

# LÉVINAS ON JUSTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE\*

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## ABSTRACT

This article deals with the concept of violence as developed by Lévinas. On the one hand, I deal with violence understood as the encounter with the other, mainly as the basis for an economy of violence. On the other hand, I examine the relationship of three dynamics of violence: a) a third party's violence; b) my own violence, i.e. Lévinas' violence; c) violence by the State as a reaction to the first kind of violence. Once that relationship is explicated, I will try to explore "violence against violence", by echoing Lévinas' well-known hesitation about a "right to violence". I will finally tackle what has been called "the aftertaste of violence", "cet arrière-goût de violence". In order to analyze this reminder of violence as much as to include the question of third-parties in Lévinas, I will deal with questions that spread out of phenomenology through a loyal and resistant reading of Husserl.

**KEY WORDS:** Emmanuel Lévinas, Dynamics of Violence, Other, State, Phenomenology.

## LÉVINAS SOBRE LA JUSTIFICACIÓN DE LA VIOLENCIA

El presente ensayo aborda la noción de violencia desarrollada por Lévinas. Por un lado, aborda la violencia en el encuentro con el otro *y*, principalmente, como fundamento de una economía de la violencia. Por otro lado, analiza la relación entre tres dinámicas de la violencia: primero, la violencia del tercero; segundo, mi propia violencia, o la violencia de Lévinas; *y*, tercero, la violencia que ejerce el Estado como respuesta a la primera. Planteado lo anterior, el ensayo interrogará la "violencia contra la violencia", haciendo eco de la célebre duda (*hesitation*) de Lévinas sobre el "derecho a la violencia".

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Finalmente, el ensayo reflexiona sobre el gusto de violencia que permanece en la boca, “cet arrière-goût de violence”. Para analizar este resto de sabor a violencia e introducir la cuestión del tercero en Lévinas, el texto abordará preguntas que tienen origen en la fenomenología, en una lectura de fidelidad y de resistencia de Husserl.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Emmanuel Lévinas, dinámicas de la violencia, Otro, Estado, fenomenología.

I will attempt, in English and with frequent citations of Lévinas in French, to explain the connection between violence (someone’s violence) and my own or Lévinas’s or the State’s violence as a response to the initial violence (Violence against Violence) and, finally, the violence which remains in the mouth, throat, aftertaste [goût] or in disgust [dégout]: “cet arrière-goût de violence”<sup>1</sup>, or “un quelconque arrière-goût de dégout” [“a kind of aftertaste of disgust”]<sup>2</sup>.

Before I go on and cite Lévinas’s fragments, and before I begin thinking about the third (third party [tiers]), about politics and the State in Lévinas, about the institution, about the legitimacy of violence, “necessary violence”, or about “ethical necessity” (these are all Lévinas’s terms, which he uses quite infrequently), I must insist on several difficulties. There are three of them, they are all Lévinas’s and all three call into question any hospitality and openness towards the other, towards the other’s violence or towards violence of the *prochain*. All these three difficulties (or Lévinas’s dilemmas) have their beginning in phenomenology, in Lévinas’s simultaneous devotion and resistance to Husserl.

The first difficulty is with the definition of violence. It seems to me that Lévinas’s first explanation of what violence is does not allow the possibility to determine the extreme violence or destructive violence<sup>3</sup>. Conversely, Lévinas gives the illusion that the other’s advantage is infinite,

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1 Emmanuel Lévinas, “Textes messianiques”, in *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), 109.

2 Emmanuel Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1982), 66; Emmanuel Lévinas, *Of God who comes to Mind* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 193.

3 The term the “absolute other” (in 1957, Lévinas says that this term belongs to Jankelevich; but it is also Hegel’s term) never has a negative connotation; when, in certain places, Lévinas uses the word “enemy” or “hostility”, he is solely attempting to find a figure which is the absolute other and which cannot be assimilated: “L’ennemi ou le Dieu sur lequel je ne peux pouvoir et qui ne fait pas partie de mon monde, reste encore en relation avec moi et me permet de vouloir, mais d’un vouloir qui n’est pas égoïste, d’un vouloir qui se coule dans l’essence du désir dont le centre de gravitation ne coïncide pas avec le moi du besoin, d’un désir qui est pour Autrui.” In Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini* (La Haye, Boston, Londres: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 212f. Lévinas probably never consulted Husserl’s “E manuscripts” from 1934. (“Hostility is the total negation of another being in its complete living activity” [Feindschaft ist die totale Negation des anderen Seins in allen seinen Lebensbetätigungen], E III 8, S. 12).

that the acceptance of the other is unconditional and that the hospitality is absolute and limitless. In four of his main texts from the early 1950's, Lévinas speaks about violence as partial negation ("*Négation partielle qui est violence*")<sup>4</sup> – murder as total negation is already, in 1951, diluted by Lévinas's constant repetition that "in the presence of the other's face [*visage*]" or "when face to face with the other," it is impossible to kill<sup>5</sup>. Apart from Lévinas's above mentioned definitions of violence being visibly influenced by Eric Weil<sup>6</sup>, Lévinas constructs three new ideas: the first being that "[*E*] *st violente toute action où l'on agit comme si on était seul à agir [...]*" ("*[...] est violente, par conséquent, aussi toute action que nous subissons sans en être en tous points les collaborateurs*")<sup>7</sup>. Two years later, Lévinas changes and adds to this formulation: "*L'action violente ne consiste pas à se trouver en rapport avec l'Autre; c'est précisément celle où on est comme si on était seul*"<sup>8</sup>. And he demonstrates that seemingly, violence comes from outside and that in principle it does not exist between two people; the third idea is found in one of his most complicated and important works, the 1954 text "*Le Moi et la Totalité*", where it is finally discovered that the source of true violence is outside "*société intime*" or "*société de l'amour*" ("*société close*", *couple*, *entre-deux*) – in "*une véritable*" *société* which refers to *le tiers* ("*le troisième homme*", "*une troisième voie*", "*le 'tu' véritable*", "*une multiplicité de tiers*")<sup>9</sup>. However, Lévinas completely takes away the sacred aura from the space violence and injustice occupy, characterizing it as a space for things and goods, material bodies and money – let us not forget that the idea of justice is for Lévinas above all economic: "*la justice économique*"<sup>10</sup>; only just reparations through money can bring an end to the history of human violence, says Lévinas<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, despite implying the existence of "*une blessure réelle*", it seems that the third (party) is not the subject of violence. Lévinas repeatedly speaks in the first person, about "I" who can damage the third and cause

4 Emmanuel Lévinas, "L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale" (1951), *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 20.

5 *Ibid.*, 21. Lévinas first mentions "*visage*" in a series of lectures he gave in 1946-1947, and which were published in 1948 in *Le temps et autre*.

6 Lévinas mentions Weil's book *Logique de la philosophie* (1951) in a text titled "Ethique et esprit" (1951) and speaks of its importance in understanding violence in opposition to discourse, cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), 17f.

7 *Ibid.*, 20: "Violence is consequently also any action which we endure without at every point collaborating in it." Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 6.

8 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Liberté et commandement* (Paris: Fata morgana, 1994), 43f.

9 Emmanuel Lévinas, "Le Moi et la Totalité", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (1954), 358 (again published in *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 23-48). It's curious that Jacques Derrida omits analyzing Lévinas's text in "Violence and Metaphysics".

10 *Ibid.*, 356. Conversely, Derrida repeatedly talks about right, about "*l'exigence de la justice comme droit*," in the book *Adieu*. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), 190.

11 Emmanuel Lévinas, "Le Moi et la Totalité", 372f.

him harm<sup>12</sup>. It is “I” who brings violence, “I” damages; not the other or the third.

This leads us to Lévinas’s second difficulty: who is the subject of violence and who tolerates it? Who is violent? I (the “Same”), the other or a third person (third party)? *Proche* or *prochain*? Or the State? Or God? Who should be defended, who should defend who, who is bringing harm to who? Don’t the foundations of all these questions, which Lévinas continuously repeats and re-formulates an infinite number of times, contain the first questions about the constitution of the subject and about the limits of intersubjectivity? On the other hand, how is violence lessened or how is violence erased? If pardon and vengeance cannot break the *cercle infernal de la violence* (“[...] *le mal engendre le mal et le pardon à l’infini l’encourage*”<sup>13</sup>), what is left? Perhaps it is necessary and somewhat acceptable, at this time, to shake-up even the basic foundations of Lévinas’s texts: don’t the histories of great crimes and murders tell us that the face [*visage*] does not stop crime (on the contrary), and that the reasons for the existence of violence can perhaps be explained with the absence of others? Perhaps violence is possible because the other (or third) is not present?

The third difficulty is methodological and probably the most complex. What is necessary is to systematically and carefully explain how Lévinas understands “the institution” and what “*instituer*” means to him. This preliminary task should again show Lévinas’s proximity to and distance from Husserl<sup>14</sup>, but also something much more important. When Lévinas, in 1977, writes about the *tiers*, about justice, about my relation to *autrui* (which is “*toujours la relation avec le tiers*”), he says the following:

[...] il faut comparer, peser, penser, il faut faire la justice, source de la théorie. Toute la récupération des Institutions –et de la théorie elle-même– de la philosophie et de la phénoménologie: expliciter l’apparaître –se fait selon moi, à partir du tiers<sup>15</sup>.

12 Ibid., 365.

13 Ibid., 373. “Le mal engendre le mal et le pardon à l’infini l’encourage”. In this text, Lévinas puts forward a hypothesis concerning justice which can bring an end to violence. I repeat, Lévinas does not, yet, strictly connect justice with the state or rights. In fact Lévinas rarely uses the word right (law) even later in his life. The problem of “breaking the chain of violence,” in the book *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (La Haye, Boston, Londres : Kluwer Academic, 1974), is solved by a call for patience.

14 Here I am referring to Lévinas’s understanding of Husserl’s terms “to institute”, “to *primally* institute” [*stiften, urstiften*], as well as to Husserl’s first readers and translators in France who wrote about the institution (Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, Lyotard). Paradoxically, the responsibility for concealing the uniqueness of these words is borne by Emmanuel Lévinas, who translates the word *Urstiftung* in *Cartesian Meditations* (1929) in two ways. In § 38, Lévinas and Gabrielle Peiffer (Alexandre Koyré examined this translation) translate *Urstiftung* as “*formation première*”, and in the famous § 50, as “*création première*”. Edmund Husserl, *Méditations Cartésiennes. Introduction à la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), 135, 181.

15 Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, 132.

It is necessary to closely follow Lévinas's numerous attempts and variations of this sentence, in order (for him) to be able to explain the connection between philosophy and institution, that is the State<sup>16</sup>. Already in 1953, Lévinas writes:

Concevoir et réaliser l'ordre humain, c'est instituer un Etat juste, qui est, par conséquent, la possibilité de surmonter les obstacles qui menacent la liberté. C'est le seul moyen de la préserver de la tyrannie<sup>17</sup>.

In 1982, Lévinas continues:

[...] il y a un accord possible entre éthique et Etat. L'Etat juste sortira des justes et des saints plutôt que de la propagande et de la prédication<sup>18</sup>.

Philosophy (or theory, or phenomenology) should bring justice into Institutions or into the State. Immediately I would pose two questions here: is philosophy responsible for the regulation of violence ("resisting evil by force," "the legitimacy of violence," "the justification of violence," "*nécessité éthique*", "*éthiquement nécessaire*") and does philosophy make violence just or justifiable? Does philosophy introduce elements of justice into violence or into war? This question finds its source in Lévinas's famous insistence (in *Totalité et Infini*) that Western philosophy produced war and that it is structured like war (an unjust and criminal war, of course).

The second question is especially problematic: how does Lévinas's philosophy repair (provide justice to) Institutions (the State) or perhaps a World State, laws, etc? This question assumes that we have answers to another series of questions: how do we read and translate Lévinas today? How do we write about him? Can and in what way does Lévinas's theory function in the Anglo-Saxon space and in Israel, in new discussions concerning the ethics of war, concerning self-defense and the defense of the civilian population, concerning the immunity of civilians (noncombatants), concerning permissible killing, concerning asymmetrical war, etc.?

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16 "Les institutions et l'Etat lui-même peuvent être retrouvés à partir du tiers intervenant dans la relation de proximité. Peut-on déduire les institutions à partir de la définition de l'homme « loup pour l'homme » plutôt qu'otage de l'autre homme? Quelle différence y a-t-il entre des institutions naissant d'une limitation de la violence ou bien naissant d'une limitation de la responsabilité ? Au moins celle-ci : dans le second cas, on peut se révolter contre les institutions au nom même de ce qui leur a donné naissance". Emmanuel Lévinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris : Grasset, 1993), 211f. Cf. Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, 248, 251, 256, 263; Lévinas, *Totalité et infini*, 276, 282, 284.

17 Lévinas, *Liberté et commandement*, 39.

18 Emmanuel Lévinas, "Philosophie, Justice et Amour", in *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 139. "Il y faut des institutions qui arbitrent et une autorité politique qui la soutienne. La justice exige et fonde l'Etat", in Emmanuel Lévinas, "De l'Unicité", in *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 216.

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If I were to attempt to sketch a short answer to this great question regarding Lévinas's intervention in existing institutions or in an ideal future institution (finally always present in the philosophical gesture), I must begin with the ineradicable trace of violence. Lévinas, in the 1950's, in several messianic texts and comments (published much later, in 1963), for the first time discusses in detail the violence of others (evil ones) and the possibility of a just violence, and he does this completely in harmony with "*la justice économique*" from 1954. He investigates several fragments from the Talmud and the coming of the third (the other, the closest, the Messiah) "*comme une personne qui vient mettre miraculeusement fin aux violences qui régissent ce monde*"<sup>19</sup>. Apart from the end of violence and political repression [*fin de la violence et de l'oppression politique*]<sup>20</sup> in the messianic epoch, Lévinas especially fears whether the Messiah will bring an end to poverty and social violence. Here are these unforgettable words:

La fin des violences politiques se sépare-t-elle de la fin des violences sociales? Schmueel annonce-t-il le paradis des capitalistes : plus de guerre, plus de service militaire, plus d'antisémitisme ; mais on ne touche pas aux comptes en banque et le problème social reste sans solution ? Un texte parallèle –car il y a beaucoup de textes parallèles dans le Talmud– n'indique-t-il pas les raisons alléguées par Schmueel en faveur de sa thèse : 'Il n'y a entre l'époque messianique et ce monde-ci d'autre différence que la fin de la violence et de l'oppression politique, car il est dit dans la Bible (Deut. 15. 11): "Le pauvre ne disparaîtra pas de la terre" (Berachoth, 34 b)<sup>21</sup>.

This problem creates an entirely new complication, namely: how will violence and injustice be erased? Lévinas continues:

Parce qu'au moment messianique il faut qu'il sacrifie les méchants aux bons. Parce que dans l'acte juste il y a encore une violence qui fait souffrir. Même lorsque l'acte est raisonnable, lorsque l'acte est juste, il comporte une violence. [...] Voilà aussi pourquoi l'engagement nécessaire est si difficile au juif, voilà pourquoi le juif ne peut pas s'engager sans se désengager aussitôt, voilà pourquoi il lui reste toujours cet arrière-goût de violence, même quand il s'engage pour une cause juste ; jamais le juif ne peut partir en guerre les

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19 Lévinas, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, 83.

20 The English translation omits these words. Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, 61.

21 Lévinas, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, 86f. In a text concerning Judaism and revolution from 1969, Lévinas again goes back to just violence (violence which ends all or any future violence), necessary violence against evil and "*Dieu des armées*", cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Du sacré au saint* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), 45.

drapeaux déployés, et aux accents triomphants des musiques militaires et avec la bénédiction d'une Eglise<sup>22</sup>.

Lévinas first changes his perspective and stops defining the violent act as such. A just or correct act (rational as well) contains violence probably because it brings pain and suffering to the other (the evil, unjust, one). However, this violence cannot be erased by justice or rationality. But, similarly, violence cannot be hidden or forgotten by the State, the community or a marching column, or by the church or religion. The bitter taste (aftertaste) in one's mouth or the remaining violence in the throat (in another place Lévinas talks about Abraham's "*arrière-goût de cendre et poussière*"<sup>23</sup>) is the precondition for true proof that violence did exist (and that it has yet to occur) and that there will always be eternal responsibility for it. Only this remnant of violence which is found *a priori* in Lévinas's every testimony and which best explains his discourse concerning responsibility for the other, can lead us to an examination of violence perpetrated by the other against the third or the third against the other. But, I must once again repeat that with Lévinas "*cet arrière-goût de violence*" absolutely eliminates my discourse or my testimony concerning violence committed against me. This is Lévinas's great innovation.

I would now like to mention several sentences from a very famous interview with Lévinas of September 28, 1982<sup>24</sup>. The State of Israel is also mentioned in this interview, as is the Jew and the violence which the other commits against the third and the third against the other.

Before and after this interview, and certainly in harmony with the difficulty of constituting a just State of Israel, Lévinas begins to speak about "my" legitimate resistance to violence. In 1977, Lévinas says:

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22 Ibid, 108f. "*Cet arrière-goût de violence*" does not exist in the English translation. "Because at the messianic moment He must sacrifice the wicked to the good. Because in the just act there is still a violence that causes suffering. Even when the act is reasonable, when the act is just, it entails violence [...] This is also why the necessary commitment is so difficult for the Jew; this is why the Jew cannot commit himself without also disengaging himself, even when he commits himself to a just cause; the Jew can never march off to war with banners unfurled, to the triumphal strains of military music and with the Church's blessing". Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, 79f.

23 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Nouvelles lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Minuit, 1996), 92.

24 Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Israël: éthique et politique", entretiens avec S. Malka (avec Alain Finkielkraut), *Les Nouveaux Cahiers* 71 (1983): 1-8. In the past few years this interview has been heavily criticized in England and the United States. Cf. "The well-known fiasco of Lévinas", in *Organs without Bodies*, Slavoj Žižek (London: Routledge, 2003), 106. The interview has been translated into English as "Ethics and Politics", in *The Lévinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989). As an introduction to this translation, the genesis of an incident which occurred on September 15 is explained (on page 288). An incident during which "Christian soldiers massacred several hundred people in the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian camps with no intervention on the part of the Israel Defence Forces. At first Begin refused to set up a judicial enquiry, commenting in the New York Times on 26 September that 'Goyim kill goyim, and they immediately come to hang the Jews'".



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Ma résistance commence lorsque le mal qu'il me fait (autrui), est fait à un tiers qui est mon prochain. C'est le tiers, qui est la source de la justice, et par là de la répression justifiée ; c'est la violence subie par le tiers qui justifie que l'on arrête de violence la violence de l'autre<sup>25</sup>.

In an October 1982 interview (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of October), in "Philosophie, Justice et Amour", Lévinas adjusts and changes this perspective:

Quand je parle de Justice, j'introduis l'idée de la lutte avec le mal, je me sépare de l'idée de la non-résistance au mal. Si l'autodéfense fait problème, le "bourreau" est celui qui menace le prochain et, dans ce sens, appelle la violence et n'a plus de Visage. [...] Ici s'ouvre donc toute la problématique du bourreau : à partir de la justice et la défense de l'autre homme, mon prochain, et pas du tout à partir de la menace qui me concerne. [...] Il y a une certaine mesure de la violence nécessaire à partir de la justice [...]. Il y a une part de violence dans l'Etat, mais qui peut comporter la justice. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il ne faut pas l'éviter, dans la mesure du possible ; tout ce qui la remplace dans la vie entre les États, tout ce qu'on peut laisser à la négociation, à la parole, est absolument essentiel, mais on ne peut pas dire qu'il n'y ait aucune violence qui ne soit légitime. [...] Autrui vous concerne même lorsqu'un tiers lui fait du mal, et par conséquent vous êtes là devant la nécessité de la justice et d'une certaine violence. Le tiers n'est pas là par accident. En un certain sens, tous les autres sont présents dans le visage d'autrui. [...] "Offrant ma joue à celui qui frappe..." Mais je suis responsable de la persécution des prochains. Si j'appartiens à un peuple, ce peuple et mes proches sont aussi mes prochains. Ils ont droit à la défense comme ceux qui ne sont pas mes proches<sup>26</sup>.

Another one of Lévinas's variations of this idea can be found in the 1985 interview, "Violence du Visage":

La violence est originellement justifiée comme la défense de l'autre, du prochain (fût-il mon parent ou mon peuple!), mais est violence pour quelqu'un<sup>27</sup>.

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25 Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, 134.

26 Lévinas, "Philosophie, Justice et Amour", 123-25.

27 Emmanuel Lévinas, "Violence du Visage", in *Altérité et transcendance* (Paris : Fata morgana, 1995), 173. It seems that "prochain" (the other in a moral sense [*au sens moral du terme*], as Lévinas says), appears for the first time in the text "Langage et proximité" in 1967. Lévinas capitalizes the word *le prochain*. In the introduction to the book *L'au-delà du verset: Lectures et discours talmudiques* (Paris, Minuit, 1982), written in September 1981, Lévinas speaks about "my"



Nowhere does Lévinas explicitly discuss the difference between *prochain* and *proche*. This is perhaps why *proche* is in the beginning translated into English as “kin” and as “someone who is near to me” (*prochain* is always “neighbor”). However, *le proche* is one who is closer to me than *le prochain* (*le proche* can be my friend and can certainly be of a different nationality). Lévinas says so implicitly. I will repeat several suggestions by Lévinas which can certainly be a precondition for a future text concerning Lévinas’s greatest problem, “auto-defense.” Can or must one, but also when and who, defend themselves from the other (from the third, from the State)?

All these suggestions are overshadowed by the transformation of my (Lévinas’s) fear of hurting the third from 1954 and my fear for the innocent from 1969, –into my fear for the other [*la crainte pour autrui*]<sup>28</sup> from 1983 (the years are completely arbitrary). Therefore, only much later does Lévinas introduce the possibility that the other or the third can commit violence and his answer is quite explicit: I am responsible for this, I must use violence and protect the other, and I must die for the other and sacrifice myself for the other.

Two innovations: in contrast to Heidegger, my concern is always a concern for the other; in contrast to Hobbes, the necessary existence of a just State (the instance of a protector) is a consequence of my fear for the life and security of the other<sup>29</sup>.

Lévinas’s proposals: (a) Lévinas gives the same name –neighbor [*prochain*]– to both the one who is my other and my third [*tiers*]; (b) *le proche* has no privileged position in relation to one who is not my *proche* (both have the right to defense [*droit à la défense*]); (c) “to have the right to defense” [*avoir le droit à la défense*] is a dual formulation: “to have the right” to defend myself or “to have the right” for someone else to defend me? (d) the privileged position of *le proche* in relation to *le prochain* – only *le proche* “has the right to defense” [*avoir le droit à la défense*] – is definitely erased by Lévinas because sometimes the other attacks the third, and sometimes the

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people and “my” family”, who also, like strangers, demand justice and protection (they are the others, near to me and my neighbors [*autres, proches et prochains*]).

28 Emmanuel Lévinas, “La conscience non intentionnelle” (1983), in *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 13.

29 “Il signifie un Etat au sens complet du terme, un Etat avec une armée et des armes, une armée qui puisse avoir une signification dissuasive, et s’il le faut défensive. Sa nécessité est éthique: c’est en effet, une vieille idée éthique qui commande précisément de défendre nos prochains. Mon peuple et mes proches, ce sont encore mes prochains. On défend le prochain quand on défend le peuple juif; chaque juif en particulier défend le prochain quand il défend le peuple juif”. “It signifies a State in the fullest sense of the term, the State with an army and arms, an army which can have a deterrent and if necessary a defensive significance. Its necessity is ethical indeed; it’s an old ethical idea which commands us precisely to defend our neighbours. My people and my kin are still my neighbours. When you defend the Jewish people, you defend your neighbour; and every Jew in particulars defends his neighbour when he defends the Jewish people”. Lévinas, “Israël: éthique et politique”, 4; Lévinas “Ethics and Politics”, 292.

third attacks the other. Therefore, my *proche* can be violent towards the one who is only my *prochain*.

In the September 28, 1982 interview, following the civilian (noncombatant) massacre, Lévinas repeats the idea of violence which never has the same direction. This is Lévinas's game of personal pronouns that begins with violence which "we" [*nous*] or "me" [*moi*] suffer, but definitely ends with the suffering of "the others" [*autres*] and with my responsibility.

Je ne crois pas du tout que la responsabilité ait des limites, que la responsabilité en "moi" ait des limites. Le moi, je le répète, n'est jamais quitte envers autrui. Mais je pense, et il faut aussi le dire, que tous ceux qui nous attaquent d'une manière si hargneuse n'y ont pas droit et que, par conséquent, il y a certainement à côté de ce sentiment de responsabilité illimitée une place pour une défense, car il ne s'agit pas toujours de "moi" mais de mes proches qui sont mes prochains. A cette défense je donne le nom de politique, mais de politique éthiquement nécessaire. A côté de l'éthique, il y a une place pour la politique<sup>30</sup>.

However, the others [*autres*] who should be defended, are the same others who someone else must defend themselves from.

Ma définition de l'autre est tout à fait différente. L'autre, c'est le prochain, pas nécessairement le proche, mais le proche aussi. Et dans ce sens-là, étant pour l'autre, vous êtes pour le prochain. Mais si votre prochain attaque un autre prochain ou est injuste avec lui, que pouvez-vous faire ? Là, l'altérité prend un autre caractère, là, dans l'altérité peut apparaître un ennemi, ou du moins là se pose le problème de savoir qui a raison et qui a tort, qui est juste et qui est injuste. Il y a des gens qui ont tort<sup>31</sup>.

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30 "I don't at all believe that there are limits to responsibility, that there are limits to responsibility in "myself". My self, I repeat, is never absolved from responsibility towards the Other. But I think we should also say that all those who attack us with such venom have no right to do so, and that consequently, along with this feeling of unbounded responsibility, there is certainly a place for a defence, for it is not always a question of "me", but of those close to me, who are also my neighbours. I'd call such a defence a politics, but a politics that's ethically necessary. Alongside ethics, there is a place for politics". Lévinas, "Israël: éthique et politique", 3; Lévinas "Ethics and Politics", 291f.

31 "My definition of the other is completely different. The other is the neighbour, who is not necessarily kin, but who can be. And in that sense, if you're for the other, you're for the neighbour. But if your neighbour attacks another neighbour or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong". Lévinas, "Israël: éthique et politique", 5; Lévinas "Ethics and Politics", 294.

*Mais si VOTRE prochain attaque un autre prochain ou est injuste avec lui, que pouvez-vous faire ?* Is not the origin of Lévinas's question, his concern and his hesitation, already found in this explanation : *voilà pourquoi le juif ne peut pas s'engager sans se désengager aussitôt, voilà pourquoi il lui reste toujours cet arrière-goût de violence, même quand il s'engage pour une cause juste...*

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