of another group (especially if we are to recognize that the suffering of the Other in large part escapes cognition)? Would activist novels be as effective if they left the suffering of their characters outside of the readers' cognitive capabilities, declaring, in some lofty movement of philosophical grandeur, that suffering is in actuality ineffable? More generally, how is the passage from the ethics of concerned representation to politics of action (which must entail some type of "edifying discourse") possible? Or, in the much more eloquent words of Levinas scholar Simon Critchley, how can one

build a bridge from ethics, understood as a responsible, non-totalizing relation with the Other, to politics, conceived of as a relation to...the plurality of beings that make up the community?³⁰

from the ethical to the political— some 'solutions'

Unfortunately, Levinas is once again frustratingly obscure in his manifold attempts to formulate a link between the ethical and the political, and this obscurity easily results in counter-productive misreadings. As Colin Davis suggests, there are points when Levinas, perhaps because of the opacity of his prose, seems to neglect or greatly diminish the political realm — a neglect which results in outcomes that are both highly non-intuitive and occasionally offensive. This critical charge of neglect results from a quite plausible reading of some passages from *Otherwise than Being* in which Levinas appears to insist that since the essential fact of my subjectivity is that I am defined in relation to the Other, I am, to quote Davis' discussion of these same passages, "bound to the Other and responsible for its deeds and misdeeds... and my responsibility extends even to acceptance of the violence which the Other may do to me."³¹ From this follows what Davis calls "the most shocking and controversial formulation in *Otherwise than Being*," that the "persecuted is liable to answer for the persecutor."³²

Yet, at the same time that he formulates these seemingly bizarre claims, Levinas maintains that it is not his view that the victims of suffering lie acquiescent out of some sense of responsibility toward their victimizers, but rather that this obligation exists in the ethical and not the political realm. In discussing this latter domain, Levinas turns to the idea of the neighbor, or as it is called in "The Ego and the Totality," the "third man."

In "The Ego and the Totality," the first of many essays that attempts to address the passage from ethics to politics, Levinas writes that it is the third man that "disturbs [the] intimacy" of the ethical relationship, which is solely between "me and you."³³ The third man stands outside the binary ethical relationship and can therefore criticize the people locked within it. He can declare my actions toward you to be evil whereas you are ethically required to maintain an infinite responsibility towards me (30). When I realize that I too am the third man for others locked in the ethical relationship I can begin to ask "Is the one...the persecutor of the other?"³⁴ If he is, it is my duty as third man to do what the persecuted cannot, declare that the persecutor is wrong and unjust. In an interview entitled "Philosophy, Justice, Love" Levinas is asked: "Does the executioner have a Face?"-a question that can be crudely reformulated as: 'Do you actually believe that the oppressed are responsible to their oppressors?'³⁵ To this interrogation Levinas 'responds' that "the executioner is one who threatens my neighbor and, in this sense, calls for violence and no longer has a face."³⁶ Thus, Levinas is not saying that I cannot criticize those who impose suffering. Rather, he is asserting that I can only criticize suffering on the grounds that it is unjustifiable for my fellow

man to suffer. To be as concrete as possible, for Levinas it seems that any particular Jew in the concentration camp should ethically criticize the Nazis on the grounds that they were persecuting all of his fellow inmates, but it remains to be seen whether it would be in fact ethical for the same Jew to condemn the Nazis on the grounds that they were persecuting him.

Given what has followed, it seems that Levinas envisions the political realm, the domain of the third man, as a community *in-difference* rather than as an indifferent community. That is, for Levinas, politics should escape what Critchley calls "the synoptic, panoramic vision of society,"³⁷ and instead recognize that while each Other may be ineffably different, it is I who am ultimately responsible for ensuring that each member of my society is not persecuted by another Other.

But how would such a society work? And how would it look different from our best intentions for a liberal democratic polity in which each citizen bears the responsibility for the well-being of his fellow men while also respecting his ineffability (what in our society is usually termed "cultural difference")? Is Levinas' ethical politics just simple utopianism made falsely meaningful (or radical) by his almost impenetrable style of mystical prose?

It is my view that while using Levinas to create an entirely different total picture of society is indeed a utopian and mainly a liberal endeavor, his insights can be used in quite a new and radical way to formulate an ethics of representation that does not elide the possibility for representation to incite political change, but instead lies commendably between both the binary ethical realm and the totalizing life-world of the political. This formulation can be achieved by

viewing ethics not as an end in itself, an unattainable goal to be moved toward, but as an "ethics that leads back to politics."³⁸

Simply put, if Levinas is used to produce such an interruptive ethics, one that demands that we continually interrogate the political on the basis of the ethical, we arrive at the idea that what is truly ethical is to formulate (and interrogate) the political in terms of the ethical — society and justice around a respect for an ineffable Other.³⁹ That is, one's decision to represent the suffering of a people for political purposes can be ethical only if one is willing to allow such a formulation to be disturbed and made problematic by each individual person within the political collective. Thus, from Levinas I can then arrive at the following formulation of the ethics of representing suffering that both takes into account my earlier attempt and questions it on the basis of its possibilities for a political pragmatism: One must represent suffering not in order to allow the audience of the representation to feel as if they can fully comprehend suffering as a totalized or justifiable social fact, but in order to incite in them the desire to suffer for the Other (first formulation). Furthermore, this incitement can be generalized and used for political purposes when it avoids at all costs presenting itself as some knowledgeable total truth, but allows itself, by its very formalistic devices, to be contested by its ethical relationship toward every suffering Other who is within proximity to the political. A more rhetorically forceful formulation of this same sentiment is expressed by Levinas himself in a preface to his last collection of essays. He writes that man, "when treated exclusively as an object... is... mistreated and misconstrued." That is, the subject of man is dehumanized when reduced to an object of political discourse. It is obvious that one

cannot totally abandon this political mode of discourse in favor of some abstract humanist ethics. As such, Levinas does not see his task as that of "putting knowledge in doubt...[for] the human being clearly allows himself to be treated as an object."⁴⁰ Then, given man's need for the political, the ethical task is to formulate such a political narrative while always "already awake to the uniqueness of the I... in responsibility for the other person... bearing love in which the other, the loved one, is to the I unique in the world."⁴¹

However and once again, in order to be responsible to Levinas I must mention that for a strict Levinassian the formulation that I have just made is antithetical to the real radicalism of Levinas' philosophy as it turns ethics into a mere norm, a hard and fast rule by which one can be ethical. One might then ask (and quite logically), why use Levinas if the very nature of his thought requires that we continually misread him? To this critic my answer is two-fold. I first reply with the deconstructive dictum that a text's meaning is constituted by the possibility of misreadings. Thus, the potential for a sovereign, choice-bound ethics is both present and suppressed in Levinas' agent-less use of the term.⁴² Second, and without appeal to the fervent critical debates about meaning and agency, I also maintain that Levinas remains important in that it seems to be mainly by way of an interrogation that moves *within* his work (rather than one which celebrates, ignores, or rejects it) that we can begin to balance these complex questions of voice, ethics, and representation that surround the issue of suffering.

the unfinished project of the ethical & the limits of philosophy

— some concluding notes

Despite my continual misreading of Levinas, one conviction that I firmly share with the philosopher is the notion that the ethical task can never be fully reached. Like the referential trace by which words in a signifying system gain meaning, the ethical is always deferred, unfinished, in need of constant and specific interrogation and reformulation -the ethical is "not a cognition but an approach."⁴³ Given then that the ethical project must be continually revised by the encounter with the Other, I have sought to continually reconfigure and restate my formulation of the ethics entailed in representing suffering. There is, however quite a difficulty within my formulation(s) that I will merely mention, and leave to much more astute minds to remedy.

The problem falls within the bounds of the intuitive rather than of the technical. Therefore, it can be phrased without the aid of Levinas:

what exactly should be included/excluded as "representation"? If suffering has a certain ineffability at its core, then to simply speak of the suffering of the neighbor entails an approximation, a re-presentation in speech that falls short of mimesis. Should the ethics that I have formulated apply to these speech acts of recognition as well as to the more traditionally accepted forms of representation: the novel, painting, or other aesthetic forms? If we decide that every speech act that recognizes the suffering of the Other should disrupt its own status as absorptive discourse in order to be ethical, do we then need to declare that in certain situations ethics must be subsumed under practical political concerns? (I fail to see how such continually problematized speech could carry any incendiary force in inciting political change.) Are we falling prey to an impossible elitism if we declare that this ethics should in fact apply only to traditionally accepted notions of representation? This opinion seems

to grant such privilege to those that have the right or power to narrate, to produce and mobilize representative forms, that it implies that only these gifted or powerful people are permitted to be truly ethical.⁴⁴ Furthermore, is there in my discussion of ethics a dichotomy between political speech and the artistic form that is in dire need of deconstruction?

In the end, however, I worry that my formulation of the ethics of representation and the aporias it produces are nothing but an effect of a play of language — a play in blind indifference to the suffering, that is going on, has gone on, and will continue to go on. Thus it is with a certain hesitance that one should use the ethics arrived at in this paper to adjudicate the respective ethicalities of "representations," whatever the sense in which one uses this term.

Indeed, I see it as more important and productive to ask the question of what is ethical than to arrive at any essentialist answer.⁴⁵ Given then the obvious gap between any philosophical discourse on suffering, no matter how careful, and the actuality of suffering itself, it is only appropriate that the last words should belong to Emmanuel Levinas, who asks, "Too beautiful to be true, does language not also become too horrible to reflect reality?"⁴⁶ — an astute and humble reflection on the profound limitations of philosophy, from one of its most gifted practitioners.



1. Emmanuel
Levinas,
*Collected Philosophical
Papers*, trans. Alphonso
Lings (Pittsburgh,
Duquesne University Press,
1998) 116f. It should be noted

that throughout this paper I will attempt to focus on the 'minor' texts of Levinas, meaning both his shorter essays and the marginal footnotes contained in the more widely read pieces. Implicit in this tactic is a desire to focus on, as Arundhati Roy might put it, the smallness of things. In other words, I wish to call into question the assumption that 'minor' works merely re-codify and re-state the themes and issues of their 'major' counterparts.

2. Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 94.

3. Of the "implicit address," see for example the section of "Meaning and Sense" in which Levinas writes:

"In other words, expression, before being a celebration of being, is a relationship with him to whom I express the expression, and whose presence is already required for my cultural gesture of expression to be produced" (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 95).

4. David Morris, "Voice, Genre, and Moral Community" and Veena Das, "Transactions in the Construction of Pain" both collected in *Social Suffering*, eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 27, 88.

5. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New York: Random House, 1997) 120.

6. I understand *pastiche* as the permanent avoidance or deferral of the ethical that often masquerades as a subtle application of *differance*.

7. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 21)

8. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 73)

9. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford: Blackwell

Publishers, 1992) 223. A similar view from Dipesh Chakrabarty was put forth on 3 June 1999 in a discussion in a graduate and undergraduate seminar entitled "Subalternity, Suffering, and Survival" conducted at University of Chicago.

10. The citation is, of course, from Foucault. See Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 102.

11. (*Entre-Nous*, 91)

12. (*Entre-Nous*, 91)

13. A comprehension which, if we accept the Lacanian moment of the mirror, inevitability also entails its representation, but the relation between comprehension and representation is another question for another time.

14. (*Entre-Nous*, 91) A psychoanalyst would call this the domain of the unconscious, but Levinas refrains from making this move, probably as locating something in the unconscious can seriously limit its pertinence to the domain of the social.

15. (*Entre-Nous*, 92)

16. (*Entre-Nous*, 92)

17. (*Entre-Nous*, 92)

18. (*Entre-Nous*, 92) The question still stands as to what extent it can remain unthematizable after Levinas has made what Colin Davis characterizes as "a theme of the unthematizable." See Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996) 69. To avoid confusion, Davis' text will hereinafter be cited as Davis rather than as Levinas.

19. An example of 'paralyzed' consciousness that is in fact 'healthy' might be the ego-death of the orgasm (what Lacan calls *le petit mort*, the small death).

20. (*Entre-Nous*, 93)

21. This of course does not mean that one should not attempt to alleviate the suffering caused by the political or patriarchal *milieu*, as we shall soon see.

22. (*Entre-Nous*, 95)

23. (*Entre-Nous*, 95) It might be helpful here to remark that what Levinas considers to be modern theodicy's celebration of the social uses of suffering is similar to

what Foucault characterizes as one of the more obscured aspects of post-Enlightenment bio-politics. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 133-159.

24. (*Entre-Nous*, 95)

25. (*Entre-Nous*, 96)

26. See "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in which Levinas writes:

"The well-known theses of... the preeminence of Being over beings, of ontology over metaphysics — end up affirming a tradition in which the same dominates the other" (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 53).

27. (*Entre-Nous*, 99)

28. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 1)

29. "*Da-sein*" is a term of renowned untranslatability. In Levinas' work, it has a sense akin to "being-ness" or "being-there."

30. (*Ethics of Deconstruction*, 220)

31. (Davis, 80)

32. (Davis, 81)

33. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 30)

34. (*Entre-Nous*, 104)

35. I write "crude" because in the interests of space I have left out Levinas' sophisticated discussion of the face.

36. (*Entre-Nous*, 105)

37. (*The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 222)

38. (*The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 222)

39. Again, this insight is from Chakrabarty 3 June 1999.

40. Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993) 3.

41. Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993) 3.

I leave it to a study specific to an actual work of representation to delve more fully into how this double-movement — between society and individual, justice and ethics — may be realized, or whether it might be yet another lofty and removed philosophical ideal. While this ethics may not in fact currently exist, or be capable of existing in the current nihilistic milieu, it is an important preliminary step to recognize this ethics as a laudable goal, as a possible criteria by which works of representation should be (ethically) judged.

42. One might also add that, as literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, the main strength of deconstructive criticism is that it seeks to engage in "a reading that produces rather than protects." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Introduction," J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997) lxxv.

43. (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 73)

44. I borrow the notion of 'a right to narrate' from a recent talk given by Homi Bhabha on cultural/artistic hybridity in the era of globalization. For Bhabha, 'the right to narrate,' i.e. the ability to 'legitimately' speak for the interests of any particular group (including one's own), depends upon the structures of power, often hegemonic, that operate within the larger societal framework. Thus those currently holding the 'right to narrate' often do not (or cannot) address the concerns of those outside of the global-capital *milieu*, and therefore occupy a highly elitist position. Homi Bhabha, "In What Sense is Culture in the National Interest?: Response to Robert Hughes," Art Institute, Chicago, 21 October 1999.

45. Including my own quasi-anti-essentialist essentialism.

46. (*Outside the Subject*, 140)