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EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

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RÉSUMÉ : *Cet article porte sur Enrique Dussel, sur son évolution dans l'élaboration d'une philosophie éthique de la libération. Depuis sa thèse de doctorat sur le bien commun d'après Charles De Koninck et Jacques Maritain, jusqu'à son dernier ouvrage sur l'architectonique d'une éthique de la libération, il a discuté et intégré à sa propre pensée des éléments de Marx, de Heidegger et de Apel. Mais l'influence principale a été celle d'Emmanuel Lévinas, qui se situe à la racine même de la pensée de Dussel, en tant qu'interpellation de l'Autre exclu.*

ABSTRACT : *This article deals with Enrique Dussel's evolution in the way of an ethical philosophy of liberation. From his doctoral dissertation on the Common Good according to Charles De Koninck and Jacques Maritain, to his last book on the Arquitectónica de una Ética de la Liberación, he has discussed and integrated into his thought elements of Marx, Heidegger and Apel. But the main influence has been Emmanuel Levinas, who stands at the root of Dussel's thought insofar as it calls upon the excluded Other.*

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas has played and still plays a central role in the philosophical movement known as the philosophy of liberation. In this brief paper, I hope to show how Levinas has influenced Enrique Dussel, the major proponent of this philosophy, to indicate the limits of Levinasian approach, and to suggest future directions that the philosophy of liberation, still following a Levinasian inspiration, might take.

Dussel's path to the founding of the philosophy of liberation passed through his traditional undergraduate work at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo and in 1959 his doctorate in Madrid with a dissertation on "The Concept of the Common Good in Charles De Koninck and Maritain" — and it should be noted that De Koninck was the founder of *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*. Dussel then went on to complete three works in the area of philosophical anthropology : *El Humanismo Semita* (1969), *El Humanismo Helénico* (completed in 1963, published in 1975), and a synthesis of these preceding works, *El Dualismo en la Antropología de la Cristiandad* (finished in 1968 and published in 1974). While this interest in philosophical anthropology and a concomitant desire to construct an ethics would lead Dussel to Martin Heidegger and his notion of *Dasein*, these early writings also display a preoccupation with ethics and

an inclination toward the Semitic heritage over the Greek that would draw him eventually toward Levinas.¹

In 1970 Dussel published *Para una Destrucción de la Historia de la Ética*, a book which sought to recover the “voice of Being” calling humanity from out of the encrustation of tradition and into its own “authentic possibilities.” As Dussel developed this Heideggerian perspective into a contemporary version of natural law, he grew particularly critical of modern philosophy and its reliance on the notion of an isolated, disembodied, rationalistic subject, whose manifestation in Cortés’s *yo conquistado* would find its philosophical echo in Descartes’s *ego cogito* and ultimately in Nietzsche’s arbitrary will to power. Dussel, however, experienced dissatisfaction with this Heideggerian ethics since it in fact only spelled out via a process of clarification the existential conditions of the possibility of a normative ethics and thus fell short of the more critical normativity produced by a metaphysical ethics in Levinas’s sense. As Dussel himself expressed it, “the normativity of ontology is making it clearly evident (*clarividencia*), whereas the normativity of alterative or metaphysical ethics is much more.”²

It is particularly in Dussel’s five volume *Para una Ética de la Liberación Latinoamericana*, published over the period 1973-1980, that one can see clearly the transition from Heidegger to Levinas. Dussel repeatedly comments on the structure of the first six chapters of the first two volumes, which treat the topic of ethical foundations. The first chapter provides an ontological fundament (the relation between *Dasein* and Being) and the second depicts the ontic possibilities (possibilities, choice, praxis) flowing from that fundament. Dussel acknowledges that he wrote this section in 1970 while he was still under the sway of Heidegger. In his third chapter, he introduces a new metaphysical foundation, the face of the Other, traces its implications through chapters four and five, and credits Levinas with influencing this new stage of his thought. In his final sixth chapter, Dussel explains the organization of the first two volumes and his own methodological priorities by affirming that while the ontological description may come first in the order of presentation, ethics is really first philosophy.³

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1. Enrique DUSSEL, “Liberación Latinoamericana y Filosofía,” in *Praxis Latinoamericana y Filosofía de la Liberación*, Bogotá, Editorial Nueva America, 1983, p. 9-12 ; Eduardo MENDIETA, “Editor’s Introduction” to Enrique DUSSEL, *The Underside of Modernity : Apel, Ricœur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, translated and edited by Eduardo Mendieta, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1996, p. xv ; Enrique DUSSEL, *El Dualismo en la Antropología de la Cristiandad, Desde el Origen del Cristianismo hasta antes de la Conquista de América*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Guadalupe, 1974, p. 11, 26, 93, 104, 282-283, 287 ; Enrique DUSSEL, *El Humanismo Semita, Estructuras Intencionales Radicales del Pueblo de Israel y Otros Semitas*, Buenos Aires, EUDEBA, 1969, p. 41-42, 45, 100, 110-111, 117-188, 120, 163 ; Enrique DUSSEL, *El Humanismo Helénico*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1975, p. XVIII, XIX, XXIV, 3, 17-18, 32.
 2. Enrique DUSSEL, *Para una De-Strucción de la Historia de la Ética in Ser y Tiempo*, edited by the Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Argentina, Santa Fe, 1970, p. 164, 168, 191, 195-196, 199, 223, 224 ; Enrique DUSSEL, *Para una Ética de la Liberación Latinoamericana*, vol. 2, *Eticidad y Moralidad*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI Argentina Editores S.A., 1973, p. 14-15, 19-20, 179, 184, 190-192.
 3. *Para una Ética de la Liberación Latinoamericana*, 2, p. 129, 145, 162-163, 187.

In moving from Heidegger to Levinas, in recognizing that ethics are not founded in ontology, Dussel seems, on the one hand, to have joined the mainstream of modern ethics, wary as it is of committing the naturalistic fallacy. On the other hand, Levinasian alterity actually gives Dussel a framework for continuing his critique of modernity and its paradigm of the isolated, dominating subject. Furthermore, the ethical character of Levinas's and Dussel's critique of modernity sets it off from other criticisms of modernity, such versions of postmodernism which often adopt an approach that is aesthetic and a- or even anti-ethical at times.

Furthermore, the significance of this shift pervades Dussel's entire thought-structure as can be seen in his collection of essays in *América Latina : Dependencia y Liberación*. The book is divided into four parts : two sets of philosophical anthropological reflections, one ontological and one beyond the ontological, and two sets of theological reflections, one based on a universalist theology and the other directed toward a theology of liberation. An example of Dussel's Levinasian transformation can be seen in his theological essays. In the first section, based on a universalist theology, Dussel seems concerned about helping the institutional Catholic church survive paganization, secularization, and social change and expand its influence in the face of these movements. He urges the church to support social change and to integrate itself with society without fearing secularization. This concern for the institutional preservation of the church all but disappears in the second theological section in which Dussel urges atheism against the European God. In addition, Dussel speculates what it would have been like if the sixteenth century European colonizers in Latin America would have understood the indigenous people from their own world (*desde su mundo*) instead of violently imposing Western capitalism and Christianity upon them. The question here becomes not one of self-expansion but one of ruthless self-critique before the face of the Other. Dussel's own philosophical transformation from ontology to ethics suggests that he gradually became a philosopher who, as Levinas might describe it, came to fear murder [of the Other] more than death [of myself].⁴

At this moment, when Dussel was engaged in integrating Levinas's thought into his own, the movement known as the "philosophy of liberation" actually commenced. Dussel himself pinpoints its origin with the publication of the *Revista de Filosofía Latinoamericana* in Buenos Aires in 1973. He recalls that the following were members of the first generation : Scannone, Ardiles, Fornari, Casalla, Parisi, Guillot, De Zan, Kienen, Cerutti, and Roig. Although some of these philosophers have distanced themselves from the philosophy of liberation or even dispute their ever being classified as part of it in the first place, virtually everyone recognizes that Dussel himself is its main protagonist.⁵

4. Enrique DUSSEL, *América Latina. Dependencia Liberación*, Buenos Aires, Fernando Garcia Cambeiro, 1973, p. 171-172, 200-202 ; Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity : An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, Boston, London, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979, p. 246.

5. Enrique DUSSEL, "La Filosofía de la Liberación en Argentina ; Irrupción de una Nueva Generación Filosófica", in *Praxis Latinoamericana y Filosofía de la Liberación*, p. 56 ; Horatio Cerutti GOLDBERG, *Filosofía de la Liberación Latinoamericana*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983, p. 31-37.

In this entire discussion of Levinas's influence, it is important to observe that Dussel appropriates Levinas's thought critically. He differs from Levinas in that he rethinks the Other in terms of the Indian, African, and Asian and refrains from understanding the Other as "absolutely other" since that tends toward "equivocity" in relationships. In his own voice and not Levinas's, Dussel sketches out an "analectical" method in contrast to a "dialectical" one in which the Other and the Same are subsumed within a single totality. In relating to the Other beyond one's totality, there is a need for trust in the analogical (neither equivocal nor univocal) word of the Other at the initial moment of the encounter, at a point where one might not be able to evaluate the soundness of the reasons of the Other. In an effort to avoid any univocal obliteration of the Other, of whose embodiment in a socio-historical "world" different from one's own Dussel had learned well from Heidegger, one must commit oneself to a "pedagogic apprenticeship" to be taught by the Other. Such initial trust, however, does not preclude one from eventually disagreeing with the Other — and such disagreements can be more for the Other's good than mere compliance with the Other's viewpoint.⁶

Dussel's philosophy of liberation has progressed by taking this ethical responsibility for the Other, which the Other first evokes, as a hermeneutical starting point from which to interpret various other domains, such as history, religion, and the economy. For instance, Dussel's lectures in Frankfurt on the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's "discovery" of "America" provide a model of an "ethical hermeneutics" in history. These lectures begin with the "invention" of the Americas by the European explorers who had little regard for how the indigenous peoples interpreted or named their environs and end with the conquest imposed by the Spaniards and justified as part of a process of modernizing and rationalizing "primitive" indigenous societies. Dussel locates the origins of modernity in this encounter between Spain and the New World that reveals the violent underside of modernity rather than in the usual more Europe-flattering events of the Renaissance or Reformation. In addition, theology can be interpreted through the prism of an ethical hermeneutics, as Dussel exhibits in a critique of a document that was drawn up in preparation for the conference of bishops at Puebla with Pope John Paul II in 1978. From Dussel's viewpoint the document spiritualizes the concept of poverty away by so widening its meaning that the economic poverty of the masses who lack sufficient food and other necessities is lost from sight.⁷

One of the most important areas in which Dussel's appropriation of Levinas becomes clear is in his reading of Karl Marx, whom Dussel interprets as doing an ethical hermeneutics of capitalism, that is, understanding the capitalist system from the viewpoint of its Other. In a study of all Marx's works and manuscripts that took

6. *América Latina : Dependencia y Liberación*, p. 112-116, 119-122 ; *Para una Ética de la Liberación Latinoamericana*, 2, p. 160-164, 168-171 ; *Método para una Filosofía de la Liberación, Superación Analéctica de la Dialéctica Hegeliana*, 2nd ed., Salamanca, Sigüeme, 1974, p. 185-188, 192-195.

7. Enrique DUSSEL, *The Invention of the Americas, Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, translated by Michael D. Barber, New York, Continuum, 1995, p. 25, 27-36, 91-117 ; "Sobre el 'Documento de Consulta' pare Puebla," in *Puebla '78 : Temores y Esperanzas*, México, CRT, 1978, p. 82-84, 96-97.

eleven years and issued in a trilogy of books, Dussel attempts to recover Marx's implicit philosophy. Dussel focuses on the notion of "living labor," that is, the flesh and blood of workers before they are subsumed within the capitalist system, before they sell their capacity to labor to the capitalist owner in the marketplace. This living labor, exterior to the system, is nothing, of no value, and is cast off into the industrial reserve army when it is no longer of use to the owner. Paradoxically, this non-objectivated labor, which is of no value, becomes the source of all value when incorporated into the capitalist system, in the same way that Schelling attributes truly creative power to the Absolute Creator who is nothing, non-being, in the exteriority of the Hegelian system of Being. It is from the perspective of this living labor that Marx reconstructs the categories of the capitalist system, e.g., seeing in surplus value a robbery of the unpaid labor of the worker who produces the value from which the capitalist lives. While traditionally Marx has been read through Hegelian lens as describing the systematic unfolding of capital through its many manifestations, just as Hegel's Logic presented the unfolding of Being through its various stages, Dussel sees Marx as describing the capitalist system in Hegelian terms but on behalf of that system's Other, the poor, the forgotten laborer, the discarded lumpenproletariat. Had this Dusselian Marx existed earlier and been taken seriously, had an emphasis been placed on the Other of the system rather than the development of the system itself, Soviet Marxism might never have established a non-democratic regime without regard for its dissenting and rebelling Others, nor justified such a regime by appealing to the iron necessity of the laws of history. In addition, there are theological implications yet to be mined from the striking parallels Dussel draws between God creative in God's non-being and impoverished laborers productive of value in their nothingness.⁸

From these extensions of his Levinas-influenced position, Dussel has proceeded to engage various European and North American philosophers. An important work in this regard is Dussel's *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricœur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, edited by Eduardo Mendieta. In that book, Dussel situates his own work midway between Richard Rorty's scepticism and Karl-Otto Apel's universalism. Dussel also argues that Rorty's critique of philosophical reason and his attack on Marx effectively support the economic status quo and leave "the poor without words" — although one ought to say that he leaves them without *philosophical* words since Rorty does believe that literature or art can foster solidarity. Likewise, Dussel opposes what he takes to be Charles Taylor's Eurocentric understanding of modernity and, drawing Apel into the discussion, claims that his own philosophy of liberation succumbs neither to Apel's formalism nor to Taylor's version of *Sitt-*

8. Enrique DUSSEL, *La Producción Teórica de Marx, Un Comentario a los Grundrisse*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1985, p. 16, 138-139, 336-343, 347, 361-364 ; *El Último Marx (1863-1882) y la Liberación Latinoamericana*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1990, p. 68, 77, 138, 143, 147-148, 333, 336, 340, 342-344, 348-349, 351, 353, 356-359, 360-362, 366, 373, 377, 381, 401, 430 ; *Hacia un Marx Desconocido, Un Comentario de los Manuscritos del 61-63*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1988, p. 87, 113, 160, 194. Dussel even presents evidence to show that the scientific prognosis of history was never Marx's own, as can be seen in Marx's belief that Russia would not have to pass through the stages of capitalism to reach socialism, see *El Último Marx*, p. 255-261.

lichkeit, whose norms the Other also places in question. Further, Dussel counters Paul Ricœur's objection that there are diverse experiences of liberation by noting that such experiences, although diverse, are often globally interrelated. While he agrees with Ricœur that the ethical demands of alterity constrain the politics one might employ to remedy economic injustices, he also questions whether Ricœur falls into a kind of "politicism" that subordinates economics to politics in the way that Marxist economism has subordinated politics to economic change.⁹

By far Dussel's greatest attention has been focused on an engagement with those often associated with the second phase of the so-called "Frankfurt School": Jürgen Habermas and, in particular, Karl-Otto Apel, with whom Dussel has met in regular philosophical conferences in what has come to be known as "The North-South Dialogue." This philosophical exchange has proceeded on basically two levels: 1) the relationship between a phenomenology of alterity and Apel's transcendental pragmatics and 2) the appropriation of Marx.

While Dussel has come to embrace the formal level of discourse ethics, he has insisted that discourse itself arises out of richer context that includes the interpellation of the excluded Other, who constantly puts discursively achieved consensus to the test. Indeed, Levinas too envisions the ethical relationship with the Other as lying at the root of the philosophy's discursive procedures and of institutions such as the state, economics, and politics — all of which are ushered in through the supervention of the Third upon the face-to-face dyad. All of these forms, while emerging with ethical necessity from the face-to-face and continually correcting its asymmetry, are also in danger insofar as they "are at every moment on the point of having their center of gravitation in themselves, and weighing on their own account."¹⁰

As regards Marx, Dussel concurs with Apel on the impossibility of eliminating *all* the institutionally created alienating dimensions of human communal living, and hence Dussel conceives Marx's "perfect community of producers" as a regulative ideal, impossible to accomplish at an empirical level. Furthermore, Dussel grants that the theory of dependence that claims that the so-called First World progresses at the

9. Enrique DUSSEL, *The Underside of Modernity. Apel, Ricœur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, translated and edited by Eduardo Mendieta, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1996, p. 103-159, 213-239.

10. Enrique DUSSEL, "The Reason of the Other: 'Interpellation' as Speech Act," in *The Underside of Modernity*, p. 19-48; Karl-Otto APEL, "Discourse Ethics Before the Challenge of Liberation Philosophy," in *The Underside of Modernity*, p. 163-204; see Michael D. BARBER, "Method and the Third: Bridges between the Philosophy of Liberation and Transcendental Pragmatics," in *Die Diskursethik und ihre lateinamerikanische Kritik*, edited by Raul Fomet-Betancourt, Aachen, Augustinus, 1993, p. 37-47; Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, The Hague, Boston, London, Martinus Nijhoff, 1981, p. 158-161. Levinas's recognition of the importance of the level of the Third, institutions, etc., as well as the impulse to institutionalization of structures of discourse from the Frankfurt School, counterbalance any mistaken concentration on the individual that might be a by-product of Levinas's emphasis on the face-to-face dyad. In a similar way Charles De Koninck sought to highlight the primacy of the common good against the personalists without, however, falling into totalitarianism that converts the state into a mega-person. See Charles DE KONINCK, *De la primauté du bien commun contre les personnalistes. Le principe de l'ordre nouveau*, Québec, Éditions de l'Université Laval and Montréal, Éditions Fides, 1943, p. 1-4, 7-35, 73-79.

expense of the so-called Third World is oversimplified, but he insists that the misery of the periphery is intimately linked to a world socio-economic system — a fact with which Apel and Ricœur are in accord. Against Apel, Dussel argues further that Marx did take account of supply and demand at the level of consumption and circulation which presupposes those processes of production that are themselves founded in that moment in which living-labor sells its capacity to work to the employer. Moreover, Apel's criticisms that Marx's labor theory of value depends upon an outdated subject-object epistemology and that Marx was convinced of the rigid laws of history that hold all theorists except socialists in their thrall would not be applicable to Dussel's Levinasian rehabilitation of Marx, as seen above.¹¹

At the present moment, Dussel is still pursuing his exchange with Apel and Habermas in a new book soon to be released and entitled *Arquitectónica de una Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y la Exclusión*. In this work, Dussel attempts to bring discourse ethics to its own fulfillment by reaching a "concrete, empirical, procedural, intersubjective validity without falling however into a pure formalism or empty proceduralism." In other words, Dussel is seeking to lay the concerns of Marx at the foundation of a discourse ethics that ought to serve just such concerns. In Dussel's view, one ought to understand discourse as arising out of a setting in which one's and one's community's material survival is at stake instead of looking upon the material domain as a locus where one might seek to apply discourse ethics. This new book by no means abandons Levinas, though, since it concentrates on the material needs of the poor that are of central importance to Levinas also and since it asserts that every critique and alternative project ought to be the consequence of a critical discursive consensus in which the victims of oppression symmetrically participate.¹²

The entire exchange between Dussel/Levinas and the Frankfurt School, worked out within Dussel's own thought, highlights precisely the strengths and the limits of Levinas's philosophy. Levinas presents a phenomenology of alterity — to be sure, a phenomenology that upsets phenomenology's own epistemological machinery (e.g. intentionality) since this machinery is not well-suited to an "object" that is the Other. While this Other, given in the face-to-face and described in phenomenology, subtends all discourse, "obliges the entering to discourse, the commencement of discourse rationalism prays for," and suffuses all discourse with an ethical dimension, it is located on a different plane than the contents that are discussed within a discourse. The phenomenology of alterity thematizes the relationship of *saying* that underpins whatever is *said*, that is, the contents and arguments of a discourse, and is therefore horizontal

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11. Enrique DUSSEL, "World System, Politics, and the Economics of Liberation Philosophy," in *The Under-side of Modernity*, p. 213-239.
 12. Enrique DUSSEL, *Arquitectónica de una Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización la Exclusión*, México, unpublished manuscript, 1997, p. 54, 100, 102-103, 148-149, 184, 266, 322, 340, 384. For a condensed English version of Dussel's new approach, see Enrique DUSSEL, "The Architectonic of the Ethics of Liberation : On Material Ethics and Formal Moralities," in *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas*, edited by David Batstone, Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Dwight N. Hopkins, London & New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 73-301.

to whatever is said. Thus, the phenomenology of alterity concentrates on the relationship on the horizon of the process of justification in which arguments are advanced, proofs or refutations offered, and validity or invalidity shown. However, insofar as the phenomenology of alterity itself offers descriptions that are intended to convince readers of their validity, it itself must make use of discourse and resort to justification, as Derrida pointed out to in his critique of Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics." Still, the saying relationship that the phenomenology of alterity discloses lurks inexhaustibly on the horizon of every discourse, including the discourse that makes that relationship a theme or the discourse that reflects at a meta-level on that discourse — since *any discursive thematization involves a saying relationship insofar as it is always directed to an interlocutor*. As Levinas himself recognized when he developed the plane of the Third and stressed its importance, one cannot look to the phenomenology of alterity for justifications and yet justifications can enclose upon themselves and desiccate unless exposed to the Other's continual plea for recognition.¹³

As a result, a transcendental pragmatics such as Apel's that reflects on the structure of discourse, including the ethical dimensions that anyone who seriously argues must already presuppose, even one who rejects the idea of such a structure and presents arguments against it, stands as a complementary counterpole to a phenomenology of alterity. Anyone who seriously argues has already paid heed to the ethical call of the Other summoning to the discourse in the first place ; one hears the command in one's response, as Levinas puts it. In a sense, Dussel and Levinas start with the ethical impulse that leads one to embark upon a discourse and Apel begins to show what discourses unreflectively presuppose after they have already been functioning.¹⁴

If theory and processes of justification find their origin in an encompassing ethical relationship with the Other, whether with the interlocutor or with the one who lies beyond one's totality (and the interlocutor always lies beyond one's totality in some way), then the way lies open for a pluralism of liberation discourses and methods that might be taken up in response to the Other. Levinas himself suggests the possibility, for instance, of a writing of history different from the usual historiography that "recounts the way the survivors appropriate the words of dead wills to themselves ; it rests on the usurpation carried out by the conquerors, that is, by the survivors ; it recounts enslavement, forgetting the life that struggles against slavery." One can imagine new kinds of history, new kinds of literature, new kinds of philosophy, new kinds of theology that might seek to recover voices lost in the past or unheeded in the present or to rectify present or past injustices — that could all be characterized under the rubric of liberation. Of course, such new liberation endeavors, undertaken as an ethical response to the excluded Other, cannot dispense with standards of truth or validity, themselves revisable in the light of evidence, and hence cannot lay claim to va-

13. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 201 ; Jacques DERRIDA, "Violence and Metaphysics : An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 79-153.

14. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 148, 150.

lidity just because they are undertaken on behalf of victims of injustice. After all these endeavors are addressed to interlocutors who themselves are ethically deserving of being convinced with evidence rather than compelled with force.¹⁵

15. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 228.